



1402711512



**SWP 44/87      CONSUMER BOYCOTTS AND  
CONSUMER SOVEREIGNTY**

**DR CRAIG SMITH  
Cranfield School of Management  
Cranfield Institute of Technology  
Cranfield  
Bedford MK43 0AL  
(Tel: 0234 751122)**

**Forthcoming in European Journal of Marketing**

**Copyright: Smith 1987**



## ABSTRACT

This paper considers how consumer boycotts may be understood as consumer behaviour. The concept of consumer sovereignty is identified as the implicit paradigm for the marketing discipline. It is then applied to consumer boycotts in illustration of this claim and in explanation of consumer boycotts as consumer behaviour. Three case examples of consumer boycotts support the argument. Consumer sovereignty is shown to have two dimensions: degree and domain. Information is shown to be important in determining the domain of consumer sovereignty and pressure groups may play an important role in providing this.

## INTRODUCTION

Consumer boycotts are far more prevalent in the United States than Europe - and Britain in particular (Vogel, 1978). Yet for more than twenty-five years the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain has been actively promoting a boycott of South African products. Most recently, with events in South Africa highlighting the pressure group's case, this boycott has achieved some prominence and some notable successes. Stores such as the Co-op, for example, have stopped stocking South African goods (Halsall, 1985). Yet this is only indicative of a long-established consumer antipathy towards South African goods. According to research conducted by the South African embassy, as many as one in four consumers may view South African products as tainted. There are many interesting issues raised by this and other consumer boycotts (see Smith, 1985). This paper focuses on how consumer boycotts may be understood as consumer behaviour.

The frequently circular arguments of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction (CS/D) analyses are eschewed in favour of an approach that emphasises the concept of consumer sovereignty. This approach, as the three case examples show, can more readily accommodate the sort of issues which inspire this form of consumer behaviour. It

seems somewhat banal to use the term consumer dissatisfaction to refer to consumer refusals to purchase products in protest at a firm's involvement with South Africa or some other major political or ethical issue. Moreover, consumer sovereignty can be usefully construed as a paradigm for the marketing discipline. This paper shows how such a paradigm may operate in reference to consumer boycotts.

#### A PARADIGM FOR MARKETING

The identification of a paradigm for a discipline is generally considered to be an important indicator of the discipline's status or advancement. There does not appear to be consensus on a paradigm for marketing and one might be tempted to judge marketing's advancement accordingly. Yet this would be too hasty a judgement. There is an implicit paradigm for marketing in the concept of consumer sovereignty.

Biggadike's reasonably comprehensive review of the contributions of marketing is both critical and pessimistic (Biggadike, 1981). He suggests there is no unifying paradigm for the entire marketing field but there is a paradigm for marketing management. This paradigm "suggests that marketing management tries to satisfy customers... within the context of the environment and the firm's

resources and objectives (the uncontrollable factors) by designing an appropriate marketing mix (the four P's - controllable factors)." It is not the purpose of this paper to dwell on the role of paradigms and previous work on paradigms for marketing [1]. It will merely be suggested that by extending Biggadike's logic it may be claimed that consumer sovereignty may serve as the paradigm for the marketing discipline. In other words, to paraphrase Thomas Kuhn (1970, p.10), it is the model from which springs particular coherent traditions of scientific research in marketing.

As it is not the foremost intention here to claim such a role for consumer sovereignty, an alternative role is proposed. This is discussed in the next section. Advancing a paradigm for marketing demands a lengthy and intricate argument. It is epistemologically difficult because it involves a process of stepping outside the discipline to observe and describe the dominant paradigm within the discipline. Finally, it may be largely futile in much the same way as marketing's earlier worries about whether it may claim to be a science. As Baker has sensibly observed on this question, it is probably better to act as if marketing is a science [2]. Such logic can be more forcefully applied to the debate on marketing's paradigm. This more recent debate, which too may be seen as an exercise in the aggrandisement of the marketing discipline, is even more

futile. The issue is not whether marketing has a paradigm, for such it must have, but what that paradigm is, and surely this will emerge if it is not already apparent [3].

