

# OPINIONS

## 'We are what we buy' in retail



Clark Larson  
Columnist

Free-market economics seems to be the order of the day. As globalization takes hold on more and more products, companies find themselves in need of cheaper means of production, and thus, lower "prices" for the consumer.

There are those who argue that low prices are essential to a healthy economy, but how can we account for the disparity between low prices of wholesale goods in a superstore compared to the slightly higher prices of a local business?

That is, why are businesses like McDonald's, Food Lion or Wal-Mart able to charge lower prices than, in our case, Laughing Seed, the French Broad Food Co-op, or Asheville Hemp Emporium, respectively?

Just as important a question is whether retail cost is an appropriate single deciding factor in how we think about what we buy, whether from global corporations or local businesses?

To answer these questions, we must begin with the economic mantra "we are what we buy."

How we, as consumers, react to marketing gimmicks, sale prices and technological innovation, strongly influences how they, as producers, operate.

For instance, consumer preference indicated that a certain automobile should have power windows (based on polls, surveys or actual purchases), then automobile companies will produce cars with power windows.

Likewise, if a consumer decides to buy a tube of toothpaste for \$2.39 instead of \$4.15, then whoever is selling toothpaste at \$4.15 will try to reduce the price to near that of the competition's price.

The catch in this scenario is that, while reducing the price of toothpaste on the shelf, costs must be displaced from production or operation involved in the making of the toothpaste so that company may still turn a profit.

Unfortunately, it is the displacement of the costs, or externalization, where we run into trouble.

Since we live in a closed-system here on Earth, meaning we must use what is already here (apart from incoming energy from sunlight), care must be taken not to utilize resources faster than they may be renewed.

The extraction of metals for the tube, minerals for the paste and petroleum for the plastic cap all have their side effects on non-renewable resource supply and environmental health through activities of extraction and processing, and represent a cost on the natural environment.

Next, are the more implicit costs of capital, labor and cash required to put everything together to make a finished product.

Finally, costs associated with dis-

tribution and sales of the toothpaste, otherwise known as middle-man costs, are included in the final price.

In order for the company charging \$4.15 to lower the retail price, therefore attracting consumers, any number of these aforementioned costs must be reduced.

Similarly, the company charging \$2.39 may already have reduced these costs. This competition to lower prices between businesses to attract customers is called the race to the bottom.

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**"What is not always apparent in the reduction in overall production costs is the detriment to the environment, society and human health of unwanted, externalized costs."**

Much of the environmental mismanagement apparent today (air and water pollution, destruction of wildlife and human habitat and toxic waste) as well as social injustice (exploitation of workers, degradation of communities, and

power/money polarization) can be traced back to displaced or externalized production costs in some way.

There is an actual cost for making a tube of toothpaste that accounts for all inputs and outputs in the process. Such a cost takes into account the loss of natural capital (i.e. forest biodiversity, water quality or community sustainability) as well as the realized costs of production.

Natural capital is essential to the functioning of our economy, since everything we use comes from the Earth in some form or another.

Responsible companies take these extra costs into account when setting retail prices, which is why much of the organic, ecologically responsible and local products available seem to 'cost' more at the register.

In reality, we are paying for those externalized costs not made harmful to us and the rest of the world.

With this in mind, I would like to suggest that, in order to provide for both human and environmental health and to allow our economy to reflect the real prices of production activities, we must begin to educate ourselves, as consumers, on what we are really buying at the multiplex superstores, as well as in our local businesses.

Often, local businesses 'internalize' their external costs, but they must also be held accountable for responsible economic pricing.

In a capitalist, free-market society, there is an opportunity for products to be affordable while remaining ecologically responsible, but we must all be conscious of these factors so no corporation is able to get away with the cost externalization that brings ruin to so many systems in our world.

I hope you finish this article with more questions than when you started. You should, because there are many answers to be found.

## Defending Israel: not a Holocaust



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Columnists

In a recently published column, Glennie Sewell takes the opportunity to commence a diatribe against the state of Israel, and in the process he spouts so many lies and, at best, half-truths, that I simply do not know where to begin.

The most damning of his accusations is that which equates Israeli defensive action to Nazi tactics.

Sewell asserts that, "The Jews do to the Palestinians what the Nazis did to them."

I kindly suggest that Sewell publish a response in which he details the German offer of Jewish self-determination and statehood. I assume Sewell will have a difficult time finding this information, for, as we all know, it never happened.

