

Giving power to the people

Level 3 | **Advanced**

1 Pre-reading | Key Vocabulary

Fill the gaps using words from the list below:

purchasing power **invincible** **sweatshop**
boycott **culpable** **outrage**

- 1• To _____ something means to refuse to buy or use something as a protest.
- 2• _____ is a general feeling of shock and extreme anger.
- 3• The ability of people to buy goods and services based on the amount of money they earn is known as _____.
- 4• A _____ is a factory where people work very hard in bad conditions for very little money.
- 5• _____ means "responsible for doing something bad or illegal".
- 6• Someone or something that is too strong to be defeated can be described as _____.

2 Why were they boycotted?

The following companies are mentioned in the article as victims of consumer boycotts:

- 1• Nike 2• Shell 3• Nestle 4• Barclays 5• Esso

Match the company with the reason for the boycott.

- a• This company tried to dump an oil platform in the Atlantic.
- b• This company is said to use sweatshop labour to produce its products cheaply.
- c• This company had large investments in South Africa during the period of apartheid.
- d• This company was seen to be against the Kyoto Protocol.
- e• This company is demanding the payment of a large debt by Ethiopia.

Now read the text and check your answers

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The outrage generated by the revelation that Nestle is demanding a \$6m payment from famine- and debt-ridden Ethiopia has become a more palpable force, as shoppers hesitate before opting for their usual KitKats or Perrier. The question of boycotts and their effectiveness has been endlessly debated.

There have been notable successes. When Greenpeace called for a boycott of Shell in June 1995 over the company's decision to dump the Brent Spar oil platform at the bottom of the Atlantic, sales plummeted by 70% in some countries, prompting a dramatic change of heart within days. During the 80s, growing international horror at the injustices of apartheid prompted a proliferation of boycott campaigns. Following an intensive push from Britain's National Union of Students, for example, Barclays' share of the student market dropped 10% within two years. The anti-apartheid movement insisted that a consumer buying South African oranges or wine was as culpable as a multinational investor, and became the first campaign to succeed in

encouraging individuals to connect their purchasing power with international politics.

Boycotts need to have a clear outcome and a moral premise to be effective, argues comedian and activist Mark Thomas, who has made two television programmes about Nestle's practices.

"An individual has to both feel that they will be making a difference by not buying or joining something, but also have a sense that they would actually think less of themselves if they did," he says. "You can't ever underestimate the ability of consumers to annoy companies. No brand is invincible, and it does seriously affect their image to be seen to be in conflict."

The rise of ethical consumerism has been a significant factor in how the tactics of campaigners have changed, he adds. "We have come quite a long way from saying, 'Don't buy that,' to saying, 'Here's a fairly traded alternative.'"

Campaigners are becoming far more sophisticated, agrees Scott Clouder, research manager of Ethical Consumer magazine. "Groups campaigning against sweatshops, for example, are extremely

equivocal about asking consumers to boycott the likes of Gap or Nike. They would rather encourage the companies to improve conditions for their workers than simply withdraw from the area and create more unemployment."

The Stop Esso campaign, organised by a coalition of Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth might have appeared to be an overly ambitious boycott. But it emerged as a result of the public desire for an outlet for their anger and frustration at President Bush's decision to pull out of the Kyoto Protocol process, says climate campaigner Nick Rau. "We identified Esso as the most active anti-Kyoto company behind Bush. It's hard to hit the company unless you target consumers," Rau says. By last June a Mori poll found that the campaign had brought about a 7% drop in the number of regular petrol buyers who said that they used Esso (in Britain), while 47% claimed they would join the boycott if they were asked to do so by environmental groups.

"The logic is that you don't need to have 100% success. Levels as low as 5% can have an effect on a company's profits. We are always hearing about public apathy, but the experience of our campaigners at the pumps is that there is a high level of awareness and support, and that people do welcome the opportunity to express themselves," Rau says.

The Guardian Weekly 12-1-2003, page 27

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3 Comprehension Check

- 1• Why has the revelation that Nestle is demanding a \$6m payment from Ethiopia caused such outrage?
 - a• Because Nestle is a multi-national company.
 - b• Because Ethiopia is a desperately poor country.
 - c• Because shoppers are hesitant when buying Nestle products.

- 2• What happened when Greenpeace called for a boycott of Shell in 1995?
 - a• The company dumped the oil platform somewhere else.
 - b• Sales of Shell products in some countries fell by 70%.
 - c• Nothing.

- 3• What was the effect of the National Union of Students campaign against Barclays?
 - a• People began to connect their purchasing power with international politics.
 - b• People bought more oranges and wine.
 - c• Barclays' shares fell by 10%.

- 4• According to the text, why are companies annoyed by consumer boycotts?
 - a• Because their sales are affected.
 - b• Because their brands are not invincible.
 - c• Because their image is affected.

- 5• Why might a boycott of Nike or Gap products have a negative effect?
 - a• It might create unemployment in their shops.
 - b• Companies might improve conditions for their workers.
 - c• It might cause hardship for the people who work in sweatshops.

- 6• Why was Esso the subject of a boycott?
 - a• Because Esso was seen as the most active anti-Kyoto company.
 - b• Because it supports President Bush.
 - c• Because its products pollute the atmosphere.

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4 Find the Word

Find the words in the text that mean the following:

- 1• a serious lack of food that continues for a long time and causes many people to die
- 2• to choose something from a range of possibilities
- 3• to fall suddenly and very sharply
- 4• a sudden increase in number or amount
- 5• a principle or statement that you consider to be true and that you base other ideas and actions on
- 6• morally right
- 7• knowing and understanding a lot about a subject (eg culture, fashion, the modern world)
- 8• a way of expressing strong feelings that you would not normally express
- 9• an occasion when a lot of people are asked their opinions about something
- 10• a feeling of having no interest in or enthusiasm about anything

5 Collocations: Odd One Out

One word in each of the groups does not collocate with the head word. Which one?

- | | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 1• _____-ridden | a• crime | b• debt | c• injustice | d• disease |
| 2• to call for _____ | a• a boycott | b• an election | c• an image | d• an inquiry |
| 3• to prompt _____ | a• a rethink | b• a brand | c• a boycott | d• a change of heart |
| 4• to generate _____ | a• income | b• profits | c• outrage | d• effectiveness |

6 Discussion

Make a list of the pros and cons of the kind of boycotts described in the article.
Do you think consumer boycotts are an effective means of protest?

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Key

1 Key Words

- 1 boycott
- 2 outrage
- 3 purchasing power
- 4 sweatshop
- 5 culpable
- 6 invincible

2 Why were they boycotted?

1 b; 2 a; 3 e; 4 c; 5 d

3 Comprehension Check

1 b; 2 b; 3 a; 4 c; 5 c; 6 a

4 Find the Word

- 1 famine
- 2 opt for
- 3 plummet
- 4 proliferation
- 5 premise
- 6 ethical
- 7 sophisticated
- 8 outlet
- 9 poll
- 10 apathy

5 Collocations

1 c; 2 c; 3 b; 4 d