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A Proposal for Political Marketing

by Charles Hampden-Turner

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Charles Hampden-Turner has a doctorate in Business Administration from the Harvard Business School. He is the author of a recently published book entitled *Radical Man*, and he is currently a visiting lecturer in the Sociology Department at Brandeis University and a Fellow of the Cambridge Institute. His proposal for political marketing was conceived as part of the program of the Center for Community Economic Development, where he is a research psychologist.

Political marketing offers a new way of assisting the economic development of poor communities and of creating opportunities for integrating political values with daily activities. Central to the concept of political marketing is the belief that the considerable purchasing power and growing political consciousness of liberals and radicals in America can be harnessed to assist in the generation of economic well-being for the poor.

Community development corporations represent an attempt to create independent institutions—owned and operated by residents of urban and rural poor communities—for stimulating the economic and social development of the poor. The strategy of political marketing is to urge liberal and radical consumers to provide a guaranteed market for the products and services of community development corporations. Consumer marketing organizations—C.M.O.'s—formed by the consumers would serve as vehicles for consumer expression and thus as a source of guidance to the community development corporations—C.D.C.'s—about their primary market. Through the C.M.O.'s and acts of “political” consumption, the consumers would be provided with new avenues for political expression and for making political values more relevant to their lives.

Political Marketing and Community Development Corporations

There are presently about fifty community development corporations in operation across the nation. Their efforts, however, face staggering obstacles. A C.D.C. must attempt to survive in an economy in which eighty per cent of small businesses fail within three years. Private sources of capital are virtually nonexistent, not only because of tight money but also because of the risks and uncertainties of new black enterprises, ingrained patterns of discrimination against minority borrowers and an unwillingness to become involved in novel and experimental ventures. Equally serious are the lack of skills in poor communities—aggravated by the shortage of funds for worker training—and the dearth of managerial talent. (In a survey of Harvard Business School students, I discovered that black M.B.A.'s, although well-informed about C.D.C.'s, were lured away by salary offers from large corporations ranging from \$13,000-25,000.)

Even with sufficient capital and talent, community development corporations could not afford to rely on the limited purchasing power of inner-city consumers. C.D.C.'s must therefore compete in a larger market, into which entry has become increasingly difficult—particularly for enterprises which are not well-financed, well-connected or experienced. In the few instances where C.D.C.'s have found capital and an assured market, they have generally been forced to rely upon the patronage of large corporations or public-spirited banks. In these situations, commercial viability may have been achieved but only at the price of political impotence and increased dependence upon local elites.

It seems clear that community development corporations have little chance of competing with corporate leaders who have resources a thousand times greater and who shape the rules of the game which they dominate. The only hope may be to create a different game.

Political marketing is an attempt to frame the rules for a new game. It assumes that the very factors which impede economic development in poor communities can become the basis of a competitive advantage. In essence, it assumes that concern for the plight of the poor is marketable.

A common function of advertising is artificial differentiation, and the amount spent on advertising a product is often inversely proportional to any real difference between the product and its competition. Reaching a market is largely a matter of creating an image. Experienced advertising executives know that "you don't sell the sausage; you sell the sizzle." Unlike such advertising, which is largely an attempt to appeal to the self-centered values of conspicuous consumption and gratification, political marketing would focus on the people behind the product, their oppression, their cooperative effort and their hopes for freedom. The sizable minority of Americans—mostly young, affluent, middle-class—who are already committed to support the poor in their struggle for a decent life thus represent an enormous potential market.

Political marketing would offer the consumer an opportunity to use his purchasing power to serve the needs of others as well as his own. In contrast to the trivial materialism of traditional advertising, it would offer nothing less than an invitation to help people get out of poverty. We have seen nearly half a million people travel to Washington to march for peace; and increasing numbers are protesting racism and pollution. Thus, it is not inconceivable that several million people might go a few blocks out of their way, or pay a little more, in response to an appeal based upon their political and social ideals.

The possibility of having an assured consumer market and of eliciting new brand loyalties suggests that the logical enterprise for the community development corporations would be wholesaling. While the profit margins in traditional wholesaling are often small, especially when the wholesaler provides only storage and distribution services, the potential for profit in "brand management" is considerable. The C.D.C.'s could market the goods of several manufacturers under their own brand name—"Liberation," for example—and could establish a national coordinating organization—Liberation, Inc.—to handle negotiations with manufacturers and large retail chains and to direct national brand advertising campaigns.