#### THE CENTRALITY OF CONSUMER SOVEREIGNTY TO MARKETING

The alternative view is that consumer sovereignty is at the core of marketing thought. This there is likely to be more agreement on. Definitions of marketing emphasise the consumer: "the 'marketing view' looks at the business as directed toward the satisfaction of a customer want and as a purveyor of a customer utility" (Drucker quoted in Boyd et al, 1972, p.3); "marketing is the performance of business activities which direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer or user in order to satisfy customers and accomplish the company's objectives" (McCarthy, 1975, p.19); "marketing is the way in which an organisation matches its own human, financial and physical resources with the wants of its customers" (Christopher et al, 1980, p.3). The marketing discipline and a marketing orientation in practice, are predicated upon a belief in consumer sovereignty. This is implicit in all definitions of marketing. Kotler makes it explicit:

"The marketing concept expresses the company's commitment to the time-honoured concept in

economic theory known as consumer sovereignty. The determination of what is to be produced should not be in the hands of the companies or in the hands of government but in the hands of consumers. The companies produce what the consumers want and in this way maximise consumer welfare and earn their profits" (1984, pp.22-23).

In the teaching of marketing, students are asked to believe that the customer is of supreme importance; that the customer is the starting point for all marketing management decisions. This act of faith is supported by appeals to common sense (or rather, more accurately, and as later disussed, the ideology of the market) and reference to commercial failures that resulted from the absence of a customer orientation, such as Sinclair's C5. Further support may come from the latest 'pop' management gurus. In In Search of Excellence, for example, Peters and Waterman implore 'stay close to the customer'.

Yet the teacher of marketing might alternatively, or additionally, present a theoretical case to the above of saying 'believe the customer is important'. Very briefly, the following argument could be employed. Firstly, it would be observed that the practice of marketing is relatively recent, a structural response to changed economic conditions where supply exceeds demand [4]. The position would then be

taken - though to some it might seem quite novel - that marketing has something to do with markets [5]. It could be observed that, as Bartels has shown, marketing has its origins in economics (Bartels, 1976). There would then follow detailed consideration of how product markets work. The discussion could be suitably spiced with favoured quotations from the classical and neo-classical economists; Smith's The Wealth of Nations is an obvious rich source, but so is Friedman's Free to Choose. The Austrian economist Mises also has much to offer and an example from Human Action neatly illustrates the flavour of the class discussion which would be taking place in the presentation of this theoretical case for a customer orientation in marketing:

"The direction of all economic affairs is in the market society a task of the entrepreneurs. Theirs is the control of production. They are at the helm and steer the ship. A superficial observer would believe that they are supreme. But they are not. They are bound to obey unconditionally the captain's orders. The captain is the consumer" (1949, p.270).

After some wallowing in the euphoria of free market economics, the discussion might be brought down to earth by introducing the idea of mixed markets and producer

sovereignty. Blatant ideology would be displaced by some measure of realism through reference to critics such as Galbraith and to mainstream economics. Consumer sovereignty, having been shown to be central to understanding markets and an underlying and unifying concept to the various definitions of marketing which abound (see, for example, Crosier, 1975), can then be defined as a technical term used to refer to degrees of consumer authority in markets. Finally, the circumstances under which this authority is enhanced (principally, where this is choice, information and retailer assessments), and restricted (a lack of competition, government intervention and limits to personal wealth) may be covered. It will be concluded that in many markets, largely because of competition, there is a considerable degree of consumer sovereignty.

So, as far as management practice is concerned, firms wishing to be successful in competitive markets have to follow the wants of the customer. They must be market driven. The next class could then explore the constraints on the firm in doing this - the marketing environment and the organisation's resources, what the firm is good at. The task of marketing management might then be understood in terms of the manipulation of the marketing mix so as to match the firm's resources with the wants of the customer and so on.

In such a way, consumer sovereignty can be shown to be central to marketing if not the paradigm for the discipline. Yet acceptance of such a paradigm or simply the recognition of the underpinning of the marketing discipline by the concept of consumer sovereignty, does highlight a feature of marketing which academics, as social scientists, might prefer to ignore. This is the acknowledgement of the ideological basis to marketing thought. It is a factor likely to militate against the recognition of consumer sovereignty as the paradigm for marketing.

#### IDEOLOGY AND MARKETING

Ideologies serve two purposes: they provide an explanation for and the justification of interests. Berger and Kellner briefly define ideology as "a set of definitions of reality legitimating specific vested interests in society" (Berger and Kellner, 1981). Berger has earlier written:

"We speak of an ideology when a certain idea serves a vested interest in society. Very frequently, though not always, ideologies systematically distort social reality in order to come out where it is functional for them to do so... The ideology of free enterprise serves to

camouflage the monopolistic practices of large American corporations" (Berger, 1966, p.130).

