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Prompt 1: The Dominance of the Global Food Industry

The Industrial Revolution transformed the food industry, which was once a predominantly local entity, into a predominantly global entity ever since. The transformation allowed global consumers to be introduced to foreign foods and diets ever since. However, the globalization of the food industry led to the conception of industrial food, which has been a controversial creation since its conception, especially over the last half-century. Controversies such as the cultivation, assembly, maintenance, and most importantly nutrition of industrial foods have led various groups such as consumers, legislators, industrialists, health professionals, etc. over the past two centuries to debate the position of industrial foods in society. Ultimately, different groups through legislative, moral, and scientific efforts over the past two centuries have challenged, resisted, and attempted to reform the globalized industrial food system, yet their efforts have ultimately been overshadowed by the modern behemoth that is the global industrial food system.

Consumers have challenged and attempted to reform the globalized food system through legislative efforts. During the 19th century, one of the early effects, rather consequences of the globalization of the food industry was the adulteration of food. As industrialization and urbanization began to sweep around the globe from Western Europe, the gap between producers and consumers began to widen, as local food industries were being replaced by global food industries, consumers began to know less about the source of their food which led to adulteration

during the 19th century (Lecture 11, 11/2/23). To address the issue of adulteration, Western European governments in Prussia and Great Britain during the 19th century began to pass regulations to resist the threat of industrial foods. In 1868, Prussia passed slaughterhouse inspection laws which concentrated meat production in fewer slaughterhouses, therefore making the inspections more convenient and easier (Lecture 11, 11/2/23). Furthermore, to resist the threat of industrial foods in 1875 Great Britain passed the Pure Food and Drink Act which mandated food labeling of all products, which hurt small businesses, but was necessary in providing transparency for British consumers (Lecture 11, 11/2/23). Ultimately, during the 19th century legislation was an effort made to combat the young, yet ever-polarizing global industrial food system which was beginning to undermine consumers for capital gain.

Similarly, during the 20th century in the United States, legislative efforts were made to challenge adulteration. In 1906 the United States government passed the Pure Food and Drug Act, which similar to the Pure Food and Drink Act of Great Britain, mandated food labeling of all products, which also hurt small businesses (Lecture 11, 11/2/23). However, the legislative efforts of groups in Prussia, Great Britain, and the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries were possible because defenders of the industrial food system backed the legislation since after all, the legislative acts ostracized small businesses and elevated big corporations, since they had the infrastructure to adapt to new regulations such as food labeling. Thus, to deem legislative efforts as a way to challenge and attempt to reform the globalized industrial food system as successful is disingenuous since there were no defenders of adulteration during the 19th and 20th centuries besides small businesses that lacked the economic and political power to combat opposition such as consumers and big corporations. However, what if legislative efforts to challenge and attempt to reform the globalized industrial food system occurred between

consumers and big corporations, well there is no more concrete example than in the present century.

Unlike 19th and 20th centuries groups, 21st century groups especially in the United States have challenged and attempted to reform the globalized industrial food system. In *Food, Inc.*, a film directed by Robert Kenner documents and reports the current problems within the globalized industrial food system. Around the 27:30-35:40 mark of the film, it touches on the story of Barbara Kowalczyk and her son Kevin, who at the age of 2 died of E. coli in 2001. In the film Kowalczyk states, “Kevin, was stricken with E. coli O157H7 and went from being perfectly healthy, beautiful little boy . . . he went from that to being dead in 12 days” (Kenner, 29:20-29:40). Furthermore, it follows Kowalczyk’s effort to challenge and attempt to reform the global industrial food system. To prevent further incidents as happened to her son, Kowalczyk championed a new legislative measure called “Kevin’s Law.” “Kevin’s Law would give back to the USDA the power to shut down plants that repeatedly produce contaminated meat” (Kenner, 33:21-33:31). It’s clear that Kevin’s Law serves to help prevent further avoidable E. coli incidents such as Kevin’s by giving the United States Drug Administration (USDA) more power to regulate global industrial food companies, but Kowalczyk states in the film, “we’ve been working for six years and it still hasn’t passed” (Kenner, 33:33-33:43).

Furthermore, unlike in the 19th and 20th centuries, consumers and global industrial food corporations no longer have shared interests in the 21st century. In Kowalczyk’s discussion with Phil English of Pennsylvania, English expresses, “From the standpoint of the consumer, a lot of people would support the idea of . . . higher standard of safety . . . I also know there are other players, you know in the food production chain, that tend to worry about that because it's going to be seen as an add-on to their costs” (Kenner, 33:50-34:12). The statement reflects the unique

and current state of the globalized industrial food system, groups demanding healthier standards versus defenders of the industrial food system, such as corporations seeking to maximize their profits. Ultimately, groups challenging and attempting to reform the global industrial food system in the 21st century through legislative efforts is nearly impossible, due to the political and economic power of corporations.

Consumers have also resisted the globalized food system through moral efforts. During the early 20th century Upton Sinclair who wrote *The Jungle*, sought to expose the immorality of the meatpacking industry and inspire resistance toward meatpacking practices. In *The Jungle*, Sinclair exposes that early 20th century meatpackers at times fell into steaming vats of lard, which were ultimately fatal, often disfiguring those who fell into the steaming vats of lard, even meatpackers were never recovered (Lecture 9, 10/26/23). However, Sinclair's moral efforts were not enough to encourage other consumers of the early 20th century to resist the globalized food system. Defenders of the food industry began to garner the vast support of American consumers during the 19th century overshadowing Sinclair's moral efforts through simple but effective skewed image of industrial foods, such as convenience, seasonless supply, and "superior" nutrition of industrial foods such as canned foods (Lecture 9, 10/26/23). Furthermore, the food industry also benefitted from home economists reshaping the minds of early 20th-century American consumers, by "educating" consumers on the value and quality of industrial foods (Lecture 9, 10/26/23). Ultimately, Sinclair sought to expose the immoral practices of the global food industry in his book *The Jungle* but was overshadowed by the presentation of industrial foods toward consumers, who were ultimately swayed, ignoring the morality of the food industry, and accepting industrial foods into their diets.

