

Old Enough to Buy Twinkies, Old Enough to Vote

By Jim P. Davis

Corporations are becoming increasingly involved in political issues. The extent to which they finance campaigns, lobby for or against specific issues, and receive government contracts or subsidies defines their level of involvement in government policies. It is because of this corporate political activity that consumers should be cautious in purchasing domestic goods.

Often the purchase of a seemingly innocent product contributes money to a conglomerate with far-reaching political power.

It is easy to overlook social issues when spending money, because policies in Washington seem too remote from commonplace shopping. Few people think of the Pentagon when they buy Barbie Dolls; fewer still think of Chile when they purchase Hostess Twinkies. But when the products are traced to their respective conglomerates, these simple purchases gain significance. The revelation by the Pentagon that all the plastic parts currently used in manufacturing weapons are made by Mattel Toys, adds a social di-



mension to an otherwise private act. Money spent on Barbie Dolls is profit for an industry which thrives on warfare. Hostess Cupcakes, Wonder Bread, and Morton Cream Pies are all owned by International Telephone and Telegraph. When the C.I.A. influenced the elections in Chile with the result that the reformist government of Allende was overthrown, one of their reasons was to preserve the parasitic role of I.T.T. on the Chilean economy. There are alternatives to the products of I.T.T., and by choosing these alternatives we can withhold our personal endorsement for their illegal activities.

The elections of 1972 illuminated another method of corporate influence. Most citizens felt that their largest role

in the election was voting. Though personal votes may be of human interest, their political impact is moot because electoral votes, not personal votes, elect the President. Conversely, most citizens disregarded the politics of their purchasing. But when it was revealed that I.T.T., Pepsi, Coca-Cola, and many others made illegal contributions to Nixon's campaign, it seemed that we elected our President more by what we purchased in the grocery store than by our vote on election day.

Of course, a corporation need not involve itself with the government to commit acts, which they perceive as economic, but which are essentially political. Witness the mass deaths of infants throughout the Third World, arising from the overzeal-

ousness of the Nestlé's company in finding a new market for baby formula. Nestlé's promotes the use of baby formula in areas which have neither the facilities to sterilize the bottles, nor the money to purchase the product once the mother stops producing milk and Nestlé's stops giving free samples. This situation has prompted the Crunch Nestlé's Quik campaign to boycott all Nestlé's products, which include Taster's Choice coffee and all Libby's products.

It should seem obvious that when making a choice between two virtually identical products, choosing the item produced by the conglomerate with the worst record of abuse should be avoided. Every time we spend money we are making a political decision, and if we ignore this dimension to our spending, then we ignore perhaps the most significant way in which the average citizen influences politics.

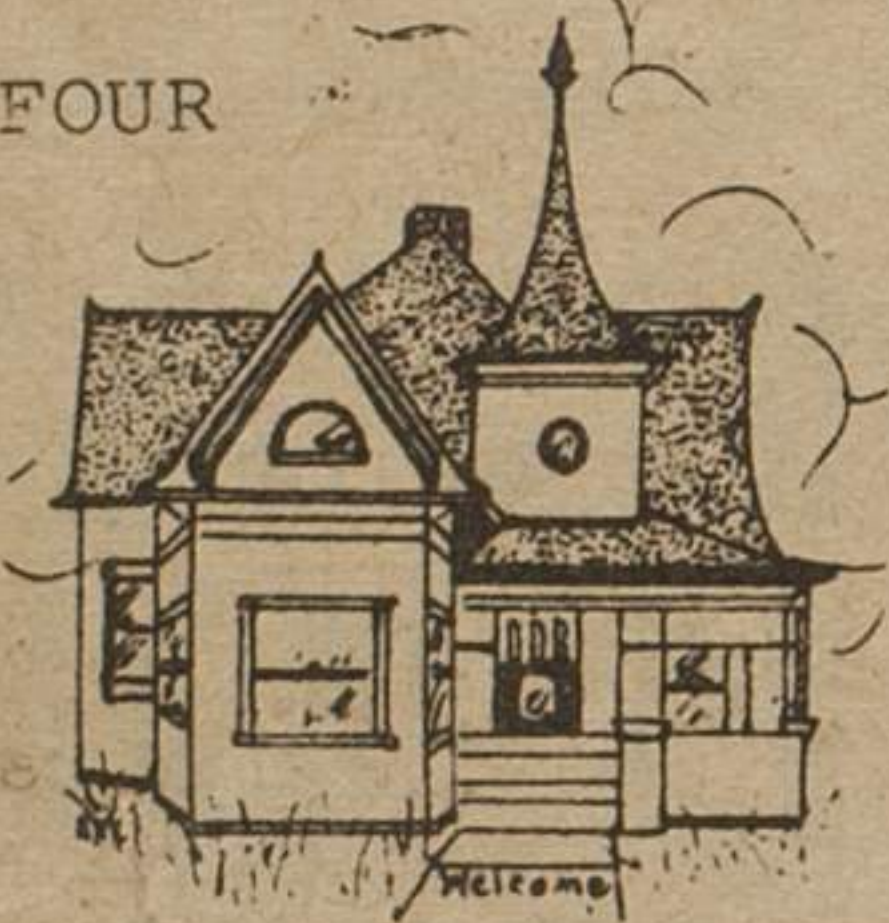
Yet, any trip to the supermarket, gas station, restaurant, or hardware store reveals that ordinarily enlightened consumers become prey to packaging design and other advertising, mindlessly giving profit to businesses which cause many of the problems a particular consumer might be working to remedy.

