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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RJB-9
A Week Without Meat

846 Broadway-Lot #49
Saugus, Mass. 01906
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:



Like many of our neighbors and millions of other Americans we did without meat last week. The decision to join the boycott was not very difficult. We lost what little indecision we had about joining the boycott when Virginia Knauer, the President's advisor on consumer affairs, appeared on TV with her shopping lists and tips for the buying public.

Our real question was how we should participate in the boycott. We had read the papers, and listened to the debate on how far the boycott should go, and whether it should be restricted to meat or include fish and chicken. Eileen, who in some abstract way would probably be considered less political than I, felt much stronger about this boycott than I did. I was willing to join it, but felt satisfied with just boycotting meat. Eileen was adamant that not only should we join, but that we should boycott fish, and chicken as well because their prices were also getting out of hand. We talked about it for a long time; Eileen persisted in her position and finally convinced me.

We agreed to spend a week without meat, fish, or fowl. On Saturday we went shopping. There were some people, as my neighbors had predicted, stocking up on meat so they wouldn't have to buy during the boycott, but we were struck by the number of carts without meat. It took us our usual forty minutes to shop. The only thing we both wanted that we couldn't find was eggplant. Eileen had included in her planned meals two dishes that called for eggplant, a ratatouille and an eggplant casserole.

We ended up with a full four bags of groceries and two cartons of soda, and our bill was \$26.27. That brought an immediate smile to both of our faces. We had gotten more than we were used to getting for a lot less. I had just become a big booster of the boycott.

Although the boycott was officially beginning on Monday we decided to begin ours on Saturday night, not for ideological reasons but because we had accepted a dinner invitation for the following Saturday night nearly a month before. If our hosts were serving meat we didn't want to say we couldn't eat it.

I must admit that I was not looking forward to the week when it began. It isn't only that I thought I'd miss meat-- it's that I'm not crazy about vegetables. The plain truth is that I dislike most cooked vegetables. Over the years Eileen has dented some of this anti-vegetable neurosis, but I still don't like beets, cooked carrots, spinach, cauliflower, broccoli, brussels sprouts, squash, lima beans, cabbage or turnips.

The week went by quickly. Eileen took a lot of care in planning the meals, so that they would be both protein-rich and enjoyable. Our lunch and dinner menus follow. I have left out our breakfasts because neither Eileen nor I are big breakfast eaters. Her breakfast usually consists of some juice and a cup of coffee, and I usually start the day with some juice and cereal.

Saturday: dinner- Eggs Valenciana(with rice, cheese, bananas, raisins, and nuts), Salad.

Sunday: lunch- bagels, and cream cheese.
dinner- asparagus, and swiss cheese casserole, corn on the cob.

Monday: lunch- grapefruit, egg salad.
dinner- tomato quiche, salad.

Tuesday: lunch- leftover quiche, corn on the cob.
dinner- mushroom crepes, cucumber salad.

Wednesday: lunch-leftover crepes, rice salad.
dinner-spagetti, greenbeans.

Thursday: lunch- cheese and tomato sandwichs, rice and lettuce salad.
dinner-cheese blintzes, mixed vegetables.

Friday: lunch- avacado salad, gazpacho.
dinner- mushroom quiche, zucchini casserole, salad.

Saturday: lunch- cheese sandwiches.

On Saturday night we went to our friend's, expecting to have our first meat in a week. It turned out that our friends were also boycotting meat, and so we had a delicious, meatless meal which did, however, include some fish. It was a nice way to end the week.

Actually we found that we missed meat less than we had expected. We did find that it took a little longer to prepare meatless meals than meat meals, especially if you try to keep the calories and cholesterol under control. Another thing that we discovered was that in a meatless week you can't avail yourselves of the quick lunches at McDonalds, or Burger King.

We will wait and see what the boycott planners decide to do in terms of continuing the protest. Right now we have decided we can do quite well with less meat and plan to have two meatless, fishless, fowlless days a week.

Of all the reactions to the boycott, the one I found most interesting was that of the food chains. I don't want to overdraw the parallel, but it reminded me of the oil companies' reactions to the public outcry over oil spills. The oil companies, as you may remember, were quick to release commercials which assured the public that they were not intentionally polluting anything, and that they, like the public, wanted a less polluted world. Well, almost as quickly as the boycott began the grocery stores started indicating in their advertisements that they were in favor of the boycott's objectives; that they, like the consumer, wanted lower meat prices. They offered their customers meatless menus, and fish and fowl specials in addition to their usual meat specials.

Most stores were outflanked in their identification with the boycotters by Leo Kahn, president of Purity Supreme(a 36-store food chain). Through an active TV and newspaper campaign Mr. Kahn announced that his stores would not carry meat on Monday, because

he wanted to share the protest with the boycotters.

Most of the other area stores reacted to this by explaining why they were carrying meat. A typical explanation was offered by Stop & Shop in its weekly advertisement, which read:

We're both paying too much for meats!

We serve almost 2 million customers every week, and one of the reasons they keep coming back to Stop & Shop is our dedication to the policy of low prices on quality foods. That policy is endangered when historic high prices at wholesale levels force us to increase our retail prices — even though those increases have not reflected the entire wholesale increase.

