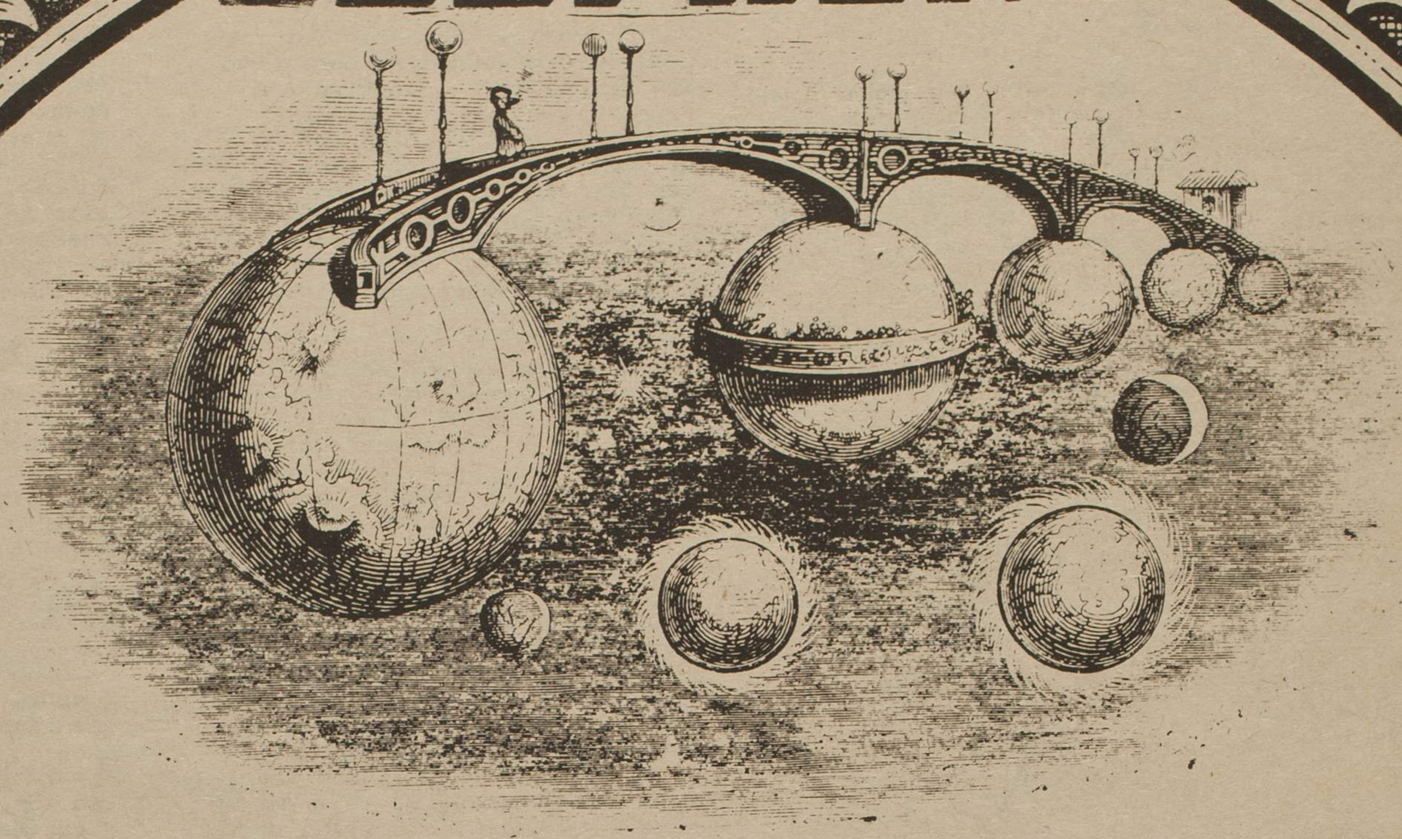
COOPNEWS



Nestlé Makes The Very Best?