Wholesaling could assist in overcoming a number of the economic obstacles facing a new C.D.C. Wholesaling requires relatively little capital, and the necessary skills can be taught in a short time. It is not, like retailing, restricted to a neighborhood market, and it can be performed by persons with little access to land or raw materials. In terms of performing the distributive function, the inner-city is well-located geographically. Economies of scale can generally be achieved at a smaller size of operation in wholesaling than in manufacturing. Wholesaling goods manufactured by others would enable community development corporations to respond to a rapidly expanding demand in the event that Liberation brand marketing were successful; if C.D.C.'s were initially engaged in manufacturing, on the other hand, their greatly limited ability to produce might result in the loss of important opportunities to capture a larger segment of the market.

Most important, wholesaling offers the prospect of vertical integration into the manufacturing process once the pattern of demand has stabilized. With an assured market and a full order book, C.D.C.'s would have less difficulty raising large sums of capital. With access to capital, gradual vertical expansion would be possible. For example, a community development corporation might be engaged in distributing laundry soap, already boxed. If successful, it could then manufacture its own boxes, filling them with the same product. Later, it could begin to manufacture the product itself. With numerous lines of merchandise to expand into, the C.D.C. could concentrate on those with the best market,

the simplest manufacturing process, etc. It could use the prices at which goods are being supplied by big manufacturers as a bench mark against which to measure its own ability to produce the goods efficiently. Such opportunities for expansion and for retention of increasingly large shares of the profit margin would provide a continual incentive for economic growth and development.

Would large corporations contract to supply C.D.C. wholesalers? Corporations are already under some pressure to assist black economic development. Businessmen are increasingly anxious to demonstrate that "the system works," and, at first glance, a contract with a community corporation promises a conventional solution. Even President Nixon has spoken approvingly of C.D.C.'s as examples of "community capitalism." Indeed, a number of manufacturers already work with C.D.C.'s in "turn-key" operations, in which subsidiaries are established in the inner-city and then turned over to the community.

But we need not rely on the altruism of the corporations. When a wholesaler places an order, the supplier will generally fill it. Manufacturers do not generally avoid an opportunity for profit, particularly one that has added public relations value. And there would always be the prospect of competitors reaping the benefits if they refused. Even if no more than one per cent of the nation's manufacturers cooperated, it would be sufficient to establish a network of C.D.C. wholesalers.

Finally, wholesaling occupies a strategic position in the economy. If political marketing succeeded in winning the brand loyalty of politically conscious, organized consumers, Liberation, Inc. would have a strong bargaining position *vis à vis* manufacturers. And once the brand name was welded into the distribution pipeline, any attempt to dislodge it could cause an uproar.

Consumer Marketing Organizations

An important ally of community development corporations in their attempt to capture a portion of the market would be the consumer marketing organizations and, on a national level, their coordinating organization. Local C.M.O. members could put pressure on retailers to stock all Liberation brand products and insure that such products were prominently displayed. At the request of a C.D.C., they could provide a "commando" sales force for soliciting institutional orders, pledges to buy, free publicity and local support. In particular, C.M.O. members from university communities could demand that their schools purchase from C.D.C.'s. The poor could thus end up the beneficiaries of much of the rapidly growing education industry, which, if Ivan Illich is right, presently represents a grossly regressive allocation of resources.

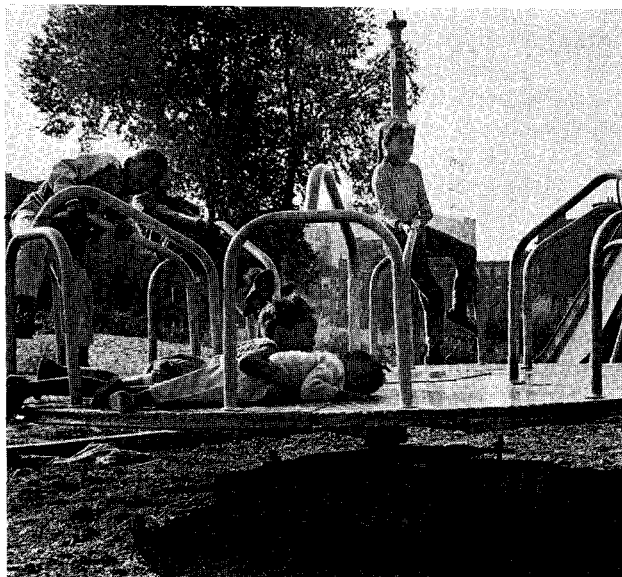
Through the C.M.O.'s, consumers would express their preferences for products and, in effect, would provide market research for the C.D.C.'s. At both the national and local levels, the C.M.O.'s could assist in the development and implementation of advertising, marketing and political strategies.

