



The Selling of The Government



Arthur Hoppe

SALE OF THE United States Government to the giant International Peanuts & Popcorn conglomerate was announced of July 4, 1973, by President Nixon.

"I have long held," Mr. Nixon declared, "that the private sector can do the job better. Now we will prove it."

Sale of the faltering government had long been rumored. Debt-ridden, it had gone into the red virtually every year for several decades. Recent scandals at top-management levels, coupled with unsound fiscal policies, had sent its stock tumbling to record lows on the international financial market.

The new venture was called "The Conglomerated States of America, Inc.," with its products and services marketed under the catchy brand name, "Con America."

As is customary in such cases, Mr. Nixon was retained as President of the government division of Con America. But otherwise, conglomerate officials moved swiftly to inject modern managerial techniques in an effort to save the shaky enterprise.

★ ★ ★

AS A FIRST STEP, the J. Walter Thompson men who had been running the White House affairs were fired and the account given to a new advertising agency, Buttons, Buttons, Buttons & Osborne.

They recommended replacing the American eagle as a trade mark with the dove of peace, clutching a \$100 bill — "to put across the image of Peace with Profit." And their company slogan was an all-around winner: "For Confidence — Con America!"

Top-level efficiency experts were called in to revitalize management techniques. The unwieldy and highly inefficient Congress was replaced by a 12-man Policy Advisory Council composed of the senior

congressional leaders.

Wasteful poverty programs were cut on the grounds of, "What's poverty ever done for America?" Corporate profits were increased "to help the little man." And the Department of Health, Education & Welfare was replaced by a Sunshine Club of directors' wives who brought comfort and cheer to the sick, the illiterate and the needy.

Presidential press conferences were, of course, canceled. But the President was required to deliver an annual State of the Conglomerate message to the annual stockholders meeting.

Big unions and big business, being the majority stockholders, naturally controlled these meetings. But it seemed only fair that those who had the most stock had the most say.

Abroad, Con-America did a vigorous job selling wheat and machinery to the Russians and Chinese and arms to every little starving country that could afford supersonic jet fighters.

Inevitably, however, the deal was challenged on the grounds it was illegal, unconstitutional and a violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act.

But the distinguished Wall Street law firm of Midge, Mudge & Mitchell, which had replaced the Supreme Court, ruled: (1) Presidents had long sold out to conglomerates; (2) no American could claim the loss of his congressman if he couldn't remember his name, and (3) other countries offered competition and if you didn't like Con America you could take your business elsewhere.

★ ★ ★

SO CON AMERICA struggled along with big unions, big business, senile congressmen and a silent President advised by advertising men running things. And, oddly enough, hardly any one noticed the difference.