

SOCIALIST VOICE

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SUPPORT THE WORKERS STRUGGLES OF RUSSIA AND THE UKRAINE

• **CAMPAIGN FOR RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN WORKERS
STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE (KORKOM)
MOSCOW MAY 1998**

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President of the SPROT Co-ordination Committee from Kiev**

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Badry Alexeievich Bekauri**

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President of the workers' committee of Angero Sudngki of the Kemerovo region in the North
Kusbass.**

Resolution adopted at the International Conference in Moscow May 1998

The International conference was a conference to set up an international co-ordinating committee (KORKOM) with a perspective of building a revolutionary international. Organisations supporting this resolution are: POI (Russia and Ukraine), GIPR (Poland), WIVL (South Africa), LIT (International Workers League how had delegates from Latin America and Europe.)

SUPPORT FOR THE STRUGGLES AND THE WORKERS' COMMITTEES OF RUSSIA AND THE UKRAINE

CONSIDERING THAT:

1. In Russia we are witnessing a new upsurge of broad sectors of the working class and the masses, spearheaded by the wave of miners' strikes. Further, the active solidarity of the general public and the emphatic incorporation of the students give new characteristics and a new dynamic to the protest movement. By the end of March this upsurge had already led to the fall of the Chernomyrdin government and to a crisis for the whole Yeltsin regime. After a short breathing space, the wave of protest, which culminated in May, will soon make itself felt again with greater intensity than before.
2. Workers' resistance extends to the Ukraine where the miners are also heading the process of struggle in various sectors with strikes, marches and pickets in front of the government building. The struggle of the workers in the Ukraine is closely linked to the struggle in Russia, starting with the fact that a significant number of Ukrainian workers emigrate to Russia.
3. The recent miners' strike in Russia has incorporated new slogans like the renationalization of the mines and the explicit demand by broad sectors of the

striking masses for the immediate resignation of Yeltsin. In addition, it includes new elements of a revolutionary character such as occupations with the taking of hostages and the rise of new organs of struggle and coordination which sharpen the situation as a whole.

4. The political problem of revolutionary leadership has come into the foreground, and for the first time the whole of the new International Coordinating Committee (KORKOM) is faced with the possibility and the obligation of intervening actively in this process of struggle to build such a leadership.

THE MOSCOW MEETING OF THE KORKOM RESOLVES:

1. To develop an international campaign of support for the strikes of the miners and workers. And in this context to promote political and material support for developing the embryos of independent workers' organization which link to and revitalize the historical Russian tradition of Soviets. In particular to organize defence against the persecutions and repressive attacks which are being set in action by state power with the complicity of the bureaucratic machines (as has already happened with the arrest of Grigory Isaev of the Samara Strike Committee and the initiation of criminal trials against the miners' leaders who headed the blockade of the Trans-Siberian Railway, as against other miners' leaders in the Ukraine who have been sentenced to jail terms).
2. To dedicate priority attention in this field to the defence of Badry Bekaury, a member of the leadership of the POI, a workers' leader in the transport sector who headed the strikes of the urban electrical transport workers of Kiev from 1989 to 1993.

founded the United Workers Committee and then in 1994, the union of transport workers in Kiev. He still continues this struggle today, although he has been sacked and is being persecuted by the government which is preventing him from working in any enterprise in the Ukraine.

3. The campaign will contain various plans that are clearly identified. It will start with an intense effort to clarify the situation to militant workers and a broad dissemination in the press of all the organizations grouped in the KORKOM of materials on the processes taking place in the ex-Soviet Union and the characteristics of the new situation which make the ex-Soviet Union one of the main revolutionary centres at world level.

4. The centre of the campaign will be to publicize, demonstrate the character of and promote political and material support from within workers' organizations in relation to this process of current strikes, and also to call on all the organizations participating in the KORKOM to develop the campaign in the workers and student organizations in which they intervene on behalf of workers' leaders and their organisations.

Letter of Appeal from Badry Bekauri

Dear comrades!

My name is Badry Alexeivich Bekauri, I'm an Ukrainian citizen. Since 29 years ago I work in the Ukraine, but I was born in 1940 in Georgia, an ex-Soviet Republic. During the so called "Perestroika" we organised a series of strikes of the urban electrical transport workers of Kiev. That struggle started in 1990 and it did not stop till the year 1993, its aim was to defend not only

the interests on the urban transport workers but of all the population of Kiev.

