



Spar Boycott Ends in Reinstatement*

During the period December 7-11 CCAWUSA (Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union) members in Spar (Natal) took strike action to demand the reinstatement of 2 sacked workers; union recognition and a wage increase. They were dismissed. Since then, the workers have waged a determined boycott campaign against Spar and its parent company. On May 21, after 4 weeks of negotiations, the following agreement was reached between CCAWUSA and Browns Retail (the parent company of Spar):

- (i) all dismissed workers to be re-engaged
- (ii) their service is to be treated as unbroken, provided they re-instate the pension fund (favourable loans will be made available for this.)
- (iii) they will receive jobs of similar status, and at no lower pay than their original positions
- (iv) the workers will be re-engaged in two stages:
 - (a) the first group of 80 will be re-engaged over a period of 4 months from June 1 in the areas in which they worked originally. During this time and until they are re-engaged they will receive 10% of their former salaries.
 - (b) a second group of 60 will be re-engaged over a period of 6 months from October 1, where vacancies arise in the broader group. They will receive 1 month's pay during this time. (Given the Christmas trade, the union expects all members will be re-engaged by December).
- (v) Alternately, workers who do not wish to take up a job with the company, will be entitled to compensation at the following rate: 2 weeks pay per 6 months worked up to a total of 3 years, and thereafter an additional 1 weeks pay per 6 months worked up to a total of 5 years.
- (vi) The union is to receive stop order facilities (which also provides means of verifying membership); a recognition agreement is to be drawn up on the basis of those stores where the union has a certain percentage of membership; other rights and facilities are to be negotiated.

* For background details see SALB 10.4

Assessment

Since 1981 there have been a number of consumer boycotts in the retail trade, but this is the first to successfully achieve a negotiated settlement. This in itself is significant for the future. In the process OCAWUSA has learnt some lessons about mobilising community support. The union established a number of support committees around itself in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Hammersdale and Johannesburg. They were supported mainly by the unity unions, the political groups and local community organisations where relevant. In addition the international union organisations - IUF and FIET - were contacted for support, although little international pressure was possible in this case. OCAWUSA maintained a stream of propaganda throughout in the form of leaflets and stickers.

The union was unable to ascertain the exact impact of the boycott, although traders on the South and North coasts of Natal, Port Shepstone and Empangeni, were especially supportive in boycotting wholesale outlets. Certainly the independent retail Spars in the townships seem to have been affected. It may be that during a recession, when profit margins are already narrow, any interruption in custom is harmful.

Above all it was the sheer determination of the workers themselves that forced Spar to compromise. Workers decided at the outset that no-one would sign off, no-one would look for a job, until either victory was won, or they went down in defeat. During this time money given by supporters kept them alive. The workers were held together by weekly meetings and report backs; each was assigned tasks - picketing, pamphletting, addressing other workers etc. Demoralisation was combated by workers and the union regularly discussing their situation and analysing management shifts.

Despite harassment, the dismissed workers constantly signalled their presence to management, taking the boycott even into the rural areas - and arousing considerable interest in unionism. During this time some unionists were assaulted by unknown customers; several pickets were arrested and two have been charged under the Internal Security Act. The union is to lay a counter-charge of assault against 2 policemen.

(SALB correspondent, May 1985)