

FOOD

The Supermarket: higher profits and a way of life

By Margie Harrison

What do ITT, the \$64,000 question, "Family Circle," Piggly Wiggly, and IBM have in common? All are part of the corporate way of bringing home the bacon (poisoned with sodium nitrite) to the American people. And all figure in making one of the lowest common denominators in American life—the supermarket.

1912 is a year dear to the hearts of supermarket partisans. In that year a new concept was given birth. Clarence Saunders opened his first Piggly Wiggly supermarket operating it on a new (and more profitable) principle: self-service.

Saunders found that not only could the labor of the public be used to replace the clerks who had provided individual service, but more importantly, he and his compatriots discovered what is now a fundamental principle of selling: "consumer impulse." Freedom to roam the aisles resulted in more than doubling the average transaction.

►The "Price Wrecker" led to more profits

In southern California in the 1920's, the growing use of the automobile fostered experimentation with stores larger and more profitable than groceries. These large, one-stop, automobile-oriented markets were dubbed "super" markets by several Hollywood stars who were investors.

With the Depression and the decline in people's ability to pay (the number of employed people dropped 27% from 1929 to 1932) the search for continued profit led entrepreneurs like Michael Cullen to rent vacant warehouses and movie theaters and to sell food at lower prices, right out of the cases.

The success of Cullen's (the "Price Wrecker") King Kullen stores in Long Island convinced large grocery chains like A & P of the supermarket's future profitability. In 1937, reflecting the general tendencies of Depression-bred reorganization, the A & P chain sacrificed its investment in over 15,000 smaller stores and adopted the supermarket form.

Between 1936 and 1938, the number of supermarkets rose from 1200 to 4,982.

The founding in 1937 of the industry's first collective body, the Super Market Institute, signalled the ascendancy of this new form of food distribution.

Conditions during World War II contributed some lasting aspects. The difficulty of obtaining plentiful stocks of food led to the introduction of non-food, high-profit items into the "product mix." Health and beauty aids, for example, were added to supermarket shelves at the expenses of the traditional drug store. Today, non-food merchandising remains a widely used strategy for maintaining supermarket profitability.

Women entered the labor force in record numbers during WW II, and many stayed despite admonitions to return home and make way for the GI's. The supermarket industry responded flexibly to post-war needs and opportunities, accommodating and fostering the wave of suburban domesticity at the same time that it promoted convenience foods for the working woman.

►Cultivating the automobile

In the 50's the supermarket industry cultivated the rich soil of the automobile suburbs. Automobile registrations had increased from less than 2.5 million in 1915 to 48.5 million in 1950 and 6.3 million in 1958. From 1940 to 1950 population in suburban areas increased by 35.5 percent as compared with a 14 percent

rise in the U.S. as a whole. The supermarket chains took a lead in organizing suburban shopping malls, backed by the banks and insurance companies.

Supermarkets, both chain and independent, were gaining greater and greater control over food supplies, processing, distribution, selling. That control has been actively pursued both in the private world of corporate merger and acquisition, and the public world of "Knowing the customer" and shaping consumption (advertising).

Today, in keeping with the earliest traditions of supermarketing, the industry engages in much research activity focused on the consumer. The industry's research arms, like the Super Market Institute and the magazine *Progressive Grocer*, carefully examine people's reactions to stores and products. With the help of advertising agencies, research firms and universities (like Cornell with its "Food Executive Program", and Rutgers with its professors of Flavor Chemistry) the industry probes into the identity of its captive constituency. Women, the chief consumers in home economy's division of labor, have received particularly close attention.

►Shaping people's needs

In pursuit of the loyalty and dollars of the public, the supermarket industry went beyond straightforward product-price advertising to participate in the creation and promotion of a social environment. Designed to stimulate profitable consumption patterns, supermarket campaigns harmonized with the wave of social retrenchment and domestic retreat of the '50s. Products were advertised within a framework of virtuous housewifely imperatives; new products and new uses were introduced; new tasks made morally urgent; more hours absorbed by isolated drudgery.

