

Com Dot Com

Election fever what? where?

*Another set of irreverent postcards
from our intrepid commentator*

Dear Com,

Good to see that the Cosatu leadership can still manage a mean toyi toyi, this time in support of the Satawu workers and their historic struggle against the chronically misnamed Equity Aviation. After a stirring and insightful speech at the recent Cosatu CEC by Comrade Randall Howard of Satawu, a motorcade of over forty vehicles bearing the entire CEC took off, and landed at Joburg International. Seems the airport authorities did not know quite what to do on their arrival. Should the police arrest the entire leadership? Should the airport security services issue a red alert? (It would have to be red Com!) Thankfully the calming hand of the Popcru leadership and a little nudging from Comrade Randall soon reassured the authorities that the new draconian anti-terrorist legislation (see redeye) would not have to be brought forward.

Mind you, rumour has it that one or two of the leadership went into auto-mode on arrival at the airport and without thinking headed for the Business Class lounge! They were however, beamed back on the right flight path. Way to go Cosatu ! Way to go! Rumour has it that the CEC is to be re-named the SFS, the Solidarity Flying Squad!

Dear Com,

This Satawu strike had me thinking. If there was ever an example to show the social and political bankruptcy of the poisonous combination of privatisation and the current form of black economic empowerment, this is it. At the bottom of the pile are the locked out workers, being told to work an extra five hours a week for no extra pay, having their meagre benefits slashed, and being bullied by a multinational union basher into accepting working conditions that

belong in the apartheid 70's. At the top are the fat cats, bleating on about the need to be competitive while their profits soar into the skies. And somewhere in the middle of all this are the get-rich-quick black empowerment partners, noticeable by their silence, some of who still flaunt their ANC membership cards. Isn't it time they used what little empowerment they have been given and pull this rogue employer into line? Shame on those who stay silent. And what about the Minister of Privatisation, Comrade Jeff Radebe in charge of the remaining 49% owned by government? Shouldn't he be saying to Inequity Aviation that this matter should be properly negotiated and settled? Has he any idea how this type of situation feeds into the growing cynicism of the electorate? Do you think the Satawu comrades and their families, and their growing band of supporters will be rushing to support ANC and its policies on privatisation



and BEE after this little episode? Made me want to paraphrase George Orwell's classic line for a Satawu t-shirt. 'We are all in Equity Aviation, but some are more Equitable than others'!

Dear Com,

That brings us to Election Fever. Where exactly is it? Can't pick up anything like enthusiasm amongst our comrades for the Ten Years On Re-election campaign. Made me think Com. It's a bit like going to see a movie when you know what the ending is! On some sort of brighter note, it does seem like one or two in the leadership of the ruling party are beginning to grapple with the longer-term implications of having a low turnout, even if it does translate into a whopping majority in parliament. Had a very instructive conversation with a former minister who shall be protected by anonymity. He told me that having supportive electorates the size achieved by George (Burning) Bush (17%) and Tony (Lapdog) Blair (32%) is fine because people have the democratic right not to bother to vote if they so wish. And if the same happens here in SA that's also fine. Its further evidence, he said, of the 'normalisation' of South Africa's parliamentary democracy, and we should welcome it! But I said, what about the millions who are becoming completely cynical about formal politics, those who have been systematically impoverished by the reactionary policies of Bush and Blair? Are they to be forgotten and abandoned? What will you say when they take to the streets and look for representation elsewhere in gut wrenching reactionary politics? When

they start to conveniently blame others living amongst them for their predicament, like the poor white working class in the UK and the US who are voting for far right parties and candidates who take out their venom on vulnerable and traumatised asylum seekers? Hey Com, I was on a roll! I said we might snigger at the pathetic attempts of the white supremacists here to finance their counter revolution by selling pots of home made jam, but what if a section of the disillusioned and effectively disenfranchised black electorate starts to mobilise along tribal lines, and outside of the control of their current leaders? Isn't this the spectre that haunts KZN? Isn't this what happened in Rwanda? Isn't this what precipitated every genocide in human history? What if some messianic figure starts to mobilise around blaming the Nigerian community here for the woes of the country and exploiting the bad press that the tiny criminal minority of Nigerians here generates? Makes me shudder Com. My ex-minister friend blinked and gave me that sort of look that says 'This comrade has finally gone mad'!

Hey Com, I am mad. I am as mad as hell! This 'crisis of representation' thing has got me sleeping badly. Surely there can be no room for complacency. Didn't we hope that the South African democratic experiment was going to be different?

Dear Com,

Just when I was getting down about the burden of history pressing on us, up pops a shop steward from the recent Saccawu strike against casualisation

who tells me that her branch meeting the previous day was the best she had ever attended in twenty years of activity. A big turn out and lots of newly recruited casuals of all ages ready to put the squeeze on the bosses if they dare to renege on their agreement. Some comrade had the bright idea of asking those present if anyone would like to share their experiences of how the strike affected them. Eventually a young single mother stood up and started to speak, first apologising for being nervous and not being used to speaking in meetings. She explained that her daughter of ten years old had asked for a new outfit for her birthday, and when her mum carefully explained about the strike and that there was no money, her daughter cried and then went to sleep. Two days later she received a call from the child's school asking if she would go in for a meeting. When she arrived, the principal explained that her daughter had set up a little stall in the lunch break selling her old toys. A sign said 'Help my mum win like Mandela' and she had raised a magnificent R16 before one of the teachers intervened. The SADTU comrades on the staff were moved to donate another R84 and the Principal gave the mum a desperately needed R100 note. She said she cried all the way home, and finally understood what trade union solidarity actually meant, and then sat down. Seems there was not a dry eye in the Branch meeting and the comrades sang their hearts out. Hey Com we need these stories to remind us of what we are fighting for. It's a mean old world Com, but isn't it just so beautiful too!