

# CONSUMER BOYCOTT

The consumer boycott has been applied with great success at the height of the struggle in the Eastern Cape. The consumer boycott was coupled to the demand for the withdrawal of the army from the townships.

The Eastern Cape's success proved that the consumer boycott **CAN** be a powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressed and exploited although it does not necessarily follow that any successful action can be transplanted from one area to another without giving thought to the kind of conditions which prevail in other areas.

## HOW CAN THE CONSUMER BOYCOTT BECOME AN EFFECTIVE WEAPON?

**What should the aims of such a boycott be?**

It is an **ECONOMIC** boycott, therefore to be successful:

★ The **FIRST AIM SHOULD BE TO MOBILIZE PEOPLE** in every home to become part of the struggle. That means **UNITY** is essential. We cannot achieve **UNITY** if students or other groups have to be used to 'police' such a boycott. We cannot condone coercing housewives or forcing a mother of a poor and starving family to drink up the bottle of cooking oil she can barely afford. The oppressed themselves must be prepared to be part of the boycott.

If we are **SERIOUS ABOUT UNITY** then we must think of the many ways to **CREATE** that unity, not destroy it.

**HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:**

**EXAMPLE:**

The **CIVICS** could become dynamic co-operative centres of the community if they could organize to buy food or other basic articles at wholesale prices and sell it at prices everyone can afford. The smaller shopkeepers who eke out a living could be drawn into the scheme.

Which housewife would oppose such an idea?

**EXAMPLE:**

The **SPORTING MOVEMENT (SACOS)** could mobilize its sportspersons by focussing the boycott on those firms who give millions of Rand each year for multinational, racial sport, as well as boycott those who refuse to sponsor SACOS codes or who give token sums compared to the thousands they offer racist sport. That should knock them for a six!!

**EXAMPLE:**

**COLLABORATORS** should be boycotted. Not only those who serve in the tricameral parliamentary structures and who have business interests, but also those who have been living off the misery of the poor, with their liquor outlets and shops in 'own affairs' group areas. Exploiters, after all, come in all colours. **CAPITALISM** is colour-blind when it suits the rulers' purpose.

**EXAMPLE:**

**MULTINATIONALS** - Let our students do the research work to find out how much of the economy is controlled by overseas Imperialist Multinationals and which of them can be effectively boycotted.

**EXAMPLE:**

**TRADE UNIONS** could inform us of the firms which do not allow representative worker bodies or independent trade unions; which shops treat their workers with contempt and are particularly racist or exploitative. The campaign could then be linked with the trade union demand for a **LIVING WAGE**.

These firms and their products could be concrete targets, linked to specific aims which are realistic in the short term. In this way we link the consumer boycott to the worker's struggle and the contradiction between **CAPITAL** and **LABOUR** can be sharpened. Workers are not just consumers. They are in the first instance producers of wealth and the wholesale robbery of workers of the value of their labour must be brought to the fore.

★ **THE SECOND AIM:**

Forging **UNITY** will enable us to work in **ORGANIZED, DEMOCRATIC, PERMANENT** structures created either well before the boycott or which are formed during the struggle.

In these structures **COLLECTIVE** decisions must be taken to ensure disciplined collective action and **COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP** under the banner of the **WORKING CLASS** so that the workers can take control of every aspect of their lives.

The boycott cannot continue indefinitely. The fruit must be the permanent structures, defended by those who built them during the struggle and which are there to survive the boycott to carry the struggle **FORWARD!!!**

★ **THE THIRD AIM** is to make us aware of the **ENORMOUS POWER** we have as workers. We produce in the factories thousands of dresses or in the bakeries - millions of loaves of bread, and they pay us **LOW WAGES** in order to make **HUGE PROFITS** for the rich. Then we have to buy back the dresses and loaves at **HIGHER PRICES**. We are thus **DOUBLY EXPLOITED** - as workers and as consumers!

# CONSUMER BOYCOTT

*By disciplined and united mass action, both in the short and long term we can bring about: Removal of GST from all basic goods! Lower prices for all commodities! Better working conditions and benefits for all! A living wage for all! Unsegregated housing, healthcare services and education for all!! Substantial sponsorships for non-racial sport codes!! Abolition of the instruments and agents of our Oppression and Exploitation!!*

★ **THE FOURTH AIM** is to ensure that we know who the **REAL ENEMY** is. The fight is not just against "white" business. It is against the **SYSTEM**. If one of our ideals is to establish a **NON-RACIAL** society then we must struggle to build precisely that!

