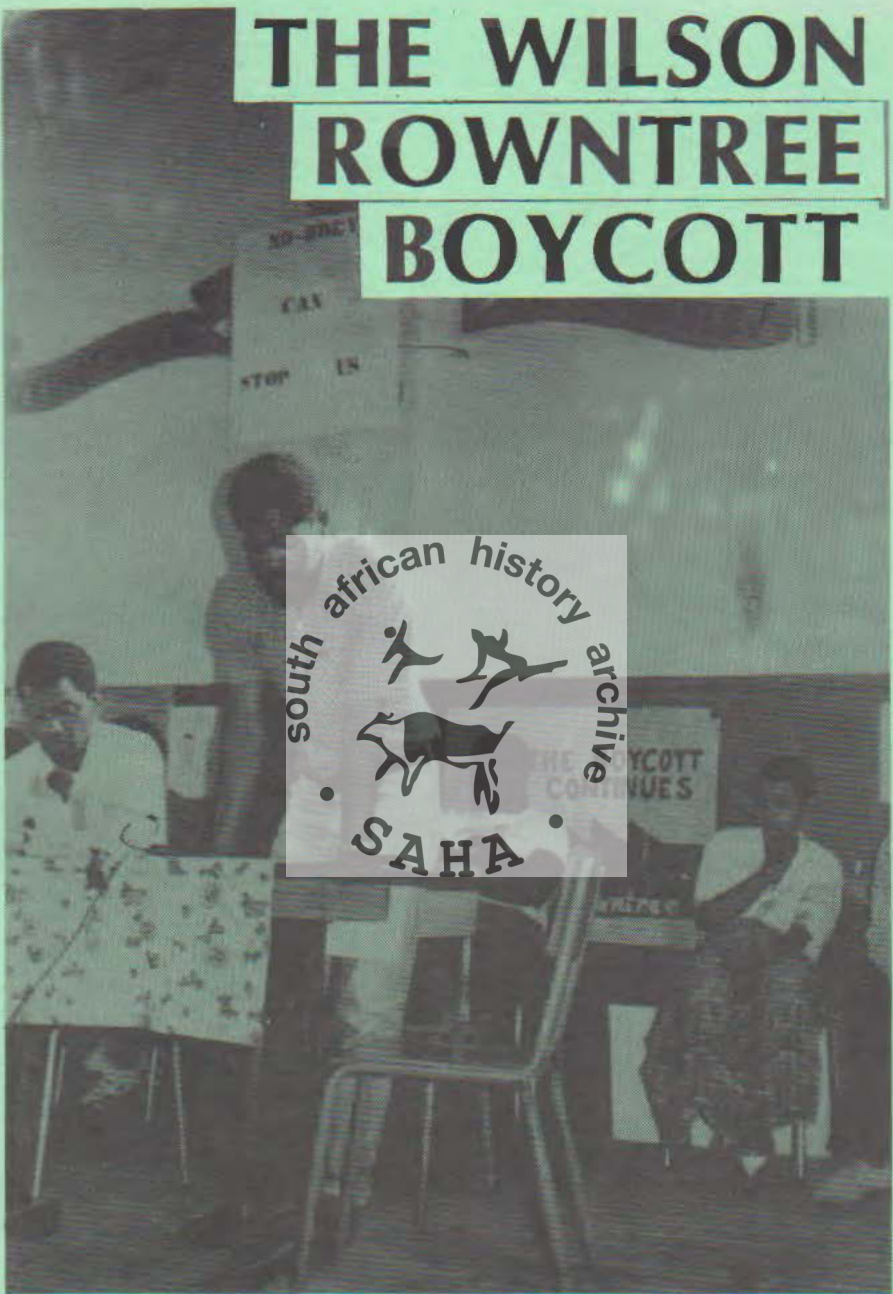


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THE WILSON ROWNTREE BOYCOTT



IN PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

The Wilson Rowntree boycott has been going on for the last 18 months, during which time there has been continued support. Management has not changed its position and as a consequence it has been decided that the boycott must continue.

This booklet gives a compact history of the boycott and covers the following points;

- a brief background and the problem of recognition of the union S.A.A.W.U.
- state repression -the role of the S.A. govt. and the Ciskei.
- Overseas and community support.
- Plans for future support.



ACTIVITIES:
OVERSEAS SUPPORT.