However, later in the 20th century a new group or movement, that evolved from Sinclair's idea once again, resisted the globalized food system through moral efforts, "counterculture". In Warren Belasco's, "Food, Morality, and Social Reform," Belasco explores the moral debate of the global industrial food system between groups such as Sinclairists and counterculturists, and defenders of the global industrial food system. The emergence of counterculture in the late 20th century focused on shifting the global industrial food system from adulteration to, "*poison, plastic, junk, pig food, and artificial* . . . the commercial food supply was hopelessly polluted - thanks, again, to corporate anonymity and irresponsibility" (Belasco 194). Counterculturists sought to expose global industrial corporations as immoral entities who sought to take advantage of consumers no matter the moral costs. Furthermore, counterculturists believed the solution to resisting the global industrial food system was, "a drastic decentralization of the food system: organic revolution" (Belasco 194). Counterculturists envisioned a global system where, "Regional, nonchemical agriculture would revitalize family-based farming and rural communities, reduce energy use, save the soil, and produce healthier food, too" (Belasco 194). However, Belasco provides the perspective of the defenders of the global industrial food system, "The challenge for food moralists is to introduce a third set of considerations . . . a sense of *responsibility* . . . the reformer tries to turn the bipolar struggle between convenience and identity into a triangle" (Belasco 196). Ultimately, moral efforts to challenge the food industrial food system are overshadowed by the capitalistic corporations that provide consumers with one luxury, time and costs, through convenience.

Thirdly, consumers have challenged and attempted to reform the globalized food system through scientific efforts. During the 19th century, nutritional science was not as prevalent as it became later in the 20th century, and especially in the 21st century. In Charlotte Biltekoff's book,

“Eating Right in America,” Biltetkoff explores the dietary trends and history of the United States, and in chapter two, Biltetkoff especially touches on the relationship between science and food during the 19th century. According to Biltetkoff, “The overt intermingling of nutritional knowledge and moral concern evident in Atwater’s work reflected the broader social context of the nineteenth century, in which scientific and religious thought were considered both similar and compatible” (Biltetkoff 19). Thus, scientific interpretations of food were lacking during the 19th century since it was blurred with religious interpretations. Therefore, the global industrial food system only had to conform to the dietary standards of various religions during the 19th century. However, from a hygienic perspective, during the mid-19th century French scientist Louis Pasteur’s discovery of germ theory fueled food fears as they were deemed as transporters of germs (Lecture 11, 11/2/23). Yet, Pasteur’s discovery ultimately challenged the organic food industry, since defenders of the industrial food industry exploited the fact that food processors were able to store their products in “sanitary boxes,” (Lecture 11, 11/2/23). Ultimately, during the 19th century, scientific efforts to challenge the industrial food system were lacking since religious views dominated dietary standards, and food processors exploited consumers’ fear of germs, which ultimately benefitted the global industrial food system.

Nonetheless, in the 20th and 21st centuries, religious dietary standards were replaced with scientific dietary standards, which shifted food from qualitative to quantitative, in terms of calories and nutrition facts. In Kristin Wartman’s, “Food Fight: The Politics of the Food Industry,” Wartman focuses on the food movement and the politics within the modern-day global industrial food system. Wartman reveals, “The food movement has garnered much attention in the past decade . . . creating an alternative to industrial food production by emphasizing organic, sustainable, local, and small-scale practices . . . food movement heroes like Michael Pollan and

Alice Waters have brought debates about our food system to mainstream America” (Wartman 75). The food movement which stems from the counterculture of the late 20th century has garnered much support and resistance toward the global industrial food system, in developing an alternative food system that scientifically juxtaposes synthetics such as GMOs, and additives. However, even with the advancement of nutritional science, “the food movement . . . the alternative to a corporate-dominated, unfair, and unhealthy food supply – actually seems to be strengthening the industrial food system” (Wartman 75). Ultimately, reforming or even challenging the industrial food system is difficult due to the affordability, scale, and subsidies of industrial food, as well as the culture of convenience (Lecture 20, 12/7/23), that defenders of the industrial food system reinforce, which dominates the global capitalistic economy, which counterculture, the food movement, Upton Sinclair, Barbara Kowalczyk, and other groups fail in countering a successful challenge, resistance, or attempt to reform the global industrial system.

To this end, great efforts over the 19th, 20th, and current 21st century such as legislative, moral, and scientific efforts to challenge, resist, and attempt to reform the globalized industrial food system, have been overshadowed by the conglomerate that is the global industrial food system. Alternative food systems simply cannot compete with the convenience that industrial foods afford people. If there is one thing that consumers value more than food, its time, and convenience is time. Ultimately, unless legislation is passed that crushes the behemoth corporations, society’s moral compass shifts, or new scientific innovations sway the balance toward alternative food systems, the global industrial food system will always reign supreme, and overshadow the efforts made by groups trying to better the quality of food for consumers.

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