Exploiters come in all colours. Let us not cloud the issue with "race" and "colour". Let us not mobilise people to exert pressure on "white" businessmen or their chambers of commerce to put pressure on their government. Let us mobilise the people so that we may fight the real enemy relentlessly. Let us not confuse the masses about the real nature of the struggle in South Africa where **APARTHEID** only hides the ugly face of **CAPITALISM**. Our struggle must be **PRINCIPLED** and **PROGRAMMATIC**. We must be fearlessly clear in **THEORY** and firm in **PRACTICE**.

*Let us focus the flame of the struggle like a surgical torch to eradicate the cancer of exploitation from our society - not like a flame-thrower which burns up everything in its path.*

★ **THE FIFTH AIM** must be to learn important **POLITICAL LESSONS**, so that the next time a boycott is called the involvement of people will be on the basis of their **UNDERSTANDING** rather than their **FEAR!** Then all the oppressed and exploited will be willing to make the sacrifices demanded of them and go forward united. Let us tell the people the truth about where we are going and what we hope to achieve. Let them know that the consumer boycott alone cannot bring the government to its knees.

**THERE ARE NO SHORT-CUTS TO LIBERATION.**

If well planned, the boycott will leave us stronger in spirit and stronger organisationally, united and ready for the next battle. We can then achieve our short-term goals like lower prices, sponsorships and exposure and isolation of traitors and collaborators.

A vague ill-defined boycott can only spread confusion, demoralisation and division among the oppressed and exploited. It may in the short-term assist to make this or that area **UNGOVERNABLE** or to get this or that capitalist to get the government to **NEGOTIATE**. **BUT IT WON'T BRING TOTAL LIBERATION!**

MESSAGE  
FROM  
MAWU

Metal workers are determined to fight for what they believe is a living wage. The metal workers want enough money to be able to support their starving families and their brothers, sisters and neighbours - those that were retrenched and those that are unemployed. We are in a very bad position. The government does not support these people. So we are forced to. We need a living wage. The metal bosses have made a lot of profits, they must share those profits with us instead of misusing them by buying more Mercedes Benz's and on Apartheid.

On working shorter hours and no overtime - We want to get enough money by working reasonable and normal hours without killing ourselves. We want to create job opportunities for those who are unemployed and to lessen retrenchments. We want jobs for all. We must have enough time with our families and friends, not only with the bosses' machines. More than 3 million people are unemployed, they must get jobs.

On extra weeks leave - The migrant workers work very hard throughout the year without seeing their families. They are entitled to spend time with their families. We want May Day to be a paid public holiday. The workers have decided to take the 1st of May as a holiday and the bosses should pay.

On retrenchments - We want the employers not to retrench any more workers and to negotiate the retrenchments and severance pay with the representatives of the workers. The bosses must stop being interested in the workers whilst they are able to produce and then discard them like dirt into the dustbin of poverty when workers are no longer useful to the bosses.

MAWU and the metal workers as a whole are sick and tired of the employers who do not want to negotiate at plant level but prefer hiding behind SEIFSA (Metal bosses organisation).

The demands of the workers include (besides those mentioned on Page 2)  
1. rest period for workers who are working in hot places;  
2. long service increases or benefits.

The metal workers are determined to fight the bosses up to the bitter end. FOSATU as a whole has decided to support the metal workers and the proposed strike. SEIFSA has given 14c across the board at the bottom and pushed the minimum to R1.90 per hour. This is not acceptable and SEIFSA has ignored the other MAWU proposals. SEIFSA has also refused its member companies to negotiate at plant level.

The bosses must stop thinking that they can fool us and play around with our lives. The employers must accept plant level bargaining, must negotiate fairly with workers and not ask for police involvement as they often do.

MAWU is presently holding a referendum to see if its members want to go on a legal strike after the bosses refusal to bargain at the factory level. The decision to go on a national strike was already taken by the MAWU shop stewards councils. The shop stewards represent more than 200 metal factories.

MOSES  
MAYEKISO