Boycotts can be effective. One of the most encouraging examples was the Farah slacks boycott. Farah's employees were primarily Chicano women who were underpaid and denied nearly every fringe benefit. When Farah started harassing all attempts by the women to unionize, a boycott was organized against all Farah products. After two years and the closing of half their factories, the management of Farah yielded and reformed their labor policies. Only after we realized the importance of our spending were we able to stimulate responsible policies.

There are innumerable reasons why we purchase what we do. But whenever we spend money, we distribute power. In the case of Presidential elections, our consuming is felt more than our voting. Like voting, spending money can be done knowledgeably or blindly. It is the responsibility of the consumer to be aware of the political effects of his or her spending and to spend in accordance with one's beliefs. The old doctrine caveat emptor has, thus, a new application.

HISTORIC HOME

FROM PAGE FOUR



The East Lawrence Improvement Association had offered plans for the venerable house. They proposed that money be allocated from the City's 1979 Community Development budget for a demonstration project using the home.

Richard Kershenbaum, ELIA president, told the other members of the CD Review Committee, the group charged with recommending a CD budget, that the project would have benefits to the city far beyond the simple addition of one living unit.

He said the restoration project would save a building with unique historic significance, and would draw attention to the potential for historic preservation in Lawrence, spurring private restoration efforts.

The presence of a fully restored house would also help to stabilize the surrounding neighborhood, he said.

Despite the Committee's recommendations that \$40,000 be allocated to the project, the City Commission axed the request in favor of a \$100,000 allocation for remodeling work in the new Senior Center, 8th and Vermont.

Commissioner Don Binns opposed the plan because he said he didn't want to use public funds to restore a house for someone who could afford adequate housing on their own.

"I'm concerned with using public funds to subsidize private funds," he said. CD funds weren't meant for private use. We would just be helping out some-

one who would have plenty of money any way."

But although the Commission was unwilling to allocate a large sum from the CD budget, the neighborhood's pleas that accelerating deterioration would soon make restoration infeasible, prompted concern from Commissioner Barkley Clark.

He suggested the interested parties meet with the City Manager and Commission to explore ideas for saving the home.

As a result, the Commission sent a letter to the Salvation Army urging them to postpone destruction of the building and advising them of the future availability of HUD 312 Loans, which could assist with rehabilitation.

