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# OPINION

## Walmart Boycott to Stop Gun Violence

BY LEW CHURCH

I read with interest the excellent op-ed “Guns Lethalize Hatred, Anger, Despair” by Marian Wright Edelman (Portland Observer, Aug. 21 issue). Ms. Edelman, as usual, presents an evocative and convincing description of why the unique problem of mass shootings and gun violence in our country needs to be stopped. As the protesters in Dayton, Ohio, after the recent mass shooting there chanted at public officials, “Do something!”

At Portland State University, our local Gray Panthers chapter has decided to follow-up on this advice. We have initiated -- with our Panther affiliate chapters around the country, and other social justice groups locally and nationally -- the Walmart Boycott to Stop Gun Violence. Specifically, we seek, both nationally, and state by state, a ban on assault weapons and high capacity magazines.

Boycotts work! As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (the Montgomery bus boycott), the African National Congress (the sanctions movement and boycotts against apartheid), Cesar Chavez and United Farm Workers (lettuce, grape and Gallo wine boycotts), and Mahatma Gandhi (the salt boycott for India's independence from British rule) -- all demonstrate, boycotts work!

Why target Walmart? As the biggest retailer in existence, Walmart's response to the mass shootings this summer has been to take down in-store advertising for violent video games. Not enough!

It has long been a strategy of distraction by those who engage in Second Amendment idolatry to identify -- like Donald Trump did this summer -- a litany of false “reasons” for mass shootings. These false rationales include video games, mental health concerns, and the Internet, among other false excuses.

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As Ms. Edelman correctly noted, the levels of gun violence in our cities and the problem of repeated mass shootings is unique to our country.

We are currently planning our next PSU Conference for Sensible Gun Laws, and we have already heard back from the office our invited keynote speaker, New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern.

After the mosque shootings in New Zealand last winter, Ms. Ardern was quick to act to have her country's government pass laws to ban both assault weapons and high capacity magazines. As we know, both Donald Trump and the Republicans in the U.S. senate have been slow to act -- if they act at all!

No, the one constant in mass shootings, from Columbine to Sandy Hook to Parkland, from the Charleston church shooting to the Tree of Life Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, to the mosque shootings in New Zealand -- is automatic weapons like AR-15s and AK-47s, and high capacity magazines.

Presidential candidate Sen. Elizabeth Warren has noted that there is a new “groundswell” of activism this year to finally halt mass shootings. One of the best ways to mobilize such a groundswell is with a large-scale consumer boycott.

But what does such a boycott look like on the ground? At PSU, when some now-elders were undergraduates, many of us supported the anti-apartheid Coke boycott

to protest sales of Coca Cola drink products in a white-run country where it was illegal for black people to vote! I even interviewed the boycott's U.S. coordinator, Ms. Tandi Gcabashe on my KBOO radio live call-in program from her American Friends Service Committee office in Atlanta.

We picketed five Coca-Cola retailers in Portland to support that boycott. Tandi, a member of the African National Congress and daughter of ANC president Albert Luthuli (succeeded by Nelson Mandela) helped us plan those pickets.

Walmart, as we know, continues to sell guns and ammo. The corporation is also known for giving short shrift to their own workers, not to mention displacing

mom and pop stores in state after state, in country after country.

While Republican politicians like Marco Rubio, Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump so far appear to be immune to grassroots democracy -- we know for a fact that corporations, by their nature, exist to protect one thing, profits, and the bottom line.

Can a small group of people actually change things? Margaret Mead famously said that important changes always start with a small group. With our Panther network in many other states, together with allies in unions, churches, colleges and even business leaders like Mike Bloomberg, the former New York City mayor, we believe democracy can still work on this issue.

If the Democrats are able to take back both the White House and the U.S. Senate in 2020, that will certainly be a vast improvement in many areas. But, grassroots boycotts give people a lever to change things now. We don't want another mass shooting or several more to occur in the next year.

After all, a fairly small group of people organized the Boston Tea Party, which was a boycott of British goods. As with Gandhi's salt boycott in India, a new government and a new country were created.

Lew Church is coordinator of Portland Gray Panthers and wrote the McKenzie River Gathering-funded grant for the PSU Conference of Sensible Gun Laws.



# JESUS

## Coming Again

## SOON!!



*“Dear G-d, Please forgive ALL my sins. I accept Jesus into my heart as my Lord and Savior, Amen”*

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