Among the chief accomplishments of this endeavor for "public education" was the creation of a number of publications that are today widely respected and read as legitimate magazine. In 1932, Piggly Wiggly supermarkets produced and distributed *Family Circle*, dubbed a "trade-paper for home-makers." A & P followed suit and began publishing *Woman's Day* in 1937. In 1951 the Super Market Institute sponsored *Better Living*.

Gradually, these organs expanded from simple advertising rags to paid publications. They presented the American housewife with ever increasing expectations, higher standards of cleanliness, new products and new tasks, all packaged in a sanctimonious halo of domestic virtue. The success of these publications led marketers and promoters to involvements in other mass media promotions.

"Give-aways," games that glorified consumer commodities to be won, proved successful for general education and for sales. Manufacturers sponsored "give-away" radio and TV programs, one of the first being "The \$64,000 Question". Though that program was later discredited when pre-game coaching of participants was revealed, today's "Let's Make a Deal," "\$25,000 Pyramid," and "Treasure Hunt" continue the tradition.

►Monitoring public concern

Contemporary public concern about the control and quality of our food have soured the supermarket-dream and have shown its failure to deliver. Concern with inflation and general corporate pollution has brought more awareness of the destructive fruits of the U.S. agribusiness chains - carcinogenic food additives and preservatives, atmospheric ozone de-



Richard Stromberg

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stroyed by aerosol cans and packaging, and a political market system that subsidizes non-growth in a time of global starvation.

None of this has been lost on an industry which with on-going consumer surveys measures our multifarious reactions—from sabotage to shop-lifting to pressure on political institutions—and seeks to badger, cajole and console us.

In 1969, representatives of Kraftco, Grand Union, *Good Housekeeping*, the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, Quaker Oats and other members of the Grocery Manufacturers of America met to found the Consumer Research institute. Though its name lends a facade of consumer representation the "Institute" serves industry and government agencies.

"Know thine enemies" must be the slogan of the Super Market Institute and the *Progressive Grocer* magazine; continuous surveys involving thousands of shoppers search for "early warnings" of coming strife in the aisles and registers. And how is the information used? Richard L. Neale, vice president of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau, says, "Consumerism is a merchandisable product." "Consumer advisors" constitute a new specialty in the world of public relations and newspeak. (Disneyland served as the site in 1973 for the formation of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals in Business.)

►Fast food competition

Supermarketeters once promoted their

parking lot marts as integral to American suburban family life. Now they are faced with a new competitive form—the "fast food" restaurants. According to the *Progressive Grocer*, while the number of retail grocery outlets declined by 6,320 from 1974 to 1975, 3,276 more "fast food" places made their appearance. In the late '60s, Americans spent 20 cents out of each food dollar in restaurants; today, we spend 36 cents of that dollar "out."

Trying to counter the \$200 million being spent annually by the "fast food" operators, Banquet Foods will soon be treating us to a \$4 million specially prepared lesson teaching the virtues of eating frozen foods at home. The motto is "Eat in and bank it."

Ironically, the success of the "fast food" outlets may lie precisely in the dollars-and-sense weakness of that motto: given the high cost of food, napkins, beverages, condiments and all those lovely liquids that even keep your hands soft, "fast food" may be a pretty good deal.

Beyond the economics, changing social needs have created a demand for these new eating places. As more and more women work or move away from housework, traditional home cooked meals and the work of making them become less frequent.

Despite assaults by competition and consumer unrest, however, supermarkets will probably reshape themselves to new conditions and continue to be a factor on America's cultural scene.

Margie Harrison is a writer in New York.

Random Samples

Can Congress discriminate?