The management of the urban transport used the excuse of putting up a repair shop in the trolley-buses garage No 4, where I worked, so as to close the garage. In this way the drivers were sent to other garages and the activists were put in the street. The efforts to keep garage No 4 working and to reincorporate us was a defeat. The leaders of the bureaucracy accused me of being the inspirer of those actions and prevented me from working in other enterprises because I was a "troublemaker" and a strike organiser. I was obliged to, temporally, emigrate and work as a trolley driver in Moscow. In this moment my family and I received another shock that was worse. My son ... who was 18 died of leukaemia after several years of struggle to save his life.

Since long ago, because of my intransigent position over the injustices of which workers suffer, I've been suffering of different ways of moral and concrete persecution, calumnies from the media's and menaces from the security state organisations.

That is why I came back to Kiev and with other comrades we founded the free Trade Union of Urban Public Transport (SPRTO) and we go on with the resistance against the abuse of the old bureaucrats who now are 'democrats' and capitalists. All my conscience life has passed in the struggles of the workers movement and I've learned that to have effective results one has to basically develop and trust workers solidarity. I send you best wishes.

Badry Bekaury
President of the SPROT Co-ordination
Committee from Kiev.
3.06.98

THE LIFE OF A WORKING-CLASS FIGHTER:

Badry Alexeievich Bekauri

Badry Alexeievich Bekauri was born in East Georgia on 28 December 1940, in a village in which the workers of a state farm. In 1945, his father, Alexiei Stepanovich died in a military hospital of Tbilisi, of wounds received in the Valdikavkaz battle against the Germans. His mother, Anna Mihilovna Sadandrashvili brought up their seven children, four boys and three girls.

In spring 1959 Alexeievich arrived in the Ukraine and was immediately conscripted for three years into military service as a radio-operator. In 1964 trained to be a trolley bus driver and worked as a driver in the cities of Tbilisi, Erevan and Donietsk. From 1969 till 1992 he lived in Kiev and worked there as a trolley bus drive. In June 1992, he was elected to the trade union committee of his trolley bus garage.

In August 1969 he and his family moved into housing collective for urban transport workers' Conditions there were very difficult, with three or four families living in rooms of 12 to 16 square meters. In November 1973 he led a struggle for better housing conditions, organising the residents and denouncing the administration who did not carry out their responsibility of giving separate rooms in an apartment to each family. One hundred of the residents supported his demand and created a committee of 43 people which went to the high officials and obtained a first victory. However, the administration was not long in counter-attacking. It tried, together with the trade union bureaucracy, to punish Bekauri. They used their power to dislodge him from the residence, together with his wife and his three children. Bekauri's continued his fight and took it to the attorney's office of the Ukraine. He succeeded in cancelling the

dislodgement, and the victory increased the moral strength of all those who took part in the struggle.

In 1974, Bekauri led a demand to the ministers' council of Russia supported by 2500 urban transport workers from Kiev, for a rise in the wages of public transport workers. After a month of negotiations they won a rise for all categories of trams and trolley buses.

In 1976, four drivers were arbitrarily sacked by the administration of the a Trolley bus garage, with the collaboration of the official. A victorious defence of the sacked workers was organized and obtain not only their reinstatement but the payment of back wages.

In 1979, with a committee of 12 workers, he participated in a struggle around the demand that the drivers should not be responsible for the collecting of tickets. They began by calling on the president of the Trade Union Council of the Ukraine support them. For five years this struggle was organized by the activists independently from the official Union, and developed into a fight for better living and working conditions for urban transport workers.

That struggle was even taken into the Communist Party of the Ukraine with a statement to the Central Committee denouncing the abuses of the bosses of the urban transport enterprises. At the end of this five year struggle the drivers were exempted from of selling tickets in the buses and several bosses were sacked from their posts.

In 1981, the administrative, party and union bureaucracy from his Trolley bus garage, directed by the management of public urban transport, appealed to the KGB to isolate Bekauri and made false accusations against him. They investigated his life in all the towns where he had worked and the period of his military service. They interrogated

several of his fellow workers so as to undermine his union activity.

In 1984 he went to work in another garage and there also the administration continued to persecute him. He was arrested by the police of Kiev under false accusations. In the meantime the investigators of the Ministry of the Interior intimated they did they did not want to take up the case against him, passing the problem back to the management of the garage.

In March 1986 in the assembly of the fourth garage the administration bureaucracy together with the official union required the resigning of Bekauri, but the majority of the present workers did not accept it.

