



**‘The worst in human beings, as represented
by the ideology and practice of apartheid,
brought out the best in its opponents.’**

Nelson Mandela

in response to Peace Lecture of World Conference
on Religion and Peace, Durban, South Africa, 9 August 1994



The term ‘boycott’ is a word that was given to the English language during the early 1880s when Captain Charles Boycott, an absentee landlord’s agent in County Mayo, was completely ostracised by the Irish Land League after he not only refused to lower rents but also evicted tenants from the land under his care. Charles Stewart Parnell recommended a non-violent solution to the problem and suggested that nobody in the locality should have business or personal contact with Boycott, nor with anyone who continued to deal with him. Boycott soon found that he couldn’t hire anyone to work the estate. When workers from Cavan and Monaghan eventually agreed to harvest his master’s crops, they needed such police and army protection that the harvest was a complete failure from a financial point of view, and the isolation of Boycott continued. He eventually resigned his position and went to live in England with his family, but not before his name had become synonymous with organised and complete social ostracism and usually applied, in Ireland at least, to a landlord or an agent.

Role-play

What might it be like to be boycotted? Ask the class to think about the Captain Boycott situation and act out the outcome of the boycott.

Research Work

Investigate other peaceful protests: children might research the life of Mahatma Gandhi; the anti-racism marches in 1960s America; the anti-Vietnam protests in 1970s America; the Civil Rights marches in Northern Ireland. Try to find interesting statements/quotations from those who led these protests; list them on a class chart and discuss them in groups.

Debate

‘To boycott someone is cruel and should never be done.’

BOYCOTT AND APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA



The apartheid regime of complete racial segregation, designed to keep economic, political and social power in the hands of the white population of South Africa, applied in sport as it did in all other areas of life. No ‘mixed’ sports were allowed, and there were separate entrances to sports pitches and all other such sports facilities for whites and for non-whites.

In the early 1950s, South Africa participated at the Olympic Games and at world championships. All-white teams from South Africa toured and were welcomed abroad while teams visiting South Africa had to abide by the apartheid system, as non-white players were not welcome. It wasn’t until the mid-fifties that South Africa’s non-white sportspeople challenged this. In 1956 the first victory against apartheid sport was won – the International Table Tennis Federation recognised the non-racial South Africa Table Tennis Board and by the end of that year people from other ethnic groups had applied for international recognition in other sports. The pressure increased throughout the sixties as people began to resist the racist sports policies in an increasingly more organised way, and South Africa was suspended by FIFA, the international football association, in 1961. The international sports boycott eventually meant a refusal by many sporting organisations to have any contact whatever with those involved in racist sport. South Africa was formally expelled from the International Olympic Committee in 1970.

See: www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/boycotts/index.html www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/20602.html

Though the sports boycott probably did most to bring the apartheid system to a belated end, a cultural and academic boycott, as well as the consumer boycott of South African goods, helped it on its way.

CONSUMER BOYCOTT OF SOUTH AFRICAN PRODUCE IN THE MID-EIGHTIES IN IRELAND



An article entitled ‘Drops in the ocean that turned the tide’ (*Irish Examiner*, 19 July 2004) tells the story of Mary Manning, who, in July 1984, refused to handle South African products following instructions issued by her union, IDATU (Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union, now MANDATE). The union had directed that its members should boycott all South African products.





TEAM SPIRIT

When Mary Manning, then twenty-one years old, was asked to check-out some Outspan fruit, she refused and was immediately suspended. Some of her co-workers in Dunnes Stores in Henry Street walked out in support of her, along with a worker from the Crumlin branch and a Dunnes Stores office-worker, Vonnie Munroe. The picket on the Henry Street branch was supported by members of the public, by the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement and later by the Irish Congress of Trades Unions and by some of the religious orders. It took almost three years for the Irish government to break the deadlock when they eventually banned the importation of South African products into Ireland in January 1987. Mary, Vonnie and the other nine striking workers had suffered huge financial losses as a result of their principled stand before the strike officially ended in April 1987. Their union branch official at the time said, 'The strike showed how workers in richer parts of the world could help those living in oppressed regions if they were prepared to take a stance.'

See: <http://archives.tcm.ie/irishexaminer/2004/07/19/story105709481.asp>

Mary Manning and her fellow-strikers became household names around the world and a street in Johannesburg has been named after her. Dublin City Council recently erected a plaque outside the Henry Street branch of Dunnes Stores in recognition of the significant role these ten young women and one young man played in the struggle against anti-apartheid.

CLASS PROJECT

- Children might research the Dunnes Stores dispute, and perhaps ask parents or grandparents what they remember of the issue. Present their findings to the class and discuss the importance of the stance of these workers. Is this kind of boycott effective? Why? Are there products they might consider boycotting? Why?
- Check Dunnes Stores (or other supermarkets) nowadays and see what products we currently buy from South Africa. They might explain why it is now acceptable to buy these items.
- Songs of protest: children might listen to songs such as 'We Shall Overcome', listen to Joan Baez singing that song, and then discuss the role of such songs in peaceful protests. They might examine the words

and music and discuss why such songs work for large crowds gathered in a mass protest/street march.

