



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Ghanaians boycott European goods, 1948

26 January

1948

to: 28 February

1948

Country: Ghana

Location City/State/Province: Accra

Goals:

Reduce the price of imported European goods, reduce the cost of living

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 071. Consumers' boycott

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 071. Consumers' boycott

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 071. Consumers' boycott

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 071. Consumers' boycott

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 071. Consumers' boycott

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 071. Consumers' boycott

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

Notes on Methods:

Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne wrote a letter to the Accra Chamber of Commerce in December 1947 outlining the grievances of the people: the increasingly high cost of living and the high prices on imported European goods. In this letter, the chief proposed an ultimatum to the European firms: the firms were to lower the prices on the goods or the people would boycott. The letter never received a response, and so on 24 January 1948, the day the ultimatum expired, Ghanaians launched the economic boycott.

Chief Bonne also toured the country after the letter was sent to the Chamber of Commerce and explained to the chiefs of other cities and towns about his plans and his intent to launch the boycott.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Ghanaian consumers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne, Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee in Accra

Partners:

The chiefs of Manya Krobo, Suhum, Akim Oda, Cape Coast, Sekondi, Tarkwa, and Axim

External allies:

Consumers in Akim Oda, Manya Krobo, Suhum, Cape Coast, Sekondi, Tarkwa, and Axim

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Axim
- Cape Coast
- Consumers in: Akim Oda
- Manya Krobo
- Sekondi
- Suhum
- Tarkwa

- The chiefs of Manya Krobo and Akim Oda

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The chiefs of the different towns pledged their support and involvement in the economic boycott. Some of the chiefs agreed to join in on the economic boycott while others mostly just sent words of encouragement.

Segment Length: *Approximately 5 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Chamber of Commerce in Accra, United Africa Company and other European firms

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was successful as shops closed down due to the economic boycott. This led to the government, which had initially declared that it would not interfere, to arrange a meeting between the Chamber of Commerce in Accra and the Anti-inflation Campaign Committee in Accra. In this meeting, firms agreed to lower their prices on some goods. However, the prices changed very little; the gross profit margin was reduced from 75 to only 50 per cent. Due to the very small change in prices, the cost of living was also reduced by very little, and so this goal was not met.

The Anti-inflation Campaign Committee in Accra survived and was very influential during the campaign. The committee was seen as the main muscle behind the campaign, which was why the meeting was organized between this committee and the Chamber of Commerce.

The campaign went beyond just Accra as many chiefs pledged their support and involvement from towns and cities all throughout Ghana.

In 1948, Ghana was a British colony in West Africa; the people had no say in political or economic life. During World War II,

large trading companies increased prices on scarce items to maintain profits. After the war ended, the high prices and shortages continued to persist.

In 1947, Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne formed the Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee in Accra in response to the inflated retail prices on goods imported in Ghana by European firms. In December of the same year, Nii Bonne sent a letter to the Chamber of Commerce in Accra outlining the position of the Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee: the prices on imported European goods were too high, which in turn made the cost of living nearly unmanageable. Nii Bonne and the Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee demanded that the European firms lower the prices of goods, especially cotton textile items.

Nii Bonne directed this letter to the United Africa Company (UAC), a subsidiary of the Anglo-Dutch multinational Unilever, in particular. Nii Bonne also included a date by which time a letter of response was to be received: 24 January 1948. If the European firms failed to send a response by that day, the Ghanaians would strike.

During the time the Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee was waiting for a response, Nii Bonne toured the country to explain his plan to boycott European goods to the chiefs and people of other towns and cities throughout Ghana. Nii Bonne's plan received widespread support. The chiefs of Manya Krobo, Suhum, Akim Oda, Cape Coast, Sekondi, Tarkwa, and Axim either gave their support or pledged to join the boycott.

By the day the ultimatum was to expire, there still had been no response by the Chamber of Commerce or the UAC. The UAC had not considered Nii Bonne's letter or the matter to be serious, as the company did not believe that the Africans could unite. The company believed that the Africans did not understand the value of money well enough to carry out a cohesive plan successfully. Nii Bonne's letter had never even been forwarded to the UAC head office in London.

As was the plan, the boycott began on 26 January 1948. The products boycotted by the Ghanaians included cotton prints, tinned meat, and flour biscuits. Although the main items boycotted were European imported goods, goods from other foreign-owned stores, such as Indian and Lebanese products, were also boycotted. The boycotters were guided by the slogan "We cannot buy; your prices are too high. If you don't cut down your prices then close down your stores; and take away your goods to your own country."

The economic boycott was very successful as it resulted in the closure of many shops. On 11 February 1948, the Ghanaian government, which had originally declared that it would not interfere, as it was a trade dispute between the people and the foreign traders, was forced to arrange a series of meetings between the Chamber of Commerce in Accra and the Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee as well as the other chiefs who had joined in the boycott.

Tensions flared during the time the meetings were held, and on 17 February a crowd demonstrated in front of the magistrate's court during the trial of a chief charged with imposing fines on non-boycotters.

On 20 February, an agreement was reached as some of the foreign firms assented to reducing their overall profit margin from 75 to 50 per cent. The Government announced over the radio that, as a result of the negotiations between the Chamber of Commerce and the Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee, prices on some imported goods would be reduced and the boycott would end on 28 February.

Although many boycotters, and other non-boycotting Ghanaians, rejoiced over this feat, they were disappointed when the prices were not reduced as much as they had anticipated. The boycotters and other Ghanaians had taken the 75 to 50 per cent reduction as meaning a 50 percent decrease in prices, but in fact it had referred to overall profit margins. Therefore, in reality the prices on imported goods changed very little, and as a result the change in the cost of living was negligible.

This campaign to boycott European goods and lower the cost of living in Ghana became part of the preparation for the 1949-51 campaign for independence. On the last day of the boycott, African ex-servicemen began a march from Accra to the British governor to present him with a petition, but were stopped by police. This led to rioting by Ghanaians in response to police brutality, which Nkrumah of the United Gold Coast Convention used to demonstrate the readiness of Ghanaians for

independence. Nkrumah and members of the Convention People's Party, which Nkrumah formed, then began to campaign for Ghana's independence from British rule. See Ghanaians campaign for independence from British rule, 1949-1951.

Research Notes

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Additional Notes:

Due to the very small decrease in prices on imported goods, tensions between the Ghanaians and foreign-owned shops continued to persist. As the Ghanaians continued to feel exploited at the hands of European firms, other demonstrations and riots arose.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Yein Pyo, 14/10/2012

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