The ideology of the competitive model of capitalism, one of the most dominant ideologies in the West, both explains capitalism and justifies the interests of capitalists (producers). A cynic might be tempted to observe that the activities and power of business are made acceptable to society by an ideology that proclaims business is not powerful at all, but under the control of consumers. This is the latent function of marketing. To twist a quote from Lindblom, consumers are not really sovereign under capitalism; they only think they are [6]. Marketing fosters this belief.

Ideology serves as an idea structure both for understanding and for legitimising one's interests. Founding the marketing concept on consumer sovereignty might be seen as highly convenient. At the base level it permits corporate power - expressed in strategies and other ways - while claiming the corporation has no power and is merely acting in accord with the wishes of the consumer. Of course, this is not the way the corporations would see it - or, perhaps, marketing academics speaking on their behalf. Corporate executives believe in the power of the consumer because this is how ideologies work. Any guilt they may have, about dubious practices that are a consequence of corporate power

or merely the recognition of that power, is allayed in the process. For as well as justifying interests, ideologies also offer explanations, which are likely to be adhered to by their subscribers. As Silk and Vogel write of the ideologies of managers: "Ideology functions not simply to advance a particular interest..... but to enable people to orient themselves to a complicated and confusing world" (1976, pp.31-32). It is not sufficient to think of them in Machiavellian, manipulative terms. Such ideologies should be respected as legitimate views of the world. This said however, what is their place within an academic discipline? Insofar as it is possible to disentangle the ideological from the 'scientific' or 'factual', how large an ideological component can a respectable academic discipline tolerate?

The marketing discipline seems to have a large ideological component. Bartels has shown that marketing's origins lie in the separation of economics and marketing with the practitioners falling in the latter camp (Bartels, 1976). Is it surprising that they should build a body of knowledge legitimising their activities, and on the most convenient grounds of all, that they are merely serving the best interests of the consumer and are tools at his or her command?

Yet marketing is not the only discipline which can be analysed in this way. The other management disciplines may

be likewise criticised, as Honour and Mainwaring argue when writing in criticism of the "attitudes and values of business studies lecturers who seem untroubled by the basis and uses of the knowledge and values they seek to pass on" (1982). Moreover, Andreski, in Social Sciences as Sorcery, claims that the social sciences frequently act to serve the interests of the wielders of power, putting a pseudo-scientific gloss on the crude realities of power and giving their blessing to the status-quo. He argues that "much of what passes as scientific study of human behaviour boils down to an equivalent of sorcery" (1972, p.10). So, for example, he finds ideology underneath scientific terminology, referring by way of illustration to Talcott Parsons' conception of power as explained by Lipset, which legitimates excesses by authority holders because they are "socially necessary" (pp.172-173). This is more of a latent than manifest function of the social sciences, but marketing as a discipline may well be a prime exponent of this, acting in the interests of producers.

#### 'TESTING' THE IDEOLOGY

To sum-up the argument so far. Consumer sovereignty, if not the paradigm for marketing, is at the core of marketing thought. However, this constitutes a major ideological component to the discipline. Marketing's model of how markets work is very close to that of the free-market

economists who espouse an idealised understanding of markets directed by what may be best termed as absolute consumer sovereignty. Such a model is easily displaced when real world markets are considered; mixed markets, where competition may be limited, consumer information restricted and, accordingly, a large degree of producer sovereignty evident. So consumer sovereignty is more accurately understood as a technical term referring to degrees of consumer authority relative to producers. The absence of this more accurate understanding of consumers' status from marketing indicates the ideological basis to much current marketing thought.

Of course, the conclusion still stands that firms in competitive markets have to follow the wants of the customer, at least as a dictate to marketing management. But an academic discipline that is concerned with the study of markets and not just the interests of producers, should surely acknowledge some measure of producer sovereignty, even in highly competitive markets. Does it not have an interest in consumers other than as a group to which something is done (by manipulating the marketing mix)?