Israel, however, offered Palestinian independence, as did the U.N. Both times, the Palestinian leadership chose war rather than peace.

When one makes such a choice, and loses, the results are often unfortunate.

I ask that Sewell point out a few references to Nazis supplying Jews with weapons for their police forces in autonomous Jewish territories, or perhaps Sewell could provide a list of German innocents brutally butchered by Jewish suicide bombers?

Might Sewell have evidence of organized Israeli plans to exterminate the Palestinian people? Might Sewell show where German-Jewish schools taught students to despise Germans, teaching that Germans used the blood of innocent Jewish children to bake their bread? I doubt he will.

Sewell believes that the Palestinians were "forcibly displaced by the Jewish leadership in 1947 and 1967."

I must point out that it was Arab violation of U.N. resolution 181 that resulted in any Palestinian loss of home in 1947, and Arab initiated war that caused Israel to, in a defensive measure, take the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (which Jordan and Egypt had shown no interest in giving the Palestinians in the first place).

In fact, the vast majority of the Palestinians chose to leave of their own volition or at the urging of the Arab League and the Arab Higher Command, the official Arab leadership of many of the cities in Palestine. In Haifa, for example, Mayor Shabtai Levy expressed "his earnest desire that members of both (Arab and Jewish) communities in Haifa should live in peace and friendship together, and that he personally

would be only too willing to bring about such a state of affairs."

The Arabs and the Hagana (the Jewish military) went through the truce terms one by one, often modifying them to meet Arab wishes. The truce agreement read that the Arabs were to "carry on their work as equal and free citizens of Haifa."

Stockwell, the British intermediary of the truce negotiations, recorded that, when they returned from contacting other Arab states on the matter "(The Arab delegates) said they could not fulfill the terms of the truce (and) as an alternative that the Arab population wished to evacuate Haifa and that they would be grateful for military assistance." They made the choice to leave.

The elderly mayor Levy, with tears in his eyes, pleaded with the Arab delegates, crying that they were committing "a cruel crime against their own people." Stockwell thundered: "Think it over, as you'll regret it afterwards. You must accept the conditions of the Jews. They are fair enough. Don't permit life to be destroyed senselessly. After all, it was you who began the fighting, and the Jews have won." The Arabs remained entrenched in their belief that "They had lost (the) first round but there were more to come."

The Syrian, Iraqi, and Egyptian militaries were doing the fighting in 1948, and are largely the reason the Palestinian representatives refused to sign the treaty. "(They) stated that they were not in a position to sign the truce, as they had no control over the Arab military elements in the town and that, in all sincerity, they could not fulfill the terms of the truce, even if they were to sign."

In the following days, Hagana, on their Arabic radio broadcast, said that the Jews "never intended evacuating the Arab inhabitants from Haifa. On the contrary, the Jews did and do still believe that it is in the real interests of Haifa for its citizens to go on with their work and to ensure that normal conditions are restored to the city." The following day, the Hagana broadcast called for anti-imperialist (in reference to the foreign military bands) Arab-Jewish cooperation: "Arabs, we do not wish to harm you. Like you, we only want to live in peace. Like you, we want to expel all imperialists from our country. If the Jews and the Arabs cooperate, no Power in the world will ever attack our country or ignore our rights. Be assured that through Arab-Jewish cooperation miracles

can be achieved."

Unfortunately, the power of the Arab leadership was too great, and other Arab officials, through threats, scare tactics, and brute force, pushed the vast majority of the Palestinians out of Israel.

On April 26, a British district Superintendent of Police reported: "every effort is being made by the Jews to persuade the Arab populace to stay and carry on with their normal lives, to get their shops and business open and to be assured that their lives and interests will be safe."

That sure sounds like Nazi Germany to me. How about you, Sewell?

I am curious as to why authors such as Sewell are so poised to strike out at Israel for responding to violence with violence, as opposed to chastising the Palestinians for initiating the violence in the first place. Sewell says: "Israel says that it wants peace, but it continues to respond to violence with violence as its only option."

Perhaps if Sewell would care to catch up on the news a bit (other than when the mass media is portraying the plight of the "poor innocent Palestinians") he would learn that Israel, for a period of three weeks, did nothing in the face of escalating suicide bombings and sniper attacks. After three weeks of warning the world that if the attacks continued unabated, they would initiate severe retaliation. They did just that.