In 1982, British trade unions and Rowntree-Mackintosh shop stewards, formulated proposals to put to Trades Union Congress. They were working with the anti-apartheid movement, students and churches. The proposals included possible measures to block the supply of machinery to the S.A. Wilson-Rowntree company. Pamphlets were also issued. In the pamphlet, Mr Murray of Trades Union Congress says Rowntree is "running away from their obligations" and he supports SAAWU in its fight "for justice and a fair deal at work."

All supporting groups overseas participated in a demonstration march through York in January, followed by a mass rally, at which they called on the S.A. Govt. and Ciskei authorities to "end its harassment of the union (SAAWU)."

The anti-apartheid movement launched a week long boycott, to coincide with June 16 activities in S.A., in an attempt to put pressure on the British company Rowntree-Mackintosh. Another purpose was to tell Britons that they can't close their door to world issues. Management claims the boycott had no effect on sales but the AAM says it was satisfied with the response.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Many support groups were set up around the boycott issue and activities included the issuing of pamphlets, posters, fundraising and general campaigning activities in an attempt to pressurize management. Through this work several things were achieved.

- The Rowntree company has been forced to greatly increase advertising
- Competitions, the entrance fee being sweet wrappers were launched.
- Market Research Unit has refused to disclose sales figures since the boycott began.
- Wilson-Rowntree sweets are being offered at cut-rate prices.

Traders in Soweto, Katlehong, Sebokeng, Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Alexandra and Mdantsane refused to sell Wilson-Rowntree products.

- Management has been forced to retrench workers

and get others to work 4 days per week instead of 7.

-Management started openly admitting that the boycott is having an effect; plans to take over another sweet factory, Wilcocks, have fallen through.

The South African Catholic Bishops Conference has added its support by calling on affiliates not to buy the products.

The University of Lesotho donated R200 to a relief fund set up by the support committee. Traders in Lesotho were refusing to sell the goods and the newspaper has given it coverage.

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RECOGNITION OF THE UNION.

The workers of Wilson Rowntree for a long time had no knowledge about a trade union. They were aware that white and coloured workers were represented by trade unions, while black workers were represented by a Liaison Committee. When workers enquired about their possible representation by the Sweet Worker's Union they were told that the SWU was only for coloured and white workers. The workers were told by the SWU branch chairman that their union was divided into three classes, A for whites, B for coloureds and C for blacks and that to blacks it only functioned as funeral benefit scheme.

At about the middle of the second half of 1980, Wilson Rowntree workers decided to find themselves a representative body that could represent them to management. The South African Allied Workers' Union was the only popular union known to these workers in the East London area. So the workers joined SAAWU, Wilson Rowntree management started canvassing for the SWU around the factory. They started telling people that the SWU would also represent blacks now. Management further told the workers that they were free to join any union of their choice so the workers had already chosen SAAWU as their representative body. Now that the workers had joined SAAWU, it could be clearly seen that the workers were beginning to learn about unionism.

The workers clearly saw the difference between the SWU and SAAWU. The SWU was not interested in improving working conditions and striving for the protection of individual worker's rights on the factory floor. The SWU was not at all interested in the workers' needs but rather in managements' needs. The Wilson Rowntree managements attitude started to change when they discovered that the SWU was fast losing membership to SAAWU. It started to victimise Saawu members and workers were being dismissed with no valid reason.

In 1981 the workers decided to resume negotiations with management towards a formal recognition of their Worker's Committee. The committee was working under the auspices of SAAWU whose officials had approached management officially in October 1980. Management had been using delaying tactics up until the end of 1980. Workers became more and more concerned. It was becoming clear that Wilson Rowntree management was not at all prepared to recognise SAAWU or the Worker's Committee as long as it was working under SAAWU which after all is an unregistered union.

Management went even further saying they were only prepared to negotiate with a union which is a member of the Industrial Council. To belong to this Council, the union must be registered with the industrial registrar. There has been increasing pressure from management bodies and the state for unions to be registered. SAAWU maintains that it is the hands of the companies to recognise trade unions as long as they enjoy majority support in the factory. On these grounds SAAWU claims that the question of registration has nothing to do with Wilson Rowntree. However the Wilson Rowntree bosses still refuse to negotiate with SAAWU because the union is unregistered.



REPRESSION by the CISKEI and SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS.

"We publicly call upon the authorities to restore peace and order and to control the militant acts of SAAWU members, who, in our discussions, have shown a total disregard for law and order". (The conclusion of a statement issued by the Wilson Rowntree management).

With these words the Wilson Rowntree bosses gave the security police of both the Ciskei and South Africa, an excuse to intervene in the terrain of industrial relations. The bosses clearly aligned themselves with the Pretoria Government and its local puppet in Mdantsane, the Ciskei Government.