It might at this point be observed that the game of the market is not a zero-sum game. That consumers and producers are not inevitably in conflict and markets provide for mutually beneficial exchange. This is neatly illustrated in

the following quote from Thomas A. Murphy, as Chairman of General Motors:

"... competitive markets and free consumer choice could be relied on to set an economic course which would maximise human welfare... The individual citizen has great capacity to modify his consumption patterns through free markets. If he does not like one product, he can choose any of several other possibilities - or none at all... This sensitive tailoring of productive resources to the complex and diverse preferences of people, expressed through free markets, is a fundamental, though often under-appreciated characteristic of our system. Each consumer, given his free choice, can purchase those products which he feels most suit his own special needs and resources. Unlike the political system, every person can win in an economic 'election'" (in Silk and Vogel, 1976, p.91).

However, this coincidence of interests is not always perfect. Consumers can have different interests to producers and particularly on issues of social responsibility in business. This, of course, is where consumer boycotts are of great interest. In consumer boycotts, consumers are, to use Murphy's analogy, employing

their purchase votes to express a difference of interest to producers. They are voting against business practices of which they disapprove by not buying a firm's product. In other words, they are exercising consumer sovereignty to express concern about and perhaps change undesirable activities by producers. The prospective U.S. presidential candidate Jesse Jackson has used consumer sovereignty in this way in his campaigns for civil rights. He has observed:

"We have the power, nonviolently, just by controlling our appetites, to determine the direction of the American economy. If black people in thirty cities said simultaneously, 'General Motors, you will not sell cars in the black community unless you guarantee us a franchise here next year and help us finance it', GM would have no choice but to comply" (quoted in Vogel, 1978, p.39).

Three case examples follow which illustrate this. The earlier discussion of consumer sovereignty provides the context in which they may be considered, as the conclusion to this paper emphasises. Moreover, the cases to some extent 'test' the ideology. Or, rather, they point out that in some circumstances 'reality' may closely conform to the

ideology, that consumer sovereignty may be quite extensive. These circumstances are later identified.

The cases are presented here in a summary form, but they are available in more detail elsewhere (Smith, 1985). They describe the boycott of Barclays over its involvement with South Africa, the international boycott of Nestle over its marketing of baby milk to the the Third World, and the Californian grape boycott over union recognition.

#### Barclays and South Africa

Apartheid in South Africa is an emotive issue. It is purportedly a system whereby the many races of South Africa may coexist securely and separately, different but equal. Yet many would argue that it is in effect a racist ideology advancing separate development to maintain the economic exploitation of the black majority. There are probably more consumer boycotts in Britain over South Africa and its system of apartheid than any other issue. Business has been attacked on other fronts as well, particularly by ethical investment, and is frequently criticised in the press for having links with South Africa.

Involvement in South Africa is a major issue of social responsibility in business. This is because of the economic function of apartheid and the role of business in

maintaining and benefiting from it. It is argued that economic progress will necessitate the incorporation of the blacks and end apartheid, but this is rejected by critics who see little evidence of this happening. Their solution is the armed seizure of control by the African National Congress (ANC) with external pressure applied in the form of various sanctions. While condemning apartheid, Western governments and business have largely resisted the pressure for disinvolvement in the South African economy, advocating constructive engagement to protect their interests.

South Africa is dependent on Western capital in the form of investment and trade. Direct investment has declined because of criticism but has been replaced by indirect investment. Yet trade and investment involves an interdependence. So the West - and Britain and the United States especially - is thereby committed to the stability of South Africa and the maintenance of apartheid, particularly as the trade with South Africa involves strategic raw materials for which South Africa is the major source of supply. This is aside from the country's political and military significance as a bastion against communism. This economic, political and strategic interdependence makes the use of effective international economic sanctions by the West unlikely. Business, in turn, wishes to defend its economic interests and so follows the government line.

The use, or otherwise, of international economic sanctions against South Africa is closely tied to the case for and against business involvement in South Africa and consumer boycotts over this. South Africa's reliance on Western trade and investment has led to many calls for economic sanctions. Yet apart from the more recent token gestures made in response to the continued unrest in South Africa, there has only been the UN arms embargo and the OPEC oil boycott. Four principal arguments are advanced against sanctions: the costs for those imposing them, as referred to above; that they would harm the blacks most, but then it is said they are already suffering; doubts as to their effectiveness, historically there is some support for this, particularly when countervailing measures are employed (but then why oppose them?); and, finally, constructive engagement. The latter argument, for 'bridge-building' and change from within, is the most prominent. In accordance with this, corporate involvement is prescribed by codes of conduct such as the EEC and Sullivan codes. These are voluntary but many firms comply to deflect criticism at home, and although they may have raised black living standards, they have not really challenged apartheid.