During those years they took ahead a struggle for the payment of the thirteenth and fourteenth month, forming a commission to go and negotiate in Moscow at the end they obtained victory through the intervention of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union.

In 1988 the headquarters of the fourth garage starts a punishment process, against Bekauri by bringing down his rank as driver and changing for worse his work conditions. In 1988 and 1989 Bekauri's son, Artur, got seriously sick with Leukemia, the doctors determine that to be able to cure him he has to be taken to Germany. All the state powers denied to listen the medical resolution.

In 1990 the urban transport workers presented a guide line of demands with 7 requirements that went from the rise of wages to better work conditions. One of the principal points was to include solidarity with Bekauri and requiring that his son should be sent to Germany to be treated. The Assembly gave a delay of two weeks to have the answer to the demands, as no demand was attended the strike started.

During 24 hours all the urban public transports were paralysed in Kiev, then the demands were attended even Artur's going to Germany.

After the victorious experience of the strike the ORKROT (United Workers Committee of the urban public transports workers from Kiev) was created, the Committee was formed with 17 members and Bekauri was elected as Chairman. Due to its activities, the Committee won very quickly authority over the urban transports workers.

A Congress took place in November 1990 to found the Free Trade Union of the Urban Public Transports Workers, in the meantime it did not manage to consolidate and develop as an trade union organisation.

In 1991, the 17th April they went into strike in protest for the bad life and work condition. The strike lasted 55 hours and again all the city of Kiev was paralysed, they obtained a part of their demands and gave a time to obtain the others. But it was fixed that in case of not having an answer for the other requirements they could go back on strike.

The demands were:

1. rise of wages and benefits for people and not only for urban transport workers;
2. better working conditions and better life conditions, including better trolley buses for the population;

Since then the workers of the fourth garage saw the necessity of sweeping away the trade union bureaucracy and elected a new union committee in a general assembly that took place the 26. 05. 92. The bureaucracy was swept away and a new committee was put up, with Bekauri at its head.

The activities of the committee intensified and the mobilisations grew in 1992 so the management of the urban public transports of the city of Kiev started a strong counter attack against the new union organisation to avoid this process extending to other garages.

In January 1993 starts a strike in the fourth garage, for the same demands of 1991.

The representative of the President of the Ukraine in the negotiations asked for two

weeks time to answer the demands. Having the answer of the management, for this date a meeting of the ORKROT had been called to take a decision with the whole of the garages. In that moment the representatives of the workers convinced themselves that it was impossible to resolve anything in endless negotiations with the bureaucracy and then voted the strike.

When Bekauri was going to the meeting of the ORKROT he was arrested by security agents accusing him of insignificant things, so he had to go to the Police Station to declare. aim of all this was to impede the realisation of the meeting.

Bekauri was arrested for 5 hours, in this time the assembly stayed vigilant and watched till he was free and then they declared the strike. The 16 February 1993 they paralysed 4 tram garages; 4 Trolley buses garages and several bus garages. The negotiations were done directly with the cabinet of the Transport Minister; the government requires in the negotiations the presence of the official Trade Union, then in the negotiation participates a representative of the official trade union and a delegate of each garage elected by the rank and files. The governments manoeuvre included the division of the workers attention fixing for the same day the negotiations or judgement of the strike to declare it illegal. The counter offensive doubles and the 22nd February 1993 the decision of liquidating the fourth garage of Trolley buses is taken with the excuse that it was necessary to put up a maintenance shop. As results of this Bekauri and the majority of the ORKROT were sacked in an illegal way, while they had the union stability. From there on it was clear that the bureaucracy from the official trade unions is an obstacle for the workers struggle and they decided to look for other tools to fight and double their efforts in the sence of building a free trade union. The 11. 07. 94 it takes place the assembly of the

transport workers where it is decided to found the Free Trade Union of the Urban Public Transport Workers from Kiev (SPROT). A co-ordinating council presided by Bekauri was elected. Since then, there exists a strong struggle to consolidate the union, constantly in struggle against the attacks of the official trade union bureaucracy and against the management of the urban public transports of Kiev.

22 May 1998

An interview with Vladimir Ilich Fokin, President of the workers' committee of Angero Sudngki of the Kemerovo region in the North Kusbass.

Angero is a miners' town with more than 100,000 inhabitants, this workers' committee leads all the miners and also other workers from the town. The miners have not been paid for many months.

The interview was made in Angero Sudganski during January 1998.

