

African Studies

25-11-59

Rev Donald Cragg,
P.O.Box 112,
Virginia, O.F.S.

Dear Donald,

Thank you for your letter of 17th November, 1959 in which you ask for advice about the subject of a boycott of S.A. goods.

I am afraid I have not been following the boycott movement very closely, and so I may not be able to give a cogent reply to the questions raised in the Oxford letter.

As I see it, however, there seem to be two kinds of boycott being advocated, namely, (i) a partial boycott of goods produced and marketed by proved Nationalist firms, and (ii) a total boycott of all goods from South Africa. The A.N.C. has advocated the first type of boycott within South Africa itself, and although it has not been 100% effective, it has affected the firms concerned and has in some cases caused them to alter their policies in favour of the non-white groups. Where such alteration has taken place, the firms concerned have been removed from the boycott list.

The other boycott which has been advocated by overseas organisations is a much more serious business. If it were to become effective, it would affect the whole or a portion of the S.A. economy and would obviously bring hardship upon both boycotters and non-boycotters. If we take the view that the Union Government would have to take note of anything which affected the economy of the country adversely, we might say that it is the principle that matters and that the responsibility for any suffering which resulted would have to be laid at the door of the Union Government and not of the boycotters. The question is whether the whole world should stand by passively while the Nationalists are perpetrating the excesses for which they are responsible simply because any action taken might bring about suffering? How much suffering is there not already as a result of the Union's policy of apartheid. As I see it, then, the particular ^{which} it is intended to affect by means of the boycott are Union exporters who would be expected to bring pressure to bear on the Union Government which in the last analysis ~~must~~ bear responsibility for any breakdown in the economy of the country to modify its policies. On the other hand if we take the view that the Union Government is altogether impervious to public opinion, at home or abroad, then I think a boycott is likely to prove abortive, and would resolve itself into nothing more than a gesture of solidarity with the non-white groups in their struggle against racial discrimination in this country, a gesture which in my opinion would not be without value.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,
J.M.