



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Meat Boycott Successful Locally; 'What Next?' Remains Big Question

Last week was the week that a lot of families in Observerland discovered the delights of the eggplant. Or soybeans. Or macaroni and cheese. Or tuna fish.

Best local evidence shows that the national meat boycott had a pretty big impact in this area. Area supermarkets and smaller grocery stores reported meat sales off from 15 to 50 per cent, and chicken, cheese and vegetables somewhat over normal.

In this area, Families United Against Inflation (the acronym of which is FUAI, pronounced "phoeey") in Farmington was particularly active, staging a march on a local supermarket as the boycott started. FUAI, which began with a group of Mrs. Lenore Mendelson's neighbors on Glenmoor Avenue in Farmington, was but one particularly visible group in what has got to be regarded as a mass protest movement which sprung from genuine popular grass roots and overnight grew to a scale surpassing even

the protests against the war in Vietnam.

Everywhere you went over the past week people were talking about the boycott and the high prices. The women in the supermarkets, the cashiers at local department stores in the shopping centers, the men belted up to the bars after work. Topic A-1 in public awareness was the boycott; it even drowned out busing.

THE MAJOR QUESTION, of course, is what happens now?

Locally, the boycott did not have much effect on meat prices, although a few local supermarket chains cut back on meat prices before the boycott started, and other price reductions may be forthcoming as increased meat supplies start coming through the pipeline.

Most economists take the view that a one-week meat boycott, no matter how effective, will not have much effect on prices, which are in the last analysis determined heavily by supply (ie. how

much meat is available) and demand (ie. how much meat people are willing to buy). A local member of FUAI made the same point: "I'm beginning to take a broader view than just a housewife on this thing. Just a one-shot protest won't in itself do much good. We've got to get more meat available, which may mean importing more foreign beef, and maybe we've got to re-think our own buying patterns."

Leaders of the national boycott are meeting today in Washington to consider their next step. Many local people think they ought to recommend that families pass up meat one or two days each week to reduce overall demand, rather than keep up a complete meat boycott. In the long run, such a plan ought to reduce the demand for meat, and thus in time bring prices down.

THE OTHER BASIC question left by the boycott has to do with President Nixon's anti-inflation program.

Reportedly, the President was once prepared to roll back all food prices to January levels, but was talked out of it at the last moment by Treasury Secretary George Schultz.

The President is reportedly still against a price roll back, but he is up against some very powerful political and economic realities:

1) The nation's housewives are plenty sore at rising prices, and the astounding overall success of the boycott indicates their anger is no small factor for a politician as astute as the President;

2) The wholesale price index went up 1.2 per cent in March, a much larger jump than expected, and this indicated that inflationary pressures are by no means confined to meat;

3) Organized labor is beginning to rumble about the obvious unfairness of rapidly rising prices and a 5.5 per cent wage increase ceiling, further jeopardizing the President's Phase 3 inflation program;

4) Democrats and Republicans in Congress are beginning to get the message that the natives are surly, and bills to roll back prices and impose more strict controls are piling into congressional hoppers.

My guess is that the President's entire anti-inflation political game

plan is in jeopardy, and that the President knows it. I suspect that he'll re-impose strict price controls over the economy, and I hope he'll roll back food prices to January levels.

Otherwise he'll have a lot of angry housewives on his back, and as everyone knows, "Hell hath no fury like..."

HER HUSBAND BRINGS HOME \$175.00 AND THEY HAVE FOUR KIDS. . . .



Emory Daniel writes

Difficult To Boycott Middleman

This is the way little piggies go to market:

The birth of little piggies are timed to orient with a later time when piglet will be full-grown and marketable.

Piglet is cared for and fed until reaching a sufficient physical condition to be sold, butchered, and packaged for marketing to consumers.

Often, the trip to the meat-packer is delayed a couple weeks to fill piggy with cornmeal to make them fatter. But, if fattened for more than a two to three-week period, piglet gets too plump with fatty tissues too abundant to get a good price for farmer.

Farmer may fatten piglet, or delay his trip to the market, depending upon the price of pork that particular week.

But, if the farmer is stuck with a number of marketable pigs and a new crop of piggies are born, he is placed in an economical situation which quickly turns profit into loss.

The intricacies of porkonomics dictates that farmer maintain and feed a batch of pigs for a limited period of time. He can delay selling, but eventually piggies must go to market.

Initially, when piglet is born, farmer has already computed the cost of feed and new equipment based on current prices or prices that can be reasonably anticipated. He definitely doesn't buy

new equipment, increase number of sows for greater litters thereby ordering more feed, on the assumption that pork prices will be 30 per cent higher by the time piglet is marketable.

With this in mind, the farmer's "boycott" of withholding hogs and cattle from the market is pure hogwash. He can do it for two, maybe three, weeks. But, eventually he must unload. Being a good businessman, farmer will sell when prices are high and before a possible dip downwards.

