

The Cola Issue



Jack Anderson

THE VOTING tomorrow will settle not only whether Gerald Ford or Jimmy Carter will occupy the White House but whether Pepsi Cola or Coca-Cola will be the most favored beverage for the next four years.

Not that the election will change the drinking habits of many Americans. But it could determine whether the Russians must continue to satisfy their cola thirst with Pepsis or whether they will be given a chance to try Cokes.

There is even a tantalizing possibility that 800 million Chinese may start guzzling the cola with the right political connections. The cola habit might also spread to Cuba in the event of an accommodation with Fidel Castro.

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PEPSI's Donald Kendall has had special entree to the White House during the Republican occupancy. He had the foresight in the 1960s to help set up Richard Nixon in a lucrative law practice in New York City.

After Mr. Nixon became President, he returned the favor by appointing Kendall as the top American on the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Trade and Economic Council — a position Kendall used to introduce Pepsis to Russia. He pushed Pepsis so aggressively, in fact, that it antagonized members of Henry Kissinger's staff.

They drafted a bitter memo and circulated it privately within government circles. The memo charges that Kendall "exploited his friendship with Nixon to further his international business interests.

"One example of this exploitation is in the delicate, controversial area of U.S.-Soviet trade. Kendall used his friendship with Nixon to obtain the position of U.S. co-chairman of the U.S.-USSR Trade and Economic Council ... It has become so much a personal tool of Kendall's that Department of Commerce people refer to it as Kendall's Council."

Despite this undercover opposition, Kendall managed to survive Watergate and to achieve a close relationship with President Ford.

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COKE'S John Paul Austin, on the other hand, has the inside track with Jimmy Carter. By accident of geography, Coca-Cola headquarters happens to be located in Atlanta where Carter presided as governor of Georgia.

It was Austin's pleasure to provide free Cokes for Carter's political barbecues, to help underwrite the governor's Prayer Breakfast and to host at least one luncheon for the visiting governor from Pernambuco.

Perhaps encouraged by Carter's improved political fortunes, Austin has made three trips to Russia to explain the capitalist principle of competition to the Soviets. They, in turn, have been mightily impressed by Coke's connections with Carter. They have questioned members of the Coke delegation closely about the enigmatic Carter.

Austin offered to provide Cokes for the 1980 Olympics in Moscow if the Soviets would open their country to competition between the two rival colas.