The successful marketing of the Liberation brand name will very likely depend upon the consumers' confidence that Liberation products meet their political criteria. Thus, the national C.M.O. coordinating body would have to be given the right to accept or reject products before they could carry the Liberation trademark. All new products would have to be agreed upon by the national C.M.O. and Liberation, Inc. Moreover, the national C.M.O. could require that a description of the particular C.D.C. marketing a product be carried on the label or in accompanying literature, or otherwise made available. While the C.M.O. would not be in the position of judging the internal conduct of the C.D.C.'s, it would insure that the relevant information was available to consumers concerned about those matters.

The relationship between the C.M.O.'s and the development corporations would represent an "arms-length" alliance between the poor and largely white, middle-class consumers, each organizing their own constituency to give maximum aid and trade to the other. That relationship would give effect to one of the vital lessons of the sixties: poor people desire and need to organize and guide themselves; and though alliances between the poor and the concerned middle class may be necessary, the latter must not be allowed to dominate them. Political marketing, then, would be founded on an equitable relationship—of mutual strengths, needs and interests—in which initiative would not be wrenched from the poor and the development of an independent political and economic base would not be frustrated.

One underlying source of strength and tension in the C.D.C.-C.M.O. relationship would be the reciprocal influence of two types of radicalism. Social research seems to indicate that middle-class radicals are strongly oriented toward abstract ideals and moral principles, while the radicalism of the poor is more concerned with material wants and concrete gains. Whereas the former group is prone to lose touch with reality, poor people are faced with the temptation to compromise principle for the sake of short-run expediency. Hopefully, the interdependence of the two sides will keep these tendencies in check and motivate them to cooperate. Mutuality is essential.

In Black ghettos, children have been found who scrub their faces to make them white. While cleanliness is next to godliness, Black can be beautiful.



Don't whitewash your community:

**Buy
Liberation
Soap**

Competitive Prospects

Competing against bigger, richer and more powerful corporations will require overcoming established brand loyalties. Brand loyalty, that subtle province of motivational research and subliminal persuasion, relies heavily on the fact that the thousands of trivial acts in our lives are based upon subconscious habit rather than conscious choice. The sheer idiocy of advertising is often quite deliberate, based on the theory that habits are formed when people quickly dismiss appeals from conscious reflection.

If people can be induced to make conscious choices, their brand loyalties can be undermined. By making brand selection into a socio-political issue, the move from subconscious to conscious choice might be effected. So as to distract the consumer from these issues as little as possible, the products marketed in the early stages should be intrinsically dull. They should also be quick-turnover items. The more frequent the acts of purchasing, the greater the consumer's feeling of participation and the more readily new brand loyalty could be established.

An enormous amount of money, energy and mendacity goes into establishing the myth that branded products are worth four or five times the price of unbranded equivalents. Liberation, Inc. could compete not only through political marketing, emphasizing the people "behind" the products, but also by challenging the blatant abuses of "hard sell" advertising. It could then charge prices equivalent to those of branded products, asking the consumer to give consciously to the poor what he earlier relinquished unknowingly to large corporations.

Moreover, the very size and power of competing corporations could be turned against them. There would be no way for a corporation which values and radiates size, wealth, glamour and power to satisfy people who do not share such values—once the issues were drawn and alternatives made available. For consumers who are predisposed to respond to the "underdog" appeal from the organized poor, the competitors' advertisements would only serve to advertise their unfair advantage. A comparable occurrence was G.M.'s attempt to smear Ralph Nader, which only enhanced his image and dramatized his criticisms.

A significant competitive advantage for Liberation products would be the efficiency of its advertising expenditures. Advertising is most effective when there is a congruence between content and advertising matter, and so left-of-center publications would be natural advertising vehicles for Liberation products. Whereas a firm advertising a wart-removing substance in *TV Guide* is faced with the fact that less than three per cent of the readers will be wart-conscious when they flip the page, close to seventy-five per cent of the readers of *The New Republic* might respond to political marketing—particularly if it received editorial comment.

