

Political Junk Food by Bayard Rustin

Confusion rather than accurate information is the product of most modern advertising. If you plan to market a non-nutritious breakfast cereal, you simply emphasize that each morsel is sugar-coated, shaped like personal zodiac signs and enjoyed world-wide by Olympic athletes. By stressing these inconsequential points, attention is cleverly diverted from the most pertinent fact: the cereal is worthless junk.

Just as corporations have successfully marketed junk foods, junk cars, and other junk products, some business-supported groups are now selling junk political ideas. Foremost among these Cracker Jack proposals are the so-called "right-to-work" laws, the original political junk food.

While appearing to offer job security and full employment, "right-to-work" laws offer neither. Instead, they are intentionally designed to weaken unions, lower wages, and keep workers in their place. All this is accomplished by imposing a compulsory "open shop," even when a majority of workers democratically opt for union representation.

Essentially, the open shop arrangement -- favored by employers since trade unions emerged over a century ago -- allows a few workers -- the free riders -- to enjoy all the benefits of collective bargaining without paying a cent toward the upkeep of their union. Such an unfair system necessarily militates against the development of strong unions, and provides the employer with numerous advantages.

By deliberately and repeatedly confusing the issues, "right-to-work" forces have scored some key victories during the last two years. In Arkansas, for instance, they successfully blocked a spirited attempt to repeal that state's compulsory open shop law. And in Louisiana they passed legislation outlawing all forms of union security clauses. Now, the business-supported National Right-to-Work Committee has opened shop in Missouri with the hope of selling its sugar-coated, but hazardous proposals. Fortunately, many key black leaders in Missouri

and across the country fully understand that a victory for "right-to-work" could very well spell disaster for the black community, economically as well as politically.

For black people, the economic consequences are especially clear. As numerous studies have shown, black union members earn substantially more than non-union blacks. In 1974, for example, the median weekly income of black union members will be jeopardized.

To sweeten the bitter economic impact of "right-to-work" laws, their leading proponents assert that "union free" states and localities quickly attract business investment which creates more jobs. The facts, however, tell a different story. A few years ago, the former Governor of Kansas -- one of 20 "right-to-work" states -- claimed that such laws actually discourage industrial development. Furthermore Professor Daniel H. Pollitt of the University of North Carolina concluded that a variety of studies "indicate that right-to-work states have not received more than their proportionate share of a new industry, and that the enactment of right-to-work laws is in no way responsible for the increase in non-farm employment."

While business groups supporting "right-to-work" efforts claim to be solely concerned with "protecting the freedom of their employees," they are, in reality seeking to protect their own freedom -- to fire workers at will, to pay low wages, and to keep fringe benefits minimal. Moreover, they also seek to neutralize labor as a political force by weakening unions in the shops.

At the political level, then, "right-to-work" is also a challenge to the black community. If these deceptive proposals -- favorites of the New Right -- win approval in Missouri or any other state we can expect a lengthy parade of other conservative measures, such as cuts in school budgets, reductions in desperately needed social services, and "tax reforms" that aid the rich. In short, another "right-to-work" victory, especially this year, will further encourage the peddlers of political junk food.

The History Of Black Popular Music

Author Arnold Shaw is teaching a new course in "The History of Black Popular Music" at UNLV this fall. Co-sponsored by the music department and the division of continuing education, the class registration will be open thru Sept 25.

With Shaw's newest book "Honkers and Shouters" (Macmillan) as the text, the course will trace the development of black rhythm and blues through the spiritual, minstrel, ragtime, classic blues and soul eras.

The course is designed to communicate the importance of black music in American culture and provide information concerning the background of rock and roll. Recordings will be used throughout the course to illustrate the history, style and sociology of black popular music.

Shaw will also teach a class in "The History of Rock" through the division of continuing education.

A composer, Lecturer and editor, Shaw has written nine books, including "The Rock Revolution," "Sinatra," "The World of Soul," and "The Street That Never Slept." His articles have appeared in numerous publications, notably the New York and Los Angeles Times, Harpers, Esquire, Down Beat, Variety, Billboard and Reader's Digest.

As an executive at several New York publishing companies, Shaw promoted numerous hit songs and was instrumental in the careers of such artists as Paul Simon, Elvis Presley, Rod McKuen and Burt Bacharach.

Students enrolled in the course can earn three upper division credits. To late register, call 739-3394 or visit Frazier Hall, Room 109.

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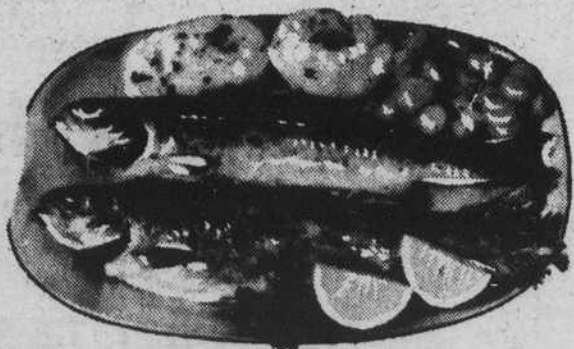
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