

FREE VALENTIN URUSOV!

An international campaign has been launched for the release of Valentin Urusov, a Russian miner framed up and imprisoned after recruiting workmates to a union.

Urusov, an employee of Alrosa, the diamond mining company, is serving six years' hard labour for an obviously fabricated offence (possession of drugs).

Russian activists say this is the first significant case in post-Soviet Russia in which a trade unionist has been victimised with a lengthy jail sentence.

Urusov was singled out for attention by the authorities after an industrial dispute in July last year at Alrosa's mine in Udachny, in Yakutiya, eastern Siberia, where he works.

After prolonged protests over working conditions, a new union organisation was formed and a protest hunger strike staged. In response, the management agreed to set up a bi-partisan negotiating committee.

On 3 September 2008, two days before the committee was due to report, Urusov, who had been acting as the miners' spokesman, was arrested. He was detained at home, illegally and forcibly taken 60 kilometres away, and threatened with a firearm.

Officers searched his home when he was in detention and "found" drugs there. He was convicted and sentenced on 26 December 2008 by the Mirinsky district court in Yakutiya.

Protests were sent to Yakutiya by trade unionists from all over the world. On 12 May 2009, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Yakutia overturned the conviction on procedural grounds and released Urusov on bail – a rare victory.

The illegal and flawed nature of the prosecution case was widely publicised, and criminal proceedings begun against the officer who headed the investigation.

Despite all this, on 26 June this year, when the case returned to the Mirinsky court, it confirmed the original conviction and six-year sentence.

Urusov's lawyers say the court has been influenced by the management of Alrosa. The company's main owner is the Yakutiya regional administration.

Russia's main independent trade union organisations, and leading human rights campaigners, are campaigning for Urusov's release. They have called on trade unionists internationally to protest to the government.

A campaign group to support Urusov was set up in London on 15 October at a meeting addressed by Boris Kagarlitsky, the Russian writer and campaigner, and attended by activists from Unison, the railworkers' RMT, the National Union of Journalists, the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers and others.

UK trade union organisations are asked, in the first instance, to:

- ❑ Write to President Dmitry Medvedev at the Presidential Administration, The Kremlin, Moscow, Russia, demanding Urusov's release (PTO for model letter);
- ❑ Urge your MP to write to President Medvedev;
- ❑ Copy your protests to the Institute for Collective Action, at info@ikd.ru. and to the London campaign group at free.urusov@googlemail.com.

More info: free.urusov@googlemail.com.

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