The economics of marketing beef are the same as selling pork, with some differences in methods and details. But, the economic principles are the same.

If the consumers' meat boycott is a one or two-week protest, it will have almost no effect on meat prices. It could, indeed, result in higher prices.

But, if the consumer is hearty enough to engage in a boycott of two or three months' duration, meat prices will drop drastically.

The farmer, meat-packer, and supermarkets will reach the point of diminishing return and meat will be dumped onto the market because, to do otherwise, there will be loss instead of profit.

Farmers, packers, and markets are anticipating the consumer will end the boycott after a couple weeks and rush for the meat - creating an unusual high demand sufficient to support even higher prices.

But when the point is reached that the possibility of profit will be negated, meat will flood into the market at whatever price it takes to entice consumers to buy.

The farmer may not be the villain. Few are claiming he is. But, it is tough to boycott the middleman. Thus, the alternatives are to

accept rising prices or boycott the product.

If consumers can endure, little piggy will go to market (with few slaying home) at 90 cents instead of \$1.40 a pound.

Leonard Poger writes

Old Suburban Scrap Gets New Attention

The newest cliché in Detroit journalistic circles is the "newly-found" suburban opposition to the "urban sprawl."

Detroit newspapers recently are busy finding out about an issue which suburban editors and their readers have known about for decades.

In fact, the opposition to new developments and any change at all dates back to Adam and Eve who objected to be moved out of the Garden of Eden by city council and/or township board public hearings on rezonings know full well that suburbanites are opposed to virtually anything that changes the peaceful surroundings they picked years ago to raise their children and run the dogs.

The political impacts have been effective in most communities.

Organized opposition to new developments have forced city councils and township boards to stiffen their backbones on new shopping centers, apartment complexes, or other brick - and - mortar construction.

Livonia city council, with the help of the voters, has an ordinance on lawbooks which restricts apartment buildings to at least 1,000 feet of adjacent residential homes.

Westland, with more than 6,000 apartments built in the last decade, approved a one-year moratorium on new apartment rezonings for 1973 and everyone in sight applauded the decision.

Canton Township's Board of Trustees recently considered a similar moratorium but refused to approve it as yet although a newly-organized homeowners' group was formed to fight apartments and a proposed major shopping center.

Garden City officials wanted to correct past errors on land use at its major downtown intersection

with the use of federal urban renewal funds.

But more than 200 persons stormed the public hearing two years ago to protest the program, which was eventually killed by the government refusing to approve funds. The refusal was based on the lengthy court suit initiated by urban renewal opponents and President Nixon's impoundment of congressionally-approved funds for such projects.

It all boils down to suburban residents opposing any change in their surroundings and city hall and/or the township hall concerned about broadening the tax base to raise funds to pay for governmental services.

So far, the residents have won the most recent battles - but the war over suburban development isn't over yet.

Sense And Nonsense

The doings of the unpredictable Livonia school board continue to mystify all.

Remember two years ago when the board refused to allow Stymelski any more than transportation costs to attend a national convention in San Francisco?

The majority quartet left for the same coast city last week to attend that same national meeting and all expenses are being paid by the board.

That's what one would call giving all to the majority and little to the minority. . . . and we might add, that doesn't appear to be the best way for a board elected by the public to operate.

Fred DeLano writes

It's The Parent Who Gets Gyped When His Children Skip Classes

Say you're a high school principal who has been driven to hair-tearing frustration by so many

students deliberately skipping classes?

Say you're a parent who can't control the kids any longer, so leave it up to them whether they actually attend school once they leave home in the morning?

The answer to this particular woe may lie in changing to a different tool in trying to reason with the little darlings.

We suggest that those who are concerned about student absenteeism on our increasingly permissive society change tactics. Instead of expressing alarm because a youngster declines to expose himself to an education, why not attack it from the tax angle? Perhaps a letter to parents along such lines as these would help:

"This is to inform you that because of seven unexcused absences this month, your child has socked it to you for \$38.85.

"No, you are not being dunned for that amount. Lord knows, we all pay enough in taxes already, but that's just the point.

"School budgets run into the millions and are pretty hard to understand. However, it's also

true that the whole thing is based on having the schools open for 180 teaching days each year.

"If you were to divide our total operating budget by the enrollment, you would find that about \$1,000 is spent on each student. In turn, when that is divided by 180, the amount invested in each youngster is just about \$5.55 per day - and it comes from the pockets of all our citizens.

"Deliberate non-attendance at scheduled classes cheats the taxpayer from his blind side, for he has no recourse. It's all the worse when one realizes it's his own child who has given him the shaft."

It's dangerous to make assumptions, but we'll jump at one just the same. Namely, it could be that a lenient father who won't blink an eye when a youngster filches \$5 from Mom's cookie jar might bat the kid's ears off for cheating Dad of his tax dollars.

In the process, of course, there ideally would come the conviction that regularly sitting in on book learning sessions ain't all that bad.

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Philip H. Power, Publisher

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