

# Consumerism

"In a natural society man gets exercise by swimming or dancing or in the course of his work; today he needs a car and a bag of golf clubs or a yacht. In a natural society, he gets status from his skills; today he needs to purchase status-symbols. Once, his fantasies were supplied by a human story-teller; now they need the elaborate machinery of television. Where he made his music by singing or playing he now depends on radio and gramophone. But is the satisfaction they yield as great? We need to establish a need-oriented society in place of our present goods-oriented society."

G. Rattray Taylor, "Rethink" 1972

Consumerism is the strong right arm of the expansion economy. We are continually being told, asked and recommended to "buy more stuff".

If our society were operating sensibly, the more goods we obtained the fewer we would need. The decreased requirement to go on producing and consuming goods would mean that more of our time could be devoted to non-economic pleasures and pursuits. It is not working out that way. One of the reasons why it is not is the fact that we allow our society commercial promotion which is designed to create, and does create dissatisfaction.

Much commercial promotion is devoted to providing information, but much is psychologically based. It plays on the mind of the reader or viewer. It creates wants. Advertising and its related arts help develop the kind of people the industrial system needs - people who reliably spend their income and work long and hard because they are always in need of more.

Much display advertising in newspapers and magazines, and most television and cinema advertising, attempts to sell a particular commodity by playing upon a supposed underlying need, such as sex, status or excitement. Although New Zealand is a fairly affluent society, television and newspaper "soft sell" will keep on trying to create dissatisfactions, trying to subvert our peace of mind, trying to maintain economic growth.

To a certain extent then, advertising is at war with increased leisure and an unspoiled environment.

Once basic material requirements have been provided, human needs are not served but are distorted by continued emphasis on material consumption.

Without the pressures of consumerism we would be much more likely to find satisfaction with what we have, and much of the threat to the survival of nature and the sanity of human-kind would be diminished.

With this knowledge it is depressing to note that the most widely-used method to eliminate unemployment is to boost consumption and economic growth.

The facts argue strongly that economic growth should not be regarded as the cure for unemployment. The best answer seems to lie in the movement to a shorter working week so that work is spread. In this situation one man does not continue to work for 50 hours a week while another remains completely idle. Full employment is gained by sharing the work. Alternatively, manpower could be diverted to more worthwhile tasks such as welfare and social work or provision of housing.

The pressures on people to consume are wrong for the following reasons:

**Economic** Consumerism stimulates economic expansion regardless of real needs and the worth of the goods produced, and it wastes resources such as energy, materials, and time.

**Environmental** Its harmful effects include using up non-renewable resources unnecessarily, and polluting the environment through the wastes of manufacturing processes, packaging and visual pollution.

**Community** Consumerism fosters individual acquisition and selfishness, not community sharing.

**Individual worth** Consumerism persuades us that we can achieve non-material things such as love and respect by merely possessing and consuming material goods. The ability to possess such goods is seen as a measure of our worth.

**Apathy** Consumerism gets us into the habit of passively "consuming" life as it comes to us, rather than becoming actively involved in making life happier for ourselves and others.

The Values Party would combat the problem of consumerism by regarding commercial promotion as information. The Party supports a change in the law of contract to make illegal the use of any claim that is meaningless, misleading or unable to be substantiated when advertising a product, or service.

In the long run the Values party would ensure that consumer information is provided in an impartial manner. At present individual advertisers present only information which serves their own interests. The facilities of the Consumer Institute should be expanded to enable greater provision of impartial information to consumers and biased information should be phased out.



**TURKISH  
BATHS  
AT HOME.**

Dr. GORDON STABLES says:  
"Foot's Bath Cabinet is the best."  
Prices from 35/-

Write for "BATH BOOK," No. 36.  
**J. FOOT & SON, Ltd.,**  
(Dept. B 36), 171, New  
Bond Street, London, W.

### The Values Party would

- Regard commercial promotion as an information process.
- Require that all advertising give the name of the product, a clear description of what it does, the name of the manufacturer and if possible the price.
- Prohibit the sponsorship of sport for advertising purposes
- Replacement funds would be granted through the Ministry of Sport and Recreation.
- Keep one TV channel entirely free of advertisements.
- Reduce the number of TV advertisements to half the present ratio.
- Limit the number of times an advertisement could be shown on TV each week.

### Packaging

- Keep packaging of goods to a minimum in keeping with the life and needs of the product.
- Require packaging to give, among other information, the name of the product, a clear, accurate description of what it is and does [including in the case of foodstuffs its ingredients and their relative quantities], unit price and the date of manufacture or time limit on consumption, and the name and address of the manufacturer.

### Planned Obsolescence

- Require guarantees on the life of products to be clear and explicit, and binding on the manufacturer.

- Investigate the practicability of varying the company taxation structure so as to provide an incentive for firms to make products with longer lives.

### Consumer Education

- Extend the facilities and scope of the Consumer Council by increasing direct Government assistance.
- Urge the Consumer Council to make the results of its tests more accessible to the public by increased use of the media and by simplified presentation.

### Community Shopping

- Encourage smaller, more personalised, local shopping facilities.
- Discourage the building of large shopping complexes.
- Encourage shopping centres to function as an integral part of community centres. Where possible they should be planned around open, park-like areas with seating, trees and overall aesthetic planning. Creches should be set up in all concentrated shopping centres, financed partly by the community, partly by retailers and partly by the users. The creche should include a meeting place and washroom for adult shoppers, and should function also as a community centre with a noticeboard, from which groups could set up meetings, craft classes, and so on, if such a centre were situated in a residential area.