Critics see little evidence of constructive engagement working, and particularly with the recent unrest, it has come to be seen as tacit support for apartheid. With substantial international economic sanctions not

forthcoming, many consumers have chosen to support a consumer boycott campaign. The consumer boycott is, as a moral act, an expression by the individual of his or her preferences on the issue, a sanction by the individual as the state is not prepared to act. It also adds to the aggregate of pressure for change. The revitalised boycott campaign has had some recent successes, especially with some retail outlets and the local authorities. The most well-known consumer boycott, of course, is of Barclays Bank.

The trend towards indirect forms of investment in South Africa has singled out the banks for attack. All the major British banks lend to South Africa, but Barclays has a subsidiary there and is particularly vulnerable because of its high visibility, with branches on most British high streets. Barclays defend their involvement with the constructive engagement argument. Although they have a disproportionately small number of black employees, there is evidence of some improvement. This their critics accept but dismiss, for apartheid continues and all constructive engagement seems to achieve, whether by firms or governments, is cosmetic changes. So the pressure group End Loans to South Africa (ELTSA) puts what they call "moral, public opinion type pressure and economic pressure" on the bank to withdraw from South Africa and cease loans. They do this by promoting the boycott. Many account closures are claimed, the local authority and church groups who close

their accounts bring much valuable publicity, and this is despite limited resources. But ELTSA accept their economic impact is minimal and far from closing the gap between the costs and benefits of investment in South Africa.

Yet the pressure group have succeeded in getting the bank "a fairly dirty name," they say, and contributed to the pressure on the bank to withdraw from South Africa. Barclays respond to their criticism with public relations activities to present their case. They suggest "economic ties and investment are the only viable instruments of peaceful change." They note that a bank cannot simply close down. While little business is said to have been lost, the criticism hurts. It is perhaps this, rather than economic loss, which is best seen as having played a part in what appears to be the first step in a phased withdrawal from South Africa. No doubt deteriorating economic conditions were paramount, but if this interpretation of Barclays recent (1985) end to its majority shareholding is correct, then ELTSA may prove to have been successful even if its own efforts weren't in themselves sufficient. Of course, constructive engagement may become a plausible argument again, in which case the withdrawal may be halted or even reversed.

### Nestle and the Marketing of Baby Milk to the Third World

'Commerciogenic malnutrition' was not the consequence of the marketing of a bad product, but its marketing in inappropriate circumstances. It took Nestle, with around half of the baby milk market worldwide and one of the largest food companies in the world, more than fifteen years to realise and accept this and take appropriate action to curtail their marketing excesses. For the latter ten years their deficiencies were forcibly brought to their attention by pressure groups. This ended most of the marketing practices of concern and involved the pressure groups in an audit commission monitoring the firm's marketing of infant formula in the Third World.

Prior to the launch of the boycott, Nestle largely ignored the issue of infant mortality resulting from baby milk misuse. One Swiss pressure group published a pamphlet outlining the case against Nestle, for which the firm took them to court and succeeded in getting a libel judgement, but at the cost of considerable adverse publicity including criticism of the firm's practices by the judge. Other critics they similarly condemned. A token attempt at self-regulation was made via the International Council of Infant Food Industries (ICIFI), the industry's representative body. But this was so inadequate that the Protein-Calorie Advisory

Group, a UN agency, refused to endorse it and one firm left to act independently and more effectively on the issue. The industry's critics were far from satisfied, so in 1977 the consumer boycott was launched in the United States.

Nestle was the target because it was the market leader but also because of its intransigence. The Infant Formula Action Coalition (INFAC), the principal pressure group acting against Nestle, achieved widespread public recognition of this when they persuaded Senator Kennedy to hold a hearing on the issue. Nestle ignored the problems in the marketing of baby milk, indisputably established by many experts at the hearing, and tried to attack the pressure groups as a threat to free enterprise. Finally recognising public opinion was going against it, the firm chose to respond less antagonistically. However, it did not address the issue but attempted to more effectively defend its position using public relations activities.