One has to ask, when did these attacks begin? Well, the original attack began in the 1930's with the likes of the Hebron massacre, in which scores of Jews were butchered. The attacks began again in 1947-48 when Israel declared its independence (which the Palestinians had every opportunity to do as well), and again in 1967 and 1973.

The current intifada began after Arafat rejected the Camp David accords, and refused to make a counter-offer. The day before Sharon went to the Temple Mount, a suicide bomber struck an Israeli military post, beginning the current intifada en masse.

Everyone knows that the only thing the Palestinians want is a state in the W. Bank and Gaza strip, right? I hate to point out that the PLO began its attacks on Israel prior to 1967, in other words, before Israel even touched the W. Bank and Gaza strip.

How about some quotes from Arafat, the democratically elected representative of the Palestinian people?

"We Palestinians will take over everything, including all of Jerusalem. Peres and Beilin have already promised us half of Jerusalem. We will take over everything including all of Jerusalem!" (January 30, 1996)

"You understand that we plan to

eliminate the state of Israel and establish a purely Palestinian state." (January 30, 1996)

"I have no use for Jews; they are and remain Jews! We now need all the help we can get from you in our battle for a united Palestine under total Arab-Moslem domination!" (January 30, 1996)

"This agreement (Wye Accord), I am not considering it more than the agreement which had been signed between our prophet Muhammed and Koraish (ten-year peace agreement between Mohammed and the tribe of Koraish, when Mohammed's military capability improved after two years he tore up the agreement and slaughtered the Koraishites). And you remember that the Caliph Omar had refused this agreement, considering it "solha donia" (a despicable truce)." (May 10, 1994)

"The goal of our struggle is the end of Israel, and there can be no compromise." (March 29, 1970)

"Peace for us means the destruction of Israel. We are preparing for an all-out war, a war which will last for generations." (February 11, 1980)

Arafat means what he says, and has already been shown to have direct connections to the suicide bombings, suggesting that he actively pursues the goals he himself has asserted. Time and time again, Israel has attempted to make peace with the Palestinians and has met only rejection from Arafat and his entourage.

A nation who wants nothing but peace, but has no peace partner, and has only the misery of suicide bombings everywhere they look will naturally elect a Prime Minister with a mandate to, rather than attempt (again) to make peace, to make safety. Hence the election of Sharon.

Israel is not perfect, but neither is France, nor the U.S., or Indonesia. I, for one, refuse to make Israel's right to exist contingent upon their moral perfection. Israel does not do everything right, but to compare military operations obviously aimed at cementing safety for its citizens as Nazi-like, is to, quite frankly, be anti-Semitic.

To spout ignorance about Jews, and to declare them the perpetrators of an obviously non-existent genocide, is to be anti-Semitic. To believe that Jews do not have the same right to self-protection when under organized attack, as any other country would have, is anti-Semitic.

Last week, Professor Chess responded to Sewell by saying that words can either kill, or make peace. I know the words extended by Haifa's Jews in 1948 live on.

I only hope the Palestinians will be able to come up with the right words to respond, because individuals such as Sewell are certainly not doing it for them.

### Blue Banner Editorials

#### Kudos to the athletic department

The UNCA athletic department has just named a new head women's basketball coach, after a nation-wide search. Replacing any coach has to be a large undertaking, and UNCA Athletic Director Joni Comstock, along with her staff, have found a coach that is sure to bring the women's basketball program around. Betsy Blose succeed Kathleen Weber, coming from Shepherd College in West Virginia.

The athletic department does an overall good job at what they do. OK, so they may not be perfect and they definitely have their downfalls, but overall, for a liberal arts college, they don't do a bad job.

Think about it, this is the only public liberal arts college in North Carolina, so what does that mean? It means that some undergraduates do not come here for sports, they come here for environmental studies or social sciences. So, it is often difficult, surely, for the athletic department to recruit athletes to attend UNCA.

Many students may not care that much for athletics here at UNCA, but really the sports here are always entertaining and something that can get all students involved in their university. Support for UNCA athletics has been lacking for the past few years, and that is really a disgrace for our school.

Many do not realize how much time and energy the athletes, coaches and the entire athletic department put into what they do. Think about finding a new coach for a Division I school. Not only has the athletic department had to search for a new women's basketball coach, but also new head men's and women's tennis coaches. That is a lot to take on in just a few months.

Athletics here often get overlooked and do not get the credit that they deserve. Every student, no matter their major or whatever, should really come out and see what UNCA athletics are all about.