- They might research the boycott on Israeli goods or on Shell oil in the 1980s and 1990s and try to find out why these boycotts were carried out and whether they were successful.

BOYCOTTS AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES



The first Olympic Games are thought to have been held in Greece, in Olympia, in 776 BC and originally there was only one event, the 200-yard dash. Legend has it that it was Heracles who built the first Olympic stadium as a tribute to his father Zeus, whose statue stood at Olympia. The games were held every four years and lasted for a few days, with sacrifices and ceremonies honouring Zeus, as well as the athletic competitions and contests. Originally only (naked) men could participate and after each event a garland of olive leaves was placed on the winner's head. It took until much later for women to gain full participation rights – 2000 was the first time that women were allowed to compete in the Olympics in weightlifting!

Boycotts

- In 1908 Irish athletes boycotted the games in London because Britain was refusing to grant independence to Ireland.
- The Olympics in Melbourne in 1956 were boycotted when some countries refused to attend after the Soviet Union quashed the Hungarian Uprising.
- Twenty-two countries boycotted the Montreal Olympics in 1976 and that same year Canada wouldn't allow the Taiwanese team to compete under the name 'Republic of China', with the result that the Republic of China (Taiwan) didn't participate again until 1984.
- One of the largest boycotts of the modern Olympic Games was that led by then US President Jimmy Carter when he led a boycott to protest against the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the then USSR – eventually a massive 65 nations rejected their invitations to the Moscow Olympics and only approximately 80 nations participated, the lowest number since the Melbourne Games.
- In 1984 the Soviet Union boycotted the Los Angeles games saying that they feared for their athletes in an





TEAM SPIRIT

BOYCOTT

‘anti-communist environment’, but that year, ironically, China sent teams and participated fully after its 32-year absence.

- Most recently, in the 2008 Olympic Games, over 10,000 athletes from around the world took part in 28 sports despite calls for boycotts of the Beijing Olympics to protest against China’s poor human rights record and because of China’s recent response to the current situation in Tibet, Darfur, and Taiwan. There were also campaigns calling for Chinese goods to be boycotted.

THE OLYMPIC TORCH

One of the aims of the Olympic Games is to promote friendship among the nations of the world and the lighting of the Olympic flame and the passing of the torch through various participating countries best illustrates this. Yet, 2008 saw protests in many cities and many countries, with the torch having to be protected by security personnel, as citizens all over the world called for a boycott on the Beijing games.

Exploration

- Children might talk about the idea of the torch and what it might symbolise. Is it a powerful symbol? Why?
- Can they think of other powerful symbols that might be used? Draw a picture of their symbol, showing it in use, and try to convince the class that it would work.

Exploring Olympic Success

- Several groups in the class might choose an Olympic athlete and build up a profile of the athlete’s training schedule and present it to the class, exploring how great the demand on them was to achieve success.
- They might research Ireland’s Olympic success – in what sports, who the medal winners were. They might talk about how difficult it is for athletes from Ireland, without good training opportunities, to achieve success and how athletes from places like Kenya have to go to America to reach the top levels.

See ‘Sports’ in this Teaching Guide for additional lesson ideas.

CLASS DEBATES

- Children might be asked to hot-seat or role-play an athlete or sportsperson who had trained for years, maybe for most of their lives, and ensured that he/she was at peak fitness, only to be denied the opportunity to compete in the Olympics because of some boycott, either by his/her own country or because of some cause with which the athlete personally agreed. Is it fair on the athlete to insist that an agreed boycott of an event such as the Olympics be upheld? Is the athlete morally bound to put his/her self-interest behind/after the greater good that might be achieved by the boycott?
- Children might also be asked to consider arguments or to debate a topic chosen by themselves or by the teacher and class together: eg ‘Politics is part of the Olympics?’ or ‘Can the Olympic Games be a positive political force, a force for good?’ ‘Do the Olympic Games provide inspiration for a healthy, active lifestyle for young children and teenagers, or do the scandals of competitors taking performance-enhancing drugs actually provide a bad example for young people?’
- The Olympic Dream – children might be asked to imagine themselves as a very talented sportsperson, one who trains several times a week in their chosen sport. The coach has hinted at a possible inclusion in a future Team Ireland. Would the young athlete have to consider carefully such a suggestion – are there any drawbacks, any negatives to a future spent training for Olympics or a world golf or similar world championship events? What might the young person have to give up – eg junk foods, staying up late etc. Ask the children to argue both for and against a career as a top sportsperson.

(Classes unused to formal debates might find it easier to do a Walking Debate, where the teacher would read a series of statements, eg ‘Human Rights are more important than the Olympics’ or ‘The Olympics should be kept free of politics’ or ‘Athletes suffer most when sport is boycotted’ etc, and the children would each adopt a position and walk to the Agree/Disagree/Don’t Know sides of the room as appropriate. They might volunteer their reasons for adopting their positions, but some children will not wish to speak and their wishes should be respected by the other children.)