The results were predictable:

- In October 1980, Mr. Willie Booys, the Minister of Manpower and Utilisation, flew to East London to encourage the employers to 'hold our' against SAAWU, until new legislation was introduced that would assist management.

- Security Police frequently harassed SAAWU officials and shop stewards. These people suffered regular detentions by both the Ciskei and South African security police. SAAWU officials Thozamile Gqwetha, Sisa Njikelana and Sam Kikine were in detention for several months recently.

- 205 SAAWU members were detained last year for singing freedom songs, and the union had to pay R9 000,00 in fines to get them out of jail. At a recent meeting one official said: "The Ciskei government uses us to make money".

- In general the Ciskei government acts harshly against workers in Mdantsane. Recently the police engaged in door-to-door raids. People with union cards were arrested and so were people who wore union T-Shirts.

- The Ciskei department of Manpower operates as a blacklisting agency. SAAWU workers who were involved in strikes are blacklisted and may never get jobs again. In the Eastern Cape the unemployment rate is especially high.

The Wilson Rowntree workers will not be able to get other jobs. They see a victory for themselves as a victory against blacklisting .

- Many of the Wilson Rowntree workers have lost their homes because of rent arrears. The strike fund cannot even satisfy their basic needs. It serves therefore more as an emergency relief fund.

-At the time of the Wilson Rowntree strike, the South African Police were used to expel the workers from the factory. Also, according to a SAAWU spokes-person, after the large scale detentions of the strikers, Major General Charles SEBE, chief of the Ciskei security, spoke to the wives of the detained men. He told them that they had been detained on the basis of a list from the Wilson Rowntree bosses.

The already mentioned events have been played out against a backdrop of increasing violence in the Eastern Cape. The period leading up to the "Ciskei Independence" was marked by violent hostility directed against SAAWU.

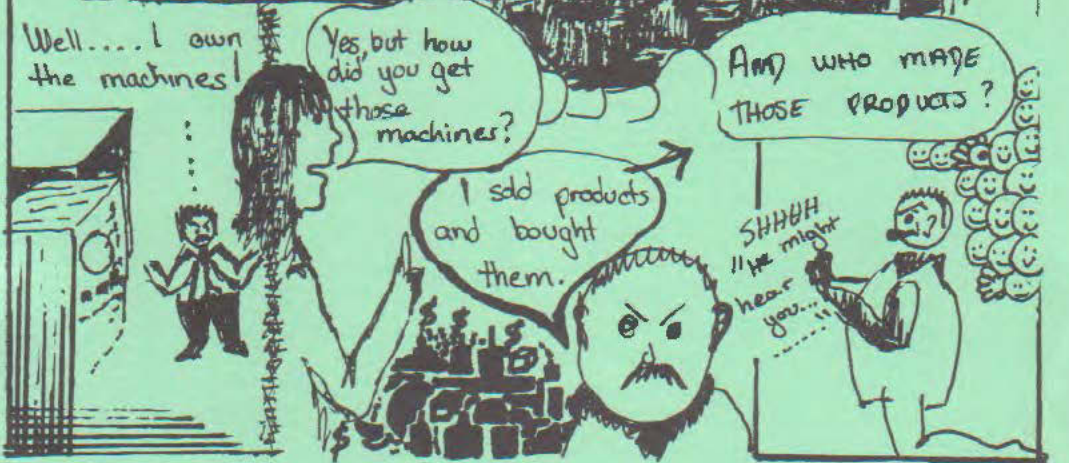
One of the most disturbing examples of this violence was the killing of Diliswa Foxisa aged 20 known to be a close friend of Thozamile Gqwetha. She was shot by the Ciskei police who, unprovoked, opened fire on a crowd of mourners at a bus stop in Mdantsane. The mourners were workers and unionists returning from the funeral of Gqwetha's mother and uncle. They were burnt to death after their house had been gutted by a fire bomb.

Despite all this, the Wilson Rowntree workers are still standing together. Their unity and courage is an example to all workers in their struggle for democracy at the workplace and in their communities.