As mentioned above, the C.M.O.'s could provide the additional competitive advantage of a free, highly motivated selling force. Moreover, once the C.D.C.'s begin to integrate vertically, the nation's university communities, which are likely to be the locations of the initial and strongest consumer organizations, could provide a very valuable resource—intellectual labor. Millions of dollars worth of patents, techniques and discoveries pour out of American universities every year, and they need not enrich giant corporations alone. I believe that many scientists and engineers could be convinced to steer an increasing volume of their technological innovations toward counter-institutions. The inventors might not become as rich, but they would gain stature among their peers and students. The climate of opinion among the younger staff in universities would seem ripe for this development.

The Needs of Political Consumers

Political marketing is as much a proposal to satisfy the needs of political consumers as it is a plan for assisting the cause of minority economic development. In my recently published book, *Radical Man*, I considered the motivating forces of the new middle-class radicalism in America, and, with the help of research findings from the social sciences, I tried to identify personal fulfillment needs which seemed to be frustrated. Among them were: 1) the need for political and cultural self-expression, and 2) the desire to reconcile contradictions. Political marketing is designed to help satisfy these frustrated needs.

Through the consumer marketing organizations, consumers would be able to translate their political concerns into product standards, ideas for new products and ideas for marketing appeals. Through political marketing, moral principles and ideas could be "acted out," and social conscience could be translated into action. The grape boycott, despite the negative nature of refusing to buy as opposed to buying, was a positive and successful effort of this kind.

For some, political marketing offers an extra, alternative avenue of political and cultural self-expression. And for others who, like the young, are disenfranchised—in terms of both voting rights in the political arena and influence on the decision-making processes of the institutions they inhabit—it offers the only means of self-expression. At least in part, political marketing is intended to give young people a meaningful lever of choice that could be exercised from their early teens onward.

Political marketing could be integrated with the political life of the left by making support of the Liberation counter-institutions a part of every major rally or campaign. Demonstrations could conclude with groups of

people going down shopping streets buying Liberation products as they went, pointedly passing by retailers who did not stock them. Every major act of Nixonian politics could be used to boost the support of the C.D.C.'s and lessen the patronage of those companies which, at best, conduct business-as-usual as the problems of our society worsen. The public outcries that would follow events like Jackson State and Kent State, the murder of Fred Hampton, the delivery of arms to the current regime in Greece and the invasion of Cambodia could include information about, and appeals to buy, Liberation products.

Within the context of political marketing, the possibilities for reconciling contradictions are very great. For example, we have already seen how political marketing could be traditional enough to work within the mainstream of the American economy yet radical enough to contribute to a real breakthrough in the economic development of poor communities.

Political marketing would make possible the reconciliation of materialism and humanitarianism. Instead of glorifying consumption and making it the symbol of achievement, status and well-being, political marketing would extol the contribution the acts of consumption could make toward the solution of social problems. The products themselves, and the purely consumptive dimension, would be de-emphasized in comparison to the human beings who would be supplying them and who would be sustained by their consumption.

Political marketing would also create the opportunity for fusing social purpose and commercial jobs. For example, most advertising copywriters, commercial artists and directors of television commercials are hopelessly compromised and trivialized as people. "Serious" writers, artists, composers and film-makers usually ostracize their commercial counterparts, yet, in an important sense, they also are compromised in our society. They are tolerated but are carefully isolated from commerce and politics. Thus, creative persons today have a choice: they can bend their talents to the greater glory of the Breakfast with the Built-In Bounce and have some impact on the economy and the lives of common men, or they can exist in a gilded ghetto of literary salons and talk shows, offering witty and irreverent comments which the wider culture will applaud and then ignore for as many years as it wishes.

The choice between impact without personal integrity and some measure of integrity with extremely limited impact is an unenviable choice and, I think, an unnecessary one. The choice reflects the existing dichotomy between the humanistic concerns of literary and artistic talents and the essentially exploitative nature of commercial advertising. In the context of political marketing, however, advertising would have political and social impact and would be an integral part of the efforts of the poor to make economic progress.

Political marketing would end the contradiction between voluntary, spare-time “do-goodism” and self-interested business-as-usual. We would no longer need to think of idealism and cooperatism as somehow impractical. Similarly, the dichotomy between private and public life would also be transcended as politics and life style are united. In the end, the reconciliation of dichotomies like these would develop in individuals the inner unity and integrity that they increasingly desire.