Can Congressmen discriminate against women? Speaker of the house Tip O'Neill and Minority Leader John Rhodes say yes. They have been working behind the scenes to convince the Justice department to go to bat for ex-Rep. Otto Passman who is being sued by a female employee he fired because he wanted a man on the job. Sex discrimination is illegal under legislation passed by the Congress—except that Congress exempted itself from the legislation. Now O'Neill and Rhodes (and a good many of their colleagues) argue that members of Congress have a Constitutional right to hire and fire as they please. They want an appellate court to reverse a lower decision that would allow the case to come to trial.

According to those on the scene, sex (and race) discrimination is rampant among our top lawmakers.



Moving Rhodesia to Alabama

Will white Rhodesians be migrating to the Deep South? The *Washington Post* reports that a Montgomery, Ala., realtor has placed an advertisement in a Rhodesian newspaper offering to sell land in America.

Humphrey Bolling, a partner in Bolling and Wallace Realtors, told the *Post* that the classified ad in the *Rhodesian Herald* "was not meant to be racial, but just to attract people over there."

The ad reportedly reads: "Farms, ranches, plantations for sale in Alabama and Mississippi. Settle in an area where the white people think as you do and are of the same Anglo-Saxon background. Good private schools, many cultural events, close to seashore and mountains."

Ypsi socialists take one

The final results are in on the Ypsilanti, Mich., city council elections (IN THESE TIMES, Feb. 16 and March 30). Ypsi's Democratic Socialist Caucus picked up one more city council seat, giving it three of the council's 11 seats. It also ran an impressive, but losing, campaign for another seat.

A ballot proposal that would have allowed an affirmative action hiring policy for the city's fire department also went down in defeat. Typical of the campaigning on that issue was the comment from one firefighter opposing the plan: "Would you want your wife to sleep in the same fire station with 24 men?"

(Eric Jackson)

Junk food at home

There is now a newsletter that enables junkfood junkies to enjoy such things as Col. Sanders chicken or Hostess Twinkies baked right in their own kitchens.

Cooking specialist Gloria Pitzer says

she spent the last two years operating "like a chemist" to break down the recipe secrets used in America's favorite fast food products.

In addition to the Colonel's chicken, her monthly newsletter, which sells for 15 cents, tells how to duplicate Arthur Treacher's Fish and Chips, Shake 'n' Bake and even Oreo cookies. That white filling in an Oreo, for example, is merely an equal mixture of Crisco and powdered sugar, with a little gelatin and water, she reports.

The address, for those inclined: Gloria Pitzer, Pearl Beach, Michigan 48052.

Who's reading what

What is the most widely read magazine in America today? The latest figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulation show that *T.V. Guide*, selling more than 12 million copies a week, is easily the publication with the largest circulation in the U.S.

In the second place, with a circulation of 8.4 million, is *Family Circle*; followed by *Woman's Day*, the *National Enquirer* and *Penthouse*. *Playboy* trails its rival *Penthouse*, ending up in sixth place.

Reader's Digest, once the all-time leader, doesn't even rank in the top 10 anymore, finishing in 11th place after *Hustler*, which ranks tenth.

The Times complicit

Documents obtained by lawyers for the sons of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg indicate that the *New York Times* may have worked with the FBI and the Rosenbergs' trial judge in efforts to stop any delay of their execution.

One FBI memo quotes an N.Y. agent as saying a *Times* official, whose name was deleted, specifically offered "assistance through the *New York Times*" to stop the campaign seeking to delay the Rosenbergs' execution. That same official, following the executions offered to write an "objective book" about the case.

More than 100 U.S. law professors recently called for a Congressional investigation of alleged prejudicial behavior on the part of trial judge Irving Kaufman during and after the Rosenberg trial. The *Times*, however, criticized the professors and editorially called for an end to the "vendetta" against Kaufman.

Organic self-defense

An organic farmer in Minnesota has been found innocent of aggravated assault for shooting at a U.S. Forest Service helicopter that was spraying herbicides near his home.

