

PC (USA) Participation in Boycotts - Recent History

The 220th General Assembly (2012) approved the boycott of Israeli products created in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The following was approved by 71% of the commissioners voting at G.A.:

1. Call upon all nations to prohibit the import of products made by enterprises in Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.
2. Call for the boycott of all Israeli products coming from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including AHAVA Dead Sea Laboratories Beauty Products and all date products of Hadiklaim, the Israel Date Growers Co-Operative Ltd., often marked by the brand names: King Solomon Dates and Jordan River (not Israel products from Israel).
3. Direct the Stated Clerk to communicate this action to all other PC (USA) councils and entities and invite and strongly encourage those groups and organizations to endorse this boycott until significant progress toward Palestinian rights and independence can be reported to the General Assembly or General Assembly Mission Council.
4. Direct the Stated Clerk to inform our ecumenical partners of this action, both nationally and globally, and call upon them to join in the boycott of these companies.

Since early in the 20th Century, the PC (USA) and its predecessor bodies have participated with other denominations in using boycotts as one way to address injustice. In 1979 the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) adopted a document entitled “Boycotts: Policy Analysis and Criteria,” which has guided much subsequent boycott action. This document states that the purpose of the church’s call for a boycott “is to bring the force of God’s love and justice to bear upon the consciences of members of Christ’s body...the church considers boycott activity in light of God’s requirement of justice and because of the existence of alleged injustice.” (1)

Such boycotts began as early as 1910 with the encouraging of Presbyterians to “keep themselves financially and politically ‘separate and apart’ from the liquor traffic... and “not to buy anything on the Sabbath.” (2) In more recent years, boycotts in 1937 against the shipments of Child Labor goods in interstate commerce (3); in 1956-1966 our denomination encouraged boycotting hotels, restaurants and other public accommodations that discriminated against persons on the basis of race, and agencies of our denomination were directed to “adopt...policies prohibiting the allocation or investment of church funds where appropriate steps have not been taken toward racial integration;” (4) in 1967 our attention was directed to the Republic of South Africa, and U.S. firms and banks doing business with South Africa were urged to “to oppose the system of apartheid and give assurance that personnel practices within their jurisdiction were not discriminatory...” (5); and in the 1970’s brought us the boycotts that many of us may remember ---the era of the boycotts of grapes, lettuce, trousers, towels, and of states not endorsing the ERA.

This document makes clear the philosophy behind these boycotts: In this long history, there is a common theme of “the use of economic power, positively through ‘selective patronage’ or negatively through ‘boycott’ to express disapproval or to force acceptance of certain conditions.” (6) The notions of “selective patronage” and “boycott” speak to the present call for a boycott of products made in illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The motivation underlying a boycott is “**the use of economic power to make a moral witness and seek change.**” (emphasis added) (7)

Footnotes are quoted from the document, “Boycotts: Policy Analysis and Criteria,” adopted by the General Assembly Mission Council, The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., March, 1979.)

1. p. i. 3. p. vi 5. p. vii 7. p. viii

2. pp. iv-v 4. pp. vi-vii 6. p. vii