

Boycotts In General

This summer I worked on several informational pickets boycotting products that have been recognized as detrimental to human rights.

It was interesting to open ourselves to the criticism and disposition of the public. A boycott demonstrates that we do live in a "global village" and neighbours are not limited to personal geography. Often we encounter hostility, indifference and often, to our good fortune we found people received literature with genuine interest and concern for boycotts.

Boycotts began in the 19th century and have been, since then, a refusal to buy, use or endorse a product, an action or a group that openly belittles the dignity of men. Most boycotts are directed against profiteering, or exploitation of people.

The on the spot boycott is a mixture of many experiences. Boycotts are frustrating because people must co-operate and for many, co-operation is a threat. Boycotts are "mind openers" when we discover how much man will rape, exploit and violate human rights to save a buck. Boycotts do not work overnight, sometimes we are fighting giants. It requires that we are constantly aware of the need for information, alertness and care. We must avoid unquestioning acceptance and impulsive consumption of media and products. Often advertisement is merely attempting to pretend immediate gratification of our needs. Sometimes products are produced under extreme conditions of inhumanity and exploitation of people who are oppressed. Sometimes the profit from products that you buy are used to suppress political revolution, to deny facilities that we presume are basic, such as schools, hospital care, unemployment insurance and even washrooms and water while we work.

The harvest of some products that you buy is controlled by the mafia.

Sometimes the conveniences that you are being convinced to use in the name of efficiency are just machines doing the same work in the same amount of time as men. (A

cynical comment I received the other day was "Machines don't go on drunks or strikes do they?")

Boycotts are organized and carried out by people who are concerned for people's rights. That's probably why they may appear small, on the contrary, most of the boycotts that have taken place in Charlottetown have been a response to national, international and multi-national calls for support in boycotts.

This summer people responded "Farmers...hum!!", "Kraft; what else would my kids eat?", "If I boycotted everything that I was asked to I couldn't shop", "Unions just cause trouble", "I don't care." Were people really saying, "Don't raise any consciousness, I'm threatened",

"The world is just a place that I occupy", "It's O.K. until I feel restrained", "I'm on vacation".

Yet many people responded with warm encouragement and support.

Unfortunately, the logic of illusion is sometimes sadly misinformed. Next time you are asked to decide on a boycott, think of the disease that begins with a germ, a revolution that begins in dialogue across a coffee table, a war settlement often ends with one thought. Think that you have power, as a person. You also have monetary power and whether or not you like it you use of abuse that power every time you spend a cent. You may buy goods or services or you may buy someone's continued enslavement to threaten job security,

to poverty, to a high mortality rate, to oppression, to dehumanization of self, family and community.

You choose, you can not pretend it doesn't matter. One of the pains of life in the 20th century is we can no longer honestly remain uninformed. It is an informed decision each of us makes. It is not an impulse or a passive response.

Boycotts are people attempting to use their power as people for people.

Boycott the Postal Code
Boycott Algonian coffee
Boycott South African Brandy
Boycott non-U.F.W. Grapes and lettuce
Boycott Kraft.

D. MacDonald

