

Sobey's monopolize grocery business

Halifax is an odd place. Over 300 000 people in the vicinity and only three or four places to buy groceries. Every time I sit down to dinner all I can taste is something suspiciously like monopoly capitalism. Strangely enough it tastes a lot like state socialism. The main difference seems to be that we pay so much more, and the profits wind up in such a small number of rather disreputable pockets.

EDITORIAL

Ever since John Sobey opened his grocery and butcher shop in Stellarton in 1906 the *modus vivendi* of the grocery business in the Maritimes has been consolidation, competitive strangulation, market-share domination and, ultimately, virtual monopoly. The results are evident; its almost impossible to buy groceries anywhere in Halifax except Sobey's, IGA, Superstore, Capitol Stores, Mary Jane's, the Saturday Market and local milk stores. There are almost no independent green grocers in Halifax, virtually no independent butchers or bakers, and most ironically, only a handful of independent fish stores. If you need

confirmation for this, check the Yellow Pages.

Most Haligonians seem fairly comfortable with this situation.. They argue that Sobey's is locally owned, is a good corporate citizen sells a wide range of good food products in large modern stores conveniently located for one-stop shopping. IGA does pretty much the same thing, although their multinational status doesn't get as many popularity points. The market domination of these two giants is somewhat compensated by the existence of corner convenience stores, the Capitol chain, Mary Jane's and the Market, so we at least have the *feeling* of alternatives.

But really, of course, the grocery situation here is completely lopsided. The level of concentration is staggering and it inflicts some very real social, cultural and economic costs.

First of all, there is almost no tradition of independent green-grocers left in Halifax. The bullies have put them out of business. This means that there is no entrepreneurial opportunity for people with limited capital to get involved in the grocery business. And there is

virtually no vestige of the time-honoured and cherished custom of personal contact with shop-keepers which makes food shopping human, pleasurable, civilized. Instead we must file through buildings shaped like airports, bombarded by voices barking esoteric commands over PA systems, marshalled through semi-automated check-out lines by under-paid victims of labour alienation and apparent gender discrimination. The culture of food has been replaced by the assembly line, the mass-market, profit-motivated dehumanization.

No competitive price regulation

Secondly, the prices we pay are exorbitant. Only in a market with no competitive price regulation could Sobey's charge 69 cents for a lemon, \$1.99 for a miniscule romaine lettuce, \$3.29 lb. for mushrooms. In Montreal, Toronto,

Ottawa, Quebec, and anywhere else where big business hasn't gained complete control these things are half these prices.

Thirdly, the quality of food available at the big chains is dismal. The big chains are very adept at buying from big producers at big discounts. Brand name products produced by multinationals, advertised on TV are not renowned for quality or culinary excitement. Kraft, Nabisco, General Foods, Campbell's, Weston's, Heinz etc.; very bland food, with some very odd political implications. You never know exactly which fascist dictatorship you're propping up when you buy coffee at Sobey's.

The problems posed by Sobey's and IGA's market control have implications far beyond food quality and prices. Most of their stores are convenient only to those with cars, so they necessitate the greatest environmental disaster of all time, the internal combustion engine. Many of the stores are non-unionized and Sobey's is especially infamous for dirty anti-union tricks. Wages at huge supermarkets distribute wealth far less equitably than do the existence of numerous

independent retailers. Money which should go to labour goes to the already fabulously-rich.

Finally, something should be said about corporate citizenship. Sobey's has consistently maintained a local image. Meanwhile they import non-regional and foreign produce when it's cheaper than local, and invest a lot of their profits outside the Maritimes. Sobey's is about as local as the Bank of Nova Scotia.

The men that run the big grocery chains inhabit the corporate boardrooms of North America, quiet plush law offices, and spend a lot of time fraternizing with their governmental equivalents. Their loyalty is not local, it is as global as the dollar.

The thought of all this is enough to make me want to forego my dinner of chemical produce and brand-name carbohydrates, run around the corner to the Lebanese food shop (one of the only independent grocers in town) and promise never, ever to be duped into another twenty minute check-out line again.

Paul Webster

First Nations don't want white pity

Duncan McCue

I am sick of hearing how awful people feel because they are white. I am sick of listening to their overriding feelings of remorse after seeing "Dances With Wolves". I am sick of sympathy.

Ever since Oka, there has been a pervading sense of ancestral guilt amongst non-natives. "My God, we have been so awful to your people". Yes, of course. That's a given.

But why dwell upon it? Why continually tell me that it must be just awful to see your culture rescinding, all because, five hundred years ago, those nasty white men came over here in their "big canoes" and stole away your land.

Our culture is not disappearing, and I would defy anyone to tell me otherwise. Yes, Indian kids play

Nintendo. Indian teenagers wear Levi's jeans. Indian lawyers carry briefcases. And Indian drunks drink Molson's.

Does that mean we have been assimilated? NO. I often feel that people would be more comfortable around Indians if we wore head-dresses and buckskins. That, indeed, would be "Indian".

But indigenous peoples have been historically documented as having remarkable skill at adapting. When the roaming Ojibwa tribes came into contact with American Iroquois for the first time, they did not immediately wage war. They traded cultures, they learned from each other how each had developed better ways. And they went their separate ways, full with new knowledge.

Similarly, when the colonialist presented guns and pots, it would

have been silly for Indians not to accept the technology because they didn't invent it. Instead, they welcomed the immense advantage muskets gave them while hunting, and changed their hunting styles to adapt.

By asking Indians to use their formidable knowledge of the wilderness to fuel the fur trade, the colonialists forced the biggest adaptation Indians ever underwent. With animal fur as a primary motive, Indians changed their entire economic system from hunter-gatherer to trapper-trader.

Adaptation is part of our culture. At times, we have been forced to accept change. I can't imagine how difficult it must have been when my ancestors were herded into small, remote pockets of land, and told it was their home. Yet, today, despite their "conditions", the re-

serves are what have kept our culture alive. Reserves have both protected our Indianness, and fostered our distinctness.

Unfortunately, non-natives aren't the only ones who pity what white people did to the Indians. There are too many unimaginative Indian politicians who, when given the spotlight, cry. They stand there and cry - "Look what you nasty white people did to us; just give us back our land".

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I should be playing the PR game - by making all the white people feel sorry for us, then we'll get our money and our land.

But I don't want the money and the land and the press, unless you understand why you're giving it to us and who you're giving it to. You're not giving it to us so we'll stop crying - you're giving it to us

because you promised us you would. And you're not giving it to a buck-skinned clad warrior with flowing black hair and defiant war paint - you're giving it to today's Indians, who look pretty much like everyone else around.

Instead of crying, question. When Phil. 1000 romanticizes the "Renaissance spirit", and asks you if Cortes was a Machiavellian, do a little research and find out exactly what happened when the Western metaphysics conflicted with a different culture. When you read in the Globe and Mail that Georges Erasmus has announced AFN has drafted a self-government proposal, figure out what it means.

We are different. We are Indians. Understand that and listen to the voices of change. Stop wallowing in ancestral guilt - I don't want your pity.

Propaganda

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with the government," she said.

Hull is hopeful things will get better — Dalhousie has made some positive recent changes. But as she nears graduation, a piece of her spirit is missing. Her mother chose not to teach her Micmac. Hundreds of years of "civilizing" propaganda had done their trick.

"She believed I would speak English, go to an English school, and do better than she did."