When the World Health Organisation (WHO) became involved, Nestle found, particularly as the concerned pressure groups were directly participating, that they could not avoid restrictions on their marketing practices. Their more surreptitious attempts to influence this by trying to co-opt WHO officials came to light, as did their role in organising a pro-Nestle article in Fortune, and were to no avail. The group monitoring Nestle's (and others') activities in the

Third World, the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), continued to identify abuses. Yet when, in 1981, the firm gave its support to the WHO code, it could not convince its critics of its intentions to seriously deal with the issue. The pressure groups wanted to be sure the code was enforced and used the boycott to this end. Efforts were even made to increase the international scope of the boycott.

In 1982, Nestle announced that its policy was then in accordance with WHO guidelines and that its practices were to be monitored by the Nestle Infant Formula Audit Commission (NIFAC), an independent body. Many of the firm's critics dismissed this as no more than a public relations exercise, but for others, and increasingly so, it came to be recognised as a genuine effort to tackle the issue. When, in January 1984, the firm agreed to meet four outstanding grievances [7] identified by the pressure groups and defined to both parties' satisfaction by the intermediary UNICEF, the boycott was suspended. It was officially ended in October 1984.

The Nestle boycott was plainly successful. Its economic impact was claimed to be substantial, though this is difficult to establish. More important was the impact on corporate image and employee morale, and the costs of giving management attention to the boycott. Its success was

acknowledged as showing how corporations may be called to account via the marketplace and it serves as an example for similar campaigns.

### The California Grape Boycott

The 1965-70 California grape boycott was both highly effective and successful. It achieved unionisation for Californian farm workers when all previous efforts and methods had failed. But the case is not simply about the right of labour to organise. It also involved minority rights, poverty, pesticide misuse, and civil rights.

Strikes had proved ineffective in the organisation of farm workers because of their mobility and the use of strikebreakers. Just as the early American labour unions had found, strikebreaking meant recourse to the consumer boycott. Certain factors in the late 1960's proved to be important in its effectiveness, most notably: popular support for 'la causa' (the cause); the structure of the grape market, especially its concentration of sales through the supermarkets, with about 50% of sales in ten major cities; and the relative stability of the table grape farm workers. So great was the support for the union and the concentration of grape sales, that an effective boycott of all table grapes was achieved. The growers were coerced into capitulation.

UFWOC (the United Farm Workers Organising Committee), although a fledgling union, was more like a promotional pressure group than a sectional one. This was particularly evident in its having to deal with two constituencies: the mainly chicano farm workers in rural California, and middle class urban America. Cesar Chavez was the inspirational leader that managed, through adherence to Alinsky's principles and non-violent direct action, to unite these diverse supporters in a common struggle. Particularly important were the public confrontations with the growers and their supporters, which served to highlight the growers' moral failings to those outside rural California. Given the need to build and mobilise popular support for the boycott, the role of the union organisers was crucial. The way they operated, as representatives of UFWOC, reflected the union's structure and methods, which not only avoided the alienation of potential supporters but even enhanced support.

The growers, by contrast, managed to lose support with almost every action they took. Their violence (such as well-documented attacks on picket lines) and attempts to set up company unions are appropriate examples of this. When they finally involved a public relations firm a little more sophistication was employed. The case was effectively made for allowing the consumer choice, but it was too late. Despite the previous bias of the judiciary, the growers

failed to get a ruling prohibiting the boycott. And although they had government supporters, legislation could not be realised to achieve this aim because of divisions among the growers.

The boycott was organised on a large scale, with boycott committees effective in the major North American markets and operating in most North American cities. They comprised a broad coalition of supporters, from religious organisations to consumer groups, each could identify in some way with 'la causa'. Picketing and a variety of events, such as the Boston Grape Party, ensured the effectiveness of the primary and secondary boycotts; though this was not achieved overnight. The union had to learn to target the outlets selectively and recognise that different cities demanded different approaches.

The growers capitulated because of the demonstrable effectiveness of the boycott. Some even admitted this. In some markets, grape shipments, and hence sales, were down by more than a third. While the union failed to anticipate the vulnerability of their contracts with the growers and had again to resort to the boycott to consolidate their gains, the 1965-70 boycott was an outstanding success.