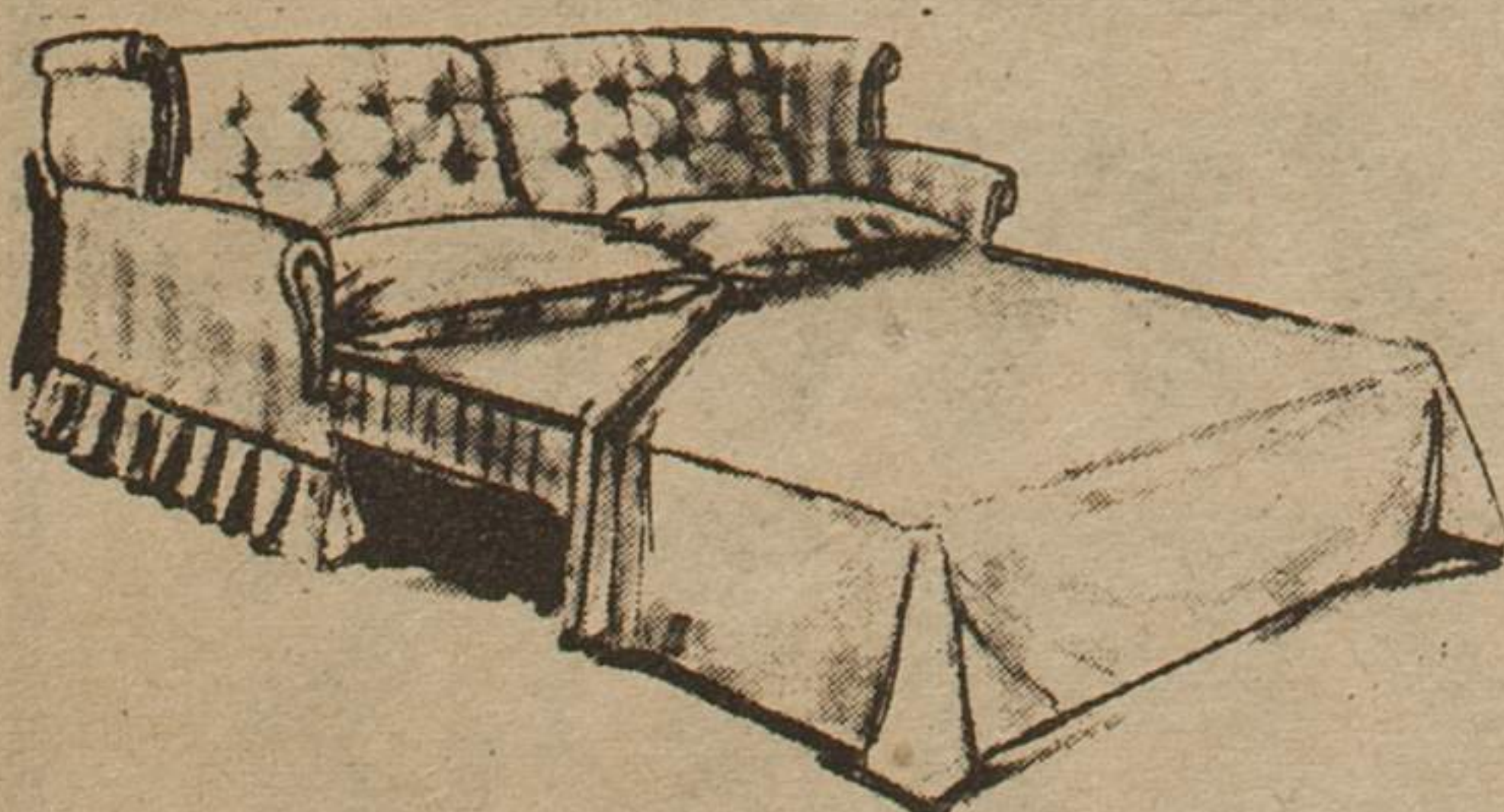
Glenn Kappelman, a member of the Salvation Army Board and chairperson of its building committee, said the group is examining alternatives for funding the restoration.

The Salvation Army has postponed indefinitely, its plans for demolishing the house this spring.

GRAN SPORT

We preach, teach and sell good equipment for bicycling, camping, backpacking, and canoeing 7th and Arkansas

O.K. Furniture & Appliance



KANSAS CITY'S LARGEST SELECTION OF NEW AND USED FURNITURE

BEDS, CHESTS, SOFAS, CHAIRS, DINETTES, STOVES, REFRIGERATORS

CASH OR TERMS

ON THE CORNER OF TRUMAN RD. & PROSPECT

2522 Truman Rd. Phone 231-6880 Kansas City, Mo.

MEXICAN FOOD

You'll Enjoy it

CASA DE TACO

Happy Hour 5 - 6 P.M.
1105 MASS. STREET

POTION PARLOR

fine gifts and paraphernalia for connoisseurs

collectibles, imported and recycled clothing

BOKONON
841-3600
12 EAST 8TH ST.