Baby Bottle Blues

BY DIANE LUBER AND MARCY MAULER

In the late 1960's it became apparent, especially to the producers of baby formula, that the "Baby Boom" had busted and that the birthrate in developed countries was heading for an all time low. Some companies gave up the baby business and went into other profitable ventures. But Ross Laboratories (the subsidiary of Abbott Labs which manufactures Similac and Isomil), Bristol-Myers (which manufactures Enfamil and Olac), Wyeth (which manufactures SMA, S-26, and Nursoy), and Nestlé (which manufactures Lactogen) all turned their attention to the Third World. In their effort to turn native mothers against traditional breastfeeding and convert them to the "civilized" method of bottle-feeding, these companies give out free samples, pamphlets, posters, and contributions of equipment to hospitals. If that doesn't do the trick, they send "mothercraft personnel" dressed in nurse-like uniforms to visit new mothers providing gifts and advice - and leaving infant formula samples.

Confused by "professional" advice, Third World women are abandoning breastfeeding in an attempt to do what's best and modern for their babies. They try to reconstitute a powdered formula when their lack of education may prevent them from clearly understanding the directions. When the only water available may be contaminated. When lack or expense of fuel makes sterilization impossible. When no refrigeration exists. Finally, when the free samples run out and the mother's breast milk supply has dried up due to disuse, these women attempt to over-dilute the expensive formula to make it last weeks instead of days.

The results? Diarrhea. Malnutrition in the form of marasmus (sunken eyes, prominent ribs, thin little arms and legs) and Kwashiorkor (puffy face and feet, anemia, apathy). Protein deficiency resulting in permanent brain damage (the full effects of which we will not realize for another 15-20 years). Death is the final form of the "bottle disease". In Zambia, mothers put empty Nestlé Lactogen cans and feeding bottles on their dead babies' graves for they believe to the end that these were the most valuable possessions their babies once had.

Photo from Mother Jones By Ira Sandler

Putting aside obstacles to sterile bottle-feeding found in Third World countries, a look into breast-feeding's replacement by bottle-feeding finds us all victims of formula manufacturers' marketing hype. Well over 90% of all modern mothers are physically able to breast-feed their babies. Mother's milk (even of an underfed woman) will provide adequate nourishment for at least the early months. For a year to 18 months more it can provide a good protein supplement. No matter what water the mother drinks, the baby receives breast milk relatively free of local infections. Mother's milk protects the infant from a generally unsanitary environment and at the same time induces in the infant an immunity against a variety of diseases. Breast-feeding, while not a foolproof method of birth control, can delay ovulation and therefore pregnancy from ten weeks to as long as twenty-six months. Rather than take advantage of breast milk as a valuable natural resource, fuel and other resources are used up to produce all the paraphernalia needed for artificial feeding - bottles, nipples, sterilizers, disposable bottle liners, etc. Pollution is needlessly caused by the same. Medical care may be necessary for the bottle fed infant who may be 10 times more susceptible to illness than his/her breastfed counterpart. In this time of food shortages and famines, the waste of human milk widens the world "protein gap" both by removing an existing protein food and by requiring a replacement. Is bottle-feeding really more convenient than breast-feeding? Or do we resort to bottle-feeding because our society sees female breasts solely as sex symbols?

What can be done? Because of U.S. women's role in the world as status setters, and because of our desire for the best for our children, those of us who have the opportunity to choose should look seriously into the alternative of breast feeding. Church groups here have used stockholders' petitions and lawsuits to force some U.S. formula manufacturers to discontinue their promotion of infant formula to mothers who can't afford to use it safely.

Finally, all of us can participate in the boycott of Nestlé products. Nestlé has been singled out because its transnational structure makes it practically immune to any pressures other than a boycott. "Crunch Nestlé Quick" is the slogan given to the boycott which includes Taster's Choice, Nestlé's Quick, Nescafé, Nestea, Nestlé's Crunch, Decaf, all Libby's and Stouffer's products, Souptime, and anything else with the name Nestlé on it.

The Community Mercantile Food Co-op, after soliciting opinions from its members, is participating in the boycott by no longer carrying Jarlsburg Cheese, a Norwegian Nestle product. Join us and remember when you see a Nestle product what it repre sents, - Third World babies who died for lack of their mother's milk.

Quick!

thanks to mother jones magazine for research information.

Boycott anything with the name Nestlé on it, including Taster's Choice, Quik, Nescafé, Decaf, Crunch, Souptime and Lactogen;

all Libby's and Stouffer's products; as well as Crosse & Blackwell's, Keiller, Maggi, McVities, Crawford, James Keller & Son; also Deer Park Mountain Spring Water, Jarlsburg and Swiss Knight Cheese.