So we welcome any effective action which will reduce the cost of meat in the nation's markets. We honestly don't know what the meat boycott will accomplish. Neither do most econo-

mists. We can only hope it will help. But it seems the only long-range solution is a substantial increase in the production of meat.

We feel our customers have a right to choose whatever they want to feed their families. For this reason, we will continue to offer meat for sale, doing the best job we can to keep the overall costs down by our policy of all-week meat specials, plus keeping our regular prices as low as we can under current market conditions.

Until production does catch up with demand, we believe this is the best course we can follow as responsible retailers.

By Thursday all the large chain stores except one, Star Market, were running big meat specials offering better prices on meat than they had for weeks. These specials were tempting, to say the least. Even Leo Kahn of Meatless Monday fame was selling, as the advertisement on the following page indicates, meat at special prices.

The only exception as I mentioned was Star Market, which ran a two-page advertisement which did not contain one major meat special. Its advertisement focussed on specials on vegetables, fish and chicken. It also offered an assortment of menus for meatless dishes such as Eggplant Parmigiana, Baked Brussels Sprouts, Potato Stuffed Bluefish, Baked Snapper, and Broiled Haddock Fillets.

All week I found the behavior of the grocery stores fascinating. It struck me as extraordinary that the grocery chains, profit making enterprises, sought to advertise themselves as innocent bystanders to the entire process of price increases. More than that they spoke of supporting the objectives of the meat boycotters at the same time as they were offering meat specials.

“Fresh meat is back in our cases now, but please, don’t buy so much.”

I’m Leo Kahn, president of Purity Supreme. As many of you know, Monday was Meatless Monday at all thirty-six Purity Supreme stores.

It was a protest on my part against the rising cost of meat, and like any protest it probably inconvenienced many people. For this I apologize, but I feel it was a valid protest. Because the only way we’re going to drive meat prices down is to stop buying so much meat.

Your response was generally favorable, and I want to thank all our customers for helping us make this protest a dramatic demonstration of our dissatisfaction.

Fresh meat is back in our cases now, but I still encourage our customers to buy less of it. We’ve got the lowest prices around on the best meat you can buy, but please, don’t buy so much.

Use our free meatless recipes, and take advantage of this week’s specials on high-protein meat substitutes at all Purity Supreme stores. Plan on having meatless meals every week, and let’s see if we can’t start controlling the prices we all have to pay for meat.



I called Joel Miller of United Beef to get his thoughts about future meat prices. United, with a work force of less than 100 people, is a relatively small firm in relation to some of the industry giants, but it still carries on a multi-million dollar business.

Joel had very mixed feelings about the boycott. He said, "Sure I think it's terrific that so many people could get together, but I don't really think they helped themselves. If anything they have helped to keep the prices up. By the time the boycott began meat prices were beginning to start to fall. But the combination of the boycott and the price ceiling has entirely disrupted the whole meat business and sent falling prices back up to ceiling levels.

"It has thrown thousands of workers out of work in meat and meat related businesses. It has cost the industry millions of dollars, and has really done nothing for the consumer. We can't buy any meat at this time on which we can make a profit. Everyone is selling at the ceiling. For us to make a profit we've got to be able to buy at a certain price, and we simply can't. We're paying more and selling for less. I'll give you an example: we buy the whole calf and today we'll have to pay 73 1/2 or 74 cents/pound, whereas just a few weeks ago we were paying 68 or 69 cents/pound. Now once we buy the beef we break it up into maybe 100 different cuts. Now, I'll show you the problems we've been having on just a couple of cuts. A couple of weeks ago we were selling top round at \$1.22/pound; now we can't get more than \$1.15. For bottom round we were getting \$1.10 or \$1.11; now we get 97 or 98¢. Well, our business is one in which you make your money on the weight, because the profit margin is so slim. There's no room for a profit for us now. We hope by the end of the week cattle prices will be down to a price where we can buy and still make some money. If we can't we'll have to lay off about 50 workers, which we don't want to do.

"But we aren't in this boat alone. All the packers are feeling the squeeze and so are the slaughter houses. The slaughter houses can only get so much from us for the meat, and they can't get beef at a low enough price to make a profit, and that's why they're laying off so many people.

"I'll tell you it's real tough. The problem is that there is a shortage of heavy meat(fat cattle), but there is an abundance of light meat(lean cattle). The farmers and feeders don't want to let the light meat on the market and there's just not enough heavy meat available.

"I hope it breaks soon because if it doesn't there is going to be a serious meat shortage in the next couple of months. It's possible you could get almost a black market situation in meat, there just won't be enough meat around to meet people's demand, not even at ceiling prices.

"The long range is something else. If you ask me, the best thing that could happen would be if people change their meat eating habits. If people cut back just a little on the amount of meat they eat, the supply and price would be better. Another thing is somebody's got to figure a way to induce the farmers and feeders to raise more beef.

"But look, these are complicated issues, and though the boycott was probably a good emotional drain it didn't help anything, it just made things more confused."

Richard / B. G.

Received in New York on April 17, 1973