## CONCLUSIONS

In each of the three cases, consumers have sought to assert their sovereignty in the marketplace. They have expressed concern about and attempted to remedy, perceived shortcomings in corporate social responsibility. This suggests, in these specific circumstances at least, an extension of consumer sovereignty beyond its mere technical meaning within economics to a more literally accurate meaning; closer, indeed, to the more ideological position earlier criticised. The circumstances permitting this extension need, however, to be noted - in particular, the role of pressure groups in providing the necessary information on the social responsibility issue.

A novel perspective on consumer sovereignty is suggested by consumer boycotts. Consumer authority in the marketplace may not simply refer to the more immediate characteristics of the offering such as product features or price but, as boycotts show, other characteristics such as whether the firm has investments in South Africa. Here, a distinction can usefully be made between the degree and the domain of consumer sovereignty.

Formerly, writers on consumer sovereignty have concentrated on the degree of consumer authority (see, for example, Galbraith's work, such as American Capitalism (1963)). In

their assessments, reference is usually made to how much competition there is. In looking at consumer boycotts, the concern, in contrast, is not so much with the amount of authority the buyer has vis-a-vis the seller, though that is important, but with the domain of that authority. Put otherwise, it is not the degree of consumer sovereignty, how much influence the buyer has, but the jurisdiction of consumer sovereignty, the issues over which the buyer may have influence.

Consider a simple example. Consumers may choose to buy Spanish oranges in preference to South African oranges because they taste better or are cheaper. They may, alternatively, choose to buy Spanish oranges in preference because they do not wish to support apartheid. In either case there must be consumer choice, there must be competition to provide some degree of consumer sovereignty. The domain of consumer sovereignty, however, refers to whether consumers can only express concern about such features as the price, colour or taste of the product, or whether they can express concern about much wider issues. Country of origin, dubious activities of the firm in some remote sphere of its operations, and many other ethical considerations can or could feature in purchase behaviour. Whether they do or whether they could, in specific instances, depends on the domain of consumer sovereignty.

As an oversimplification, consumers have to be concerned, willing and able for a boycott to be effective. They have to know and be concerned about the issue in question. They have to be willing to use their purchasing on the issue. And they must be able in the sense of being capable of transferring to another firm's product - there must be consumer choice. (The only alternative where there is an absence of consumer choice is refraining from purchase of the item altogether, as in the California grape boycott case.) It is these requirements which point to a role for pressure groups in the marketing system to enhance consumer sovereignty. While they can do little to ensure competition, they can provide the necessary information and encouragement required for consumer boycotts.

So, consumer boycotts may be usefully understood as consumers exercising consumer sovereignty. This suggests that consumer sovereignty may be seen as having two dimensions: degree and domain. Degree refers to the amount of consumer authority relative to producers. Domain refers to the jurisdiction of that authority. The domain of consumer sovereignty is seen in the consumer boycott cases to have been enhanced by the provision of information by concerned pressure groups. By illustration, the article has also shown how the more central concerns of marketing - as the study of markets - may be addressed. It may even in

such a way confirm consumer sovereignty as the paradigm for the discipline.

### Notes

1. See, for example, Arndt (1985) or Foxall (1984).
2. Baker writes "The case for accepting marketing as a science is clearly a good one. It diverts energy spent on arguing over the criteria of what is science to more fruitful application elsewhere and ensures a more integrated approach towards marketing from both the academics and the practitioners" (1983, p.32). This author does not find the case as strong as Baker suggests, principally because of the partisan substance of most marketing writing, teaching and research (as later indicated), and the likely continuation of this orientation. As Hunt (1976) notes "If...the entire conceptual domain of marketing is profit/micro/normative, then marketing is not and (more importantly) probably cannot be a science." He goes on to suggest marketing could be a science if the conceptual domain includes both micro/positive and macro/positive phenomena (macromarketing). Yet there is little real evidence of this orientation and the situation does not seem likely to change. However, this

article might be seen as a contribution within Hunt's broadened conceptual domain!

