

Wal-Mart Member Education Kit May 2005

To Boycott or Not to Boycott: FAQs

Q: Can our Association (NEA, CEA, UniServ Units, and local associations) legally boycott Wal-Mart?

A: Yes. To do so is not a “secondary boycott,” which is illegal, i.e., boycotting one party in an attempt to get back at another party.

Q: Who is currently boycotting Wal-Mart?

A: Primarily individuals and small groups, as far as our research can tell. There are no current nationwide boycotts of Wal-Mart.

Q: Why has NEA not boycotted Wal-Mart?

A: Association leaders have rejected a national boycott of Wal-Mart numerous times since 1990. The main reason is that we do not see how it can be successful. Boycotts work when you can focus on one product or service in a competitive environment, e.g., a specific brand of beer in a sea of beers or a brand of hotel among many hotels in the lodging market. People can refrain from buying the boycotted brand because they have many similar products to buy instead.

Wal-Mart’s retail stores are mainly in small to medium-sized towns where there are few similar sized competitors: stores like Wal-Mart. A boycott may work in a town where there is at least one similar store, such as K-Mart, Costco, Target, etc.

A boycott is a conflict situation. Putting our members into a conflict is not how our Association wants to help members achieve our goals.

Nevertheless, the Delaware State Education Association (DSEA) decided, through a vote of its Representative Assembly in April 2005, to boycott Wal-Mart. The new business item is to “oppose the anti-labor tactics of the Wal-Mart Corporation by calling upon DSEA to cease patronizing any and all Wal-Mart stores, SAM’S CLUB stores and Wal-Mart subsidiaries, and call upon our members to also comply with this action.”

Some progressive unions and organizations decided not to boycott Wal-Mart, but to conduct activities that bring negative attention to Wal-Mart. NOW, the National Organization for Women, named Wal-Mart its fifth “Merchant of Shame” and conducted a public relations campaign about economic justice for women workers. NOW has also supported lawsuits by employees against Wal-Mart.

UFCW (United Food & Commercial Workers Union) decided to organize Wal-Mart employees instead of boycott the company. They need to positively engage workers to get them to sign union representation cards and vote for union representation in an election. UFCW leaders decided they could not do this with a simultaneous boycott.