A jury in Grand Marais, Minnesota deliberated for eight hours before acquitting 33 year old Harmon Seaver who admitted firing a shotgun in the direction of the helicopter.

Seaver told the jury he became enraged when he realized that the Forest Service was spraying 2,4-D from the air near his farm. He said he feared that the chemical would contaminate the stream his family uses as drinking water. Seaver also said that he aimed near but not at the chopper to scare the machine away.

The low price of murder

More than five months after an explosion at the Phillips Petroleum plant in Kansas City killed two pipefitters, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has concluded that the company was negligent, and has fined them the grand total of \$490.



Perfect job for pregnant women

Following the Supreme Court ruling that women have no legal right to disability for pregnancy, Rep. Patricia Schroder (D-Colo) announced to the Washington Press Club her idea of the perfect job for pregnant women.

According to the *Monitor*, Schroder stated, "One of the best jobs in the world for a pregnant woman would be a position on the Supreme Court. The work is sedentary and the clothing is loose fitting."

Rep. Schroder is the first member of Congress to give birth while holding office. She defined the current Court as "total isolation on a pinnacle."

(Lancaster Independent Press)

The B-1 goes up

The cost of the highly criticized B-1 Bomber has now reached more than \$100 million per plane.

Lt. Gen. Alton Slay, Deputy Air Force Chief of Staff for Research and Development told a Senate subcommittee that inflation was going to raise the total cost for 255 B-1s to \$24.8 billion, up an additional \$1.9 billion over the 1976 estimate. Each B-1 will cost \$101.6 million by that calculation.

Meanwhile, Sen. John Culver, an Iowa Democrat and strong B-1 opponent, has issued a separate report that finds that the final program cost may go up another twenty percent. That would mean that the ultimate cost per B-1 would be \$121.9 million.

(John Markoff)

Bionic save for B-1

On a slightly different front ABC's "\$6 Million Dollar Man" saved the B-1 in one mid-February show. Foreign agents from somewhere or other were bent on making a B-1 test flight look bad. That was serious, viewers were told, because "lots of people don't like the B-1." Naturally, the bionic man saved the day.

B-1 opponents - not the foreign agent type - say that the show was a not-so-subtle message of support for the controversial bomber. After all, if the baddies are against it, then it must be good.

Truth-in-Renting in Jersey

The nation's first "Truth-in-Renting Act" took effect last summer in New Jersey. The seven-section statute is written in uncommonly simple language and mandates the N.J. Department of Community Affairs to prepare and publish a statement of established legal rights and

responsibilities of tenants and landlords.

Landlords are required to distribute a copy to each of their present tenants, to all prospective tenants and must post a copy in at least one prominent location accessible to all tenants.

The current statement runs to about 15 pages and is available for \$1 from the Bureau of Housing, Dept. of Community Affairs, Box 2768, Trenton, N.J. 08626. (Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies)

Where's Faubus now?

The *New York Times* reports that inflation has put former Arkansas governor Orval Faubus, who led opposition to racial integration of public schools in Little Rock some 20 years ago, back to work. Faubus, who is 67, is working as a teller in the First National Bank of Huntsville, Ark. Faubus complains that his state retirement benefits, computed on 10 of the 12 years he spent as governor, amounting to just over \$600 a month, is not enough. He hopes to work only till August when he has a book appearing.



Ella could break your ear

If you've ever wondered how Ella Fitzgerald shatters a glass using only her voice in that TV advertisement for tape cassettes, the secret is out.

The Memorex Company, in response to allegations that the ad might be fraudulent has released an affidavit backing up its claim. The affidavit reveals that Ella's voice is amplified by the speaker system to 146 decibels.

New Scientist magazine reports that 146 decibels of any kind of sound will not only shatter glass, but will destroy eardrums and even damage other organs in the human body.