3. Consumer sovereignty as the paradigm for marketing is here advanced only by illustration. If this is insufficient then either such a claim is incorrect or it is not yet the time for the emergence of marketing's paradigm.
4. As Foxall (1984) puts it "Marketing-orientation is itself no more than an appropriate response to a given market structure: high levels of intra-industrial competition, the capacity for supply to exceed demand and consumer affluence as manifested in a large measure of discretionary spending. The adoption and implementation of the marketing concept are by no means the altruistic acts implied by some marketing textbooks: they derive from the recognition that, under appropriate conditions, a particular form of attention to customer requirements is essential if the goals of the producer are to be achieved."
5. Marketing is rarely considered to be about the study of markets. So Barnhill and Lawson (1980) comment "While considerable effort has been devoted to developing the theory of markets, those developments have been predominantly in the field of economics. There has been

little development of the theory of markets in the field of marketing, yet markets are a central and necessary state of being as well as a precondition for the function of common marketing components such as buyer behaviour, pricing... None of these marketing components are viable without a market in which to function."

6. In a closely analogous way, Lindblom notes that liberty may have the form of freedom from indoctrination, for under liberal democracy men are not really free, they only think they are: "A communist intellectual asks: 'What are people free from in the Soviet Union? They are free from exploitation, from all moral oppression, and consequently their thinking and deeds are free from the age-old shackles created by the economic, political and moral rule of the exploiters'. It is not a ridiculous argument... in polyarchy not only are people indoctrinated - as inevitably in all societies - but they are heavily indoctrinated by leadership and a favoured class" (1977, p.265).
  
7. The limiting of free supplies of powdered baby milk, the stopping of all personal gifts to health workers by the baby milk producers, the revision of misleading literature for mothers and health workers, and the inclusion of clear warnings on baby milk labels about

the hazards of bottle feeding and the benefits of breast feeding.

### Bibliography

Andreski, Stanislaw (1972), Social Sciences as Sorcery (London, Andre Deutsch).

Arndt, Johan (1985), 'On Making Marketing Science More Scientific: Role of Orientations, Paradigms, Metaphors and Puzzle Solving, Journal of Marketing, Vol.49, No.3.

Baker, Michael J, and others (1983), Marketing: Theory and Practice (London, Macmillan, (first published 1976)).

Barnhill, J A and W M Lawson (1980), 'Toward a Theory of Modern Markets', European Journal of Marketing, Vol.14, No.1.

Bartels, Robert (1976), The History of Marketing Thought (Columbus, Grid, (first published 1962)).

Berger, Peter (1966), Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective (Harmondsworth, Penguin, (first published 1963)).

Berger, Peter L and Hansfried Kellner, (1981), Sociology Reinterpreted: An Essay on Method and Vocation (Harmondsworth, Penguin).

Biggadike, E Ralph (1981), 'The Contribution of Marketing to Strategic Management', Academy of Management Review, vol.6, No.4.

Boyd, Harper W, Jr.. and William F. Massy, (1972), Marketing Management (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

Christopher, Martin, Sherril H Kennedy, Malcolm McDonald and Gordon Wills (1980), Effective Marketing Management (Farnborough, Gower).

Crosier, Keith (1975), 'What Exactly is Marketing?' Quarterly Review of Marketing, Winter.

Foxall, Gordon (1984), 'Marketing's Domain', European Journal of Marketing, Vol.18, No.1

Galbraith, J K (1963), American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power (Harmondsworth, Penguin, (first published 1952)).

Halsall, Martyn (1985), 'Co-op cuts all trade with SA', The Guardian, October 4.

Honour, T F and R M Mainwaring (1982), Business and Sociology (London, Croom Helm).

Hunt, Shelby D (1976), 'The Nature and Scope of Marketing',  
Journal of Marketing, Vol.40.

Kotler, Philip (1984), Marketing Management: analysis, planning and control (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall (fifth edition)).

Kuhn, Thomas S (1970), The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press (first published 1962)).

Lindblom, Charles E (1977), Politics and Markets: The World's Political - Economic Systems (New York, Basic Books).

McCarthy, E Jerome (1975), Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach (Homewood, Richard D Irwin).

Mises, Ludwig von, (1949), Human Action: A Treatise on Economics (London, William Hodge).

Silk, Leonard and David Vogel (1976), Ethics and Profits: The Crisis of Confidence in American Business, (New York, Simon and Schuster).

Smith, N. Craig (1985), Ethical Purchase Behaviour and Social Responsibility in Business: An Investigation of Pressure Group Influence on Purchase Behaviour Particularly in the Use or Threat of Consumer Boycotts (Ph.D. thesis, School of Management, Cranfield Institute of Technology).

Vogel, David (1978), Lobbying the Corporation: Citizen Challenges to Business Authority (New York, Basic Books).