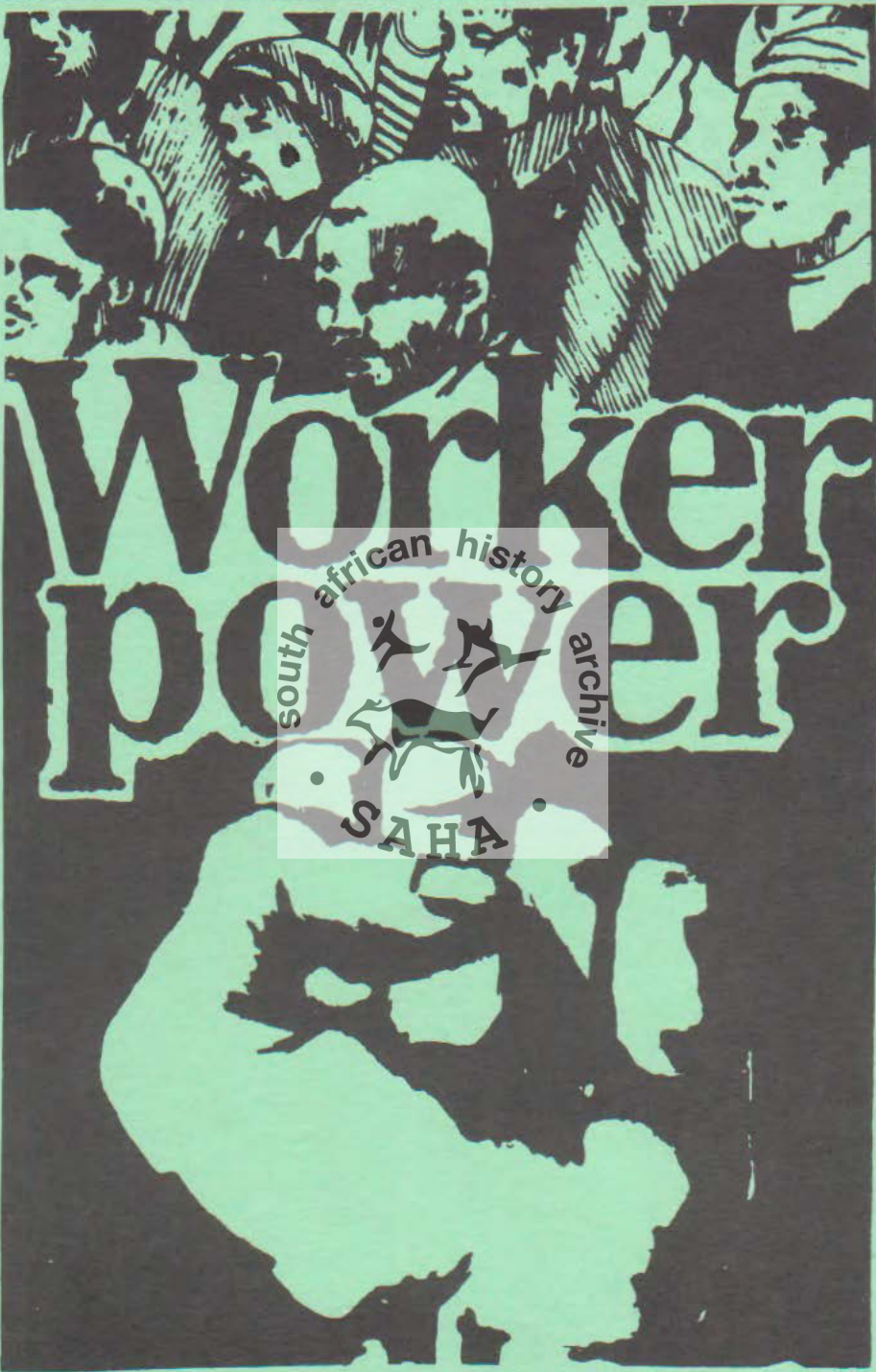
Suggested plan for the future:

- At School:** Do you have an SRC? If so, ask them to publicise the boycott and to ask the students for their support. If you do not have an SRC, gather together friends tell them about the story and choose a representative to go to the committee in your area so that you are in touch with the latest developments. Plan ways of publicising the story of the workers to fellow school-mates. Other school societies like debating society, sports clubs and cultural clubs can also take the issue to encourage students to be involved.
- At churches and mosques:** Talk to church leaders who will support the issue about ways of publicising the workers plight to all. Plan ways in which committees can be formed that plan for discussions around the issue. If you can print the story and hand a brief copy to members of the church or mosque then they can help pass on the message to their families and friends.
- Sports Clubs** can be asked to support the workers and their families by playing matches and donating some of the earnings to the workers. Also, at matches someone could ask to be able to tell people about the situation at Wilson Rowntrees. It is preferable not to advertise the focus in advance
- In the community in general, as well as at all places where people meet, stickers, posters and pamphlets can be used to GET PEOPLE GOING !!!

How workers are exploited:



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SAHA



Worker power