F-. Everything has been said in the coal miners extraordinary Congress, we live next to much richness, through our city passes oil and gas. The miners patience, and not only that one of miners, came to an end, we have to fight to get what is ours.

- But, fight in which way?

F-. We are far away from the centre, we live in Siberia. Moscow has the 80% of the capital investments. In Siberia there is no electrical energy to run the factories, while Moscow is all illuminated, ... brilliant. All

the richness that is drawn out from the depths of Russia is transferred to Moscow.

Then what we have to do is to invert that process, inverting the blood flow that is being pumped to Moscow.

To one force there is always another opposed force.

In December 1997 the police invaded the city to repress the miners that impeded the passage of the Transsiberian train. In the town there was a commotion, all the city was tense because the OMON (Regional police) came from several towns. The police of our city didn't intervene in the strike because the majority of the policemen are on our side. They don't repress workers, but when the blockade of the railway took place a colonel came in a helicopter to force our policemen to repress us, then the local police chief said 'here you come, you repress and go away, but I live here with them, and I will not allow that to be done'. The Prefect of the city said 'in this I don't meddle, you can shoot me if you want, but I will not give it the order to repress.'

Then the OMON drew back and drew up a better plan to drive out the miners from the railways and presented a written decree to the governor, but the governor only gave the decree in words. The police from our city retired from the scene, that means that, the police of Angero understood perfectly that they cannot touch even one hair of a miner. Before there were some cases in which the militiamen beat-up some workers, but after the workers movement went out to fight they were daunted and they disappeared from the streets and now whatever we do they do not touch us.

Those from the top understood that it was necessary to send policemen from other towns to suffocate the rebellion. But when a mass of 10,000 workers went to block the

railways, they, with their detachments, foremen and shields, had to withdraw. It was something to see, because they are practically kids standing with shields and they had a terrible fear. We then met all together and talked a bit because the messengers of the Coal Industry Minister were due, and there in the middle of the railway they paid part of the backward money that was owed to us.

This time power understood that this is an endless process, and since then they develop a policy to destroy the movement.

The situation in Angero

The city is bankrupt, there were six mines and now there are only two in activity and one in construction which is paralysed because the investment has been cut. In the next year another mine will be closed. They are sacking people in the two mines that are working and are they unifying the management. They say that the amount of coal we produce is not necessary. In answer to that we have regions where people live in freezing temperatures for the lack of fuel. In other words we are sitting on coal mountains and paradoxically our sections of our population freezes.

They are destroying the mines, in spite of the quality of the coal we extract - it is one of the best quality that feeds the steel industry. They close the mines here to buy coal from Africa, destroying the heart of our coal industry. For example the case of the closure of the Sudgenskaya mine: they say they closed because it has a hundred years old, but in 1971 the mine was rebuilt and equipped with the most modern technology and now it is being buried, merely buried! And there are coal reserves for more than a 100 years extracting a million tons per year. If we take in account all of the reserves calculated, there are 150 million tons of the

best coal. But for them it is more profitable now to buy coal from Africa, and for that reason they decided to close the mines when you can still work for another hundred years in them. Thirty six people per shift can extract 120 tons of coal, and that is a good productivity level.

See what an incredible thing, in those two mines that were closed we have all the reserves of which I talked, but those they left working are those where practically there no reserves. Those will close on their own.

We don't live in Africa, if we lived there coal would not be necessary, but we live in Siberia. Siberia exports gas, oil, all that to warm boilers in the West. And now they think that in Siberia we don't need any coal. From here they take out everything and give us nothing.

A simple example of how they do that is to close a mine. They start by not paying the wages, workers get furious and go on strike, the productivity costs of coal go up. All over the world, and here too, the coal industry is subsidised by the state. Their policy is to cut the subsidy and close all the mines because they are not profitable for their production costs.

That is the policy applied, that is the policy of the North American government and our governments go along with it.

Nowadays in the town we have 105,000 people, we had 120,000. Many left, many have died. They try to emigrate to someplace, to a village in the countryside for those who have retired or to the house of their parents who live in a big city. Because the big cities still subsist, but the small ones..., the government is destroying the country, and starts with the small towns and the villages. In this moment the small towns explode and they only maintain the big state centres and nothing else. But the destruction of our small towns should not be the aim. Our town for example, produces coke coal,

and coke is the bread of our steel industry. If there is no coke there is no metal, so there is no machine making. That is destruction!

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