Random Samples was compiled by Doyle Niemann from accumulated news services and other sources. Contributions are welcome and should be sent c/o *In These Times*, 1509 N. Milwaukee, Chicago 60622.

IN THE WORLD

U.S. in Zaire: others do the dirty work



By Robert A. Manning

The internationalization of the conflict in Zaire seems to grow wider each day. Whether or not Coca-Cola turns out to be the secret weapon (President Mobutu has ordered 600,000 cans), the intervention by the U.S./NATO countries and a host of right-wing African states on Mobutu's behalf offers a sneak preview of the Carter administration's approach to global problem-solving and also reflects Africa's growing polarization.

Given the economic and strategic stakes involved (Zaire has 67 percent of the world's cobalt, 7 percent of its copper, one-third of its industrial diamonds plus zinc, manganese, tin, uranium, etc.—and about \$1 billion in American investment), the international rallying to Mobutu's defense hardly comes as a surprise. But the way in which it has developed is unique.

By virtually all press accounts, the rebellion underway in Zaire's Shaba province (where most of Zaire's mineral wealth is located) is an internal conflict. The rebels of the NFLC (National Front for the Liberation of the Congo) control about one-third of the former Katanga province and have begun to administer the area. They enjoy widespread popular support and have even been joined by many of Mobutu's troops.

President Carter says that there is "no hard evidence" of any direct Cuban or Angolan involvement in Zaire although the State department has accused Angola of providing "logistical support" for the offensive. Mobutu claims that the "invasion" of Shaba is part of a Soviet/Cuban offensive to dominate Africa. Although the administration responded in a swift but cautious way to Mobutu's aid requests, sending \$15 million in emergency "non-lethal" aid, Carter has so far turned down Mobutu's request for military hardware.

Considering that Zaire, which has received more than \$350 million in American economic and military aid since 1961, has been the linchpin of American strategy in Black Africa, Mobutu's statement that he is "bitterly disappointed" at the American response is understandable. Mobutu has correctly read a main current of Carter's emerging Africa policy, which has been undergoing review.

This policy has two main threads that disturb Mobutu and other rightist military dictatorships: 1) keeping an arms length from unpopular regimes and 2) rejecting the Kissinger mechanical invocation of a "Soviet threat" when the status quo is threatened. This posture is reflected in Andy Young's recent comment that "if [Mobutu] can't stop a couple of thousand Katangese, we shouldn't send the marines to help him."

But there is a third element in Carter's foreign policy upon which the first two are based: proceeding on a *multilateral* rather than unilateral basis in confronting global problems.



Mobutu

This is a key principle of the Trilateral Commission, the international think-tank of the U.S., West Europe and Japan, whose members occupy the top offices in the White House and the Defense department, the State department and the Treasury.

One of a dozen Trilateral papers on foreign policy highlights the logic evident in Carter's handling of Zaire: "U.S. domestic policies...and the unwillingness of other countries to follow its lead, rule out the same degree of American dominance that existed in the recent past. No country or group of countries now seems equipped to play a major leadership role alone. The only alternative is collective leadership."

►Trilateral crisis management.

The first thing that must be said about Carter's response to the Zaire conflict is that the aid he has sent was already budgeted, part of \$30.5 million for Zaire for this fiscal year. Thus, Carter has avoided a possible clash with Congress similar to that of the Ford administration over aid to CIA-backed groups in Angola last year.

While Carter has claimed that American aid to Zaire was not sent "in consultation with others as part of a coordinated plan," a growing body of evidence suggests that the limited American response cannot be separated from the total sum of intervention on Mobutu's behalf. It should be added that the American definition of Moroccan (and possibly Egyptian and Sudanese) involvement as not outside intervention but African solutions to African problems" smacks of Nixon's "Vietnamization" of the war in Indochina.

All told, the multilateral intervention in Zaire has been an amazingly sophisticated operation—particularly considering that it has occurred *outside* the framework of global institutions (i.e., the U.N. and OAU). A few bits of the circumstantial evidence pointing to a concerted effort are:

- Carter confirmed that on Anwar

Sadat's recent visit they discussed "the entire situation in Zaire." Shortly thereafter Egypt sent a military mission to discuss sending troops.

- Morocco is closely aligned to France and the U.S., as the U.S. is a key weapons supplier (\$30 million in military aid for fiscal '77), and Morocco is required by law to obtain advance permission before using American weaponry outside Morocco.

- French President Giscard d'Estaing discussed Zaire with Cyrus Vance on his way home from the March SALT talks in Moscow—perhaps indicating the American position.

- U.S. undersecretary of State Philip Habib (No. 3 man in State) met with Giscard d'Estaing's top Africa advisor Rene Journiac, according to *Newsweek*, after Journiac returned from Zaire. The U.S. and France are also sharing intelligence information.

While it is true that these nations have their own reasons for bolstering Mobutu

—France to tighten its ties to Francophone Africa and Morocco to gain support for its losing war in the Sahara against POLISARIO guerillas—the sum total reflects a confluence of interests and appears to be the first taste of "Trilateral Crisis management."

For Africa, the conflict raises once again the limits of the OAU (which, by the way, Morocco has been boycotting) when the sticky question of resolving problems classed as "internal affairs" arises. This has been a cardinal principal of the OAU, and prevented it from acting on a host of controversial questions—Angola, the Sahara, Eritrea and now Zaire.

Many observers feel this question will be raised when the OAU meets in June in Gabon, but as Africa is increasingly polarized between the conservative states such as Zaire and friends, and the radicals such as Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania and Guinea, it is not likely to be resolved.

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CIA ANGOLA HEAD RESIGNS

John Stockwell, a CIA operative since 1964, recently sent a letter of resignation to the agency's new head, Admiral Stanfield Turner. Stockwell had grown up in Zaire, and after having graduated from the University of Texas and served in the U.S. Marine Corps, was recruited into CIA. Stockwell was then 27.

Stockwell spent from 1966 to 1977 in Africa, most recently as the chief of the

CIA's Angola Task Force. His disillusionment with CIA stemmed largely from his experiences there.

His letter indicts the CIA for incompetence and doubledealing, as well as for its role as an arm of American interests.

In the following excerpt from his letter, Stockwell describes to Turner his experiences in Angola and Zaire:

After Vietnam I received the assignment of chief, Angola task force. This was despite the fact that I and many other officers in the CIA and State department thought the intervention irresponsible and ill-conceived, both in terms of the advancement of United States interests, and the moral question of contributing substantially to the escalation of an already bloody civil war, when there was no possibility that we would make a full commitment and ensure the victory of our allies.

From a chess player's point of view the intervention was a blunder. In July 1975 the MPLA was clearly winning, already controlling 12 of the 15 provinces, and was thought by several responsible American officials and senators to be the best qualified to run Angola—nor was it hostile to the United States. The CIA committed \$31 million to opposing the MPLA victory, but six months later it had nevertheless decisively won, and 15,000 Cuban regular army troops were entrenched in Angola with the full sympathy of much of the Third World and the support of several influential African chiefs of state who previously had been critical of any extra-continental intervention in African affairs.

At the same time the United States was solidly discredited, having been exposed for covert military intervention in African affairs, having managed to ally itself with South Africa and having lost.

This is not Monday-morning quarterbacking. Various people foresaw all this and also predicted that the covert intervention would ultimately be exposed and curtailed by the United States Senate. I myself warned the interagency working group in October 1975 that the Zairian invasion of northern Angola would be answered by the introduction of large numbers of Cuban troops—10,000 to 15,000, I said—and would invite an eventual retaliatory invasion of Zaire from Angola.

Is anyone surprised that a year later the Angolan government has permitted freshly armed Zairian exiles to invade the Shaba

(Continued on next page.)