Radical Social Change Through the Transformation of Commercial Relationships

A radical proposal is one that goes to the root of a situation. One of the roots of our culture and society is the commercial relationship. Alter its context and its meaning for people, and the complexion of society might be fundamentally altered.

For Marx, the “relations of production”—primarily between the industrial proletariat and the owners of capital—comprised the most influential and formative aspect of economic life. But today, the number of people involved in industrial production has decreased markedly, and the economies of mass production are no longer the chief cutting edge of capitalist competition. Most people are involved in supplying goods and services, and businesses compete and retain the allegiance of their employees and consumers by massive campaigns to project an image. (Expect for marginal differences between products or companies, such images and messages celebrate the same values.) This new focus on the consumer aspect has had several profound effects on economic life, which is ripe for change through political marketing.

First, the commercial relationship has tended to become inauthentic. Manufacturers hire advertising agencies to discover what images and symbols will lead people to buy their products. In addition to their instrumental and manipulative qualities, commercial appeals are designed to disguise a product’s shortcomings or limitations—products that cause lung tumors are often advertised in the context of spring days and mountain streams, and those with a reputation for shoddiness are frequently presented in luxury surroundings.

Second, commercial relationships are less a form of cooperation than of mutual egotism. The seller gets the money; the buyer gets the product. It is usually a matter of complete indifference to either what the purchase means to the other; there has simply been a coincidence of self-interest. “Customer relations” are usually confined to ensuring the prospect of repeat sales, and where repeat sales are unlikely—as in the door-to-door selling of encyclopedias—the sales techniques are generally ruthless. In tightly organized small communities, commercial

relationships are usually controlled by the network of social relationships; but in the anonymity of urban mass culture, the true viciousness of the purely commercial relationship comes into its own.

Third, the commercial relationship is often an exceedingly unequal one. When organized business deals with unorganized consumers, there is no dialogue. Business firms define the range of choice and styles of products; the consumer says “yes” or “no” totally within the context decreed by business. The power to formulate alternatives is not shared at all. Not surprisingly, therefore, the consumer suffers from a trivialization of choice. And the thousands of commercial messages to which he is exposed all stimulate and reinforce the same narrow vein of acquisitiveness.

How would political marketing transform the moral imbecility of existing commercial relationships? Authenticity would be increased because of the integrity of the Liberation brandname and the worth of the goals it would stand for. Mutual egotism and the mere coincidence of self-interest would give way to genuine cooperation, because consumer support of Liberation products would have a beneficial effect on the lives of the poor. And if Liberation, Inc. proved successful enough to go into production, the commercial relationship would become more equal. Through local C.M.O.’s, consumers, for the first time, would be able to help create and choose the kinds of products supplied to them.

Once they had tasted freedom and personal creativity, consumers would no longer tolerate the paternalism and instrumentalism of traditional marketing. Those who can choose between levels of moral existence, who by the selective support of certain organizations can help nudge the course of social history, will not lightly regress to suckling on the latest taste-sensation. The success of the C.M.O.’s could represent the beginning of the end of corporate-dominated consumption.

The Effect on Communications Media

In the long run, political marketing could transform television commercials and newspaper advertising from trivial and distracting invitations to narcissism to continued reminders of our obligation to other men and of the real pleasure of successfully helping them.

Many liberals and radicals are hostile to television and other advertising *per se*, ignoring how incredibly influential it could be if the content of the messages ever rose above the level of the spurious. The morality currently

being inculcated through television advertising holds that self-gratification is deservedly achieved by those who most nearly correspond to conventional role models and images. The conservative, racist and sexist ramifications of this conditioning are obvious. Nostalgic affection is inspired for those stereotypical images idealized by the Silent Majority, while increasing degrees of disgust are evoked for those who deviate. Thus, the cruelty of advertisements falls upon all those who cannot or will not conform to the role models—blacks, people with unconventional features, people unfulfilled by the roles of consumer and housewife and people too poor to consume on the idealized scale. The morality of the person who shouts “Get a haircut” to young peace marchers is taught to him and reinforced by his television set.

The content of the actual programs corresponds to these values, except that what is stressed is the maintenance of harmony among a number of conventional roles. In program after program, conventional virtue is threatened by dark-complexioned or hirsute characters who are foiled in the nick of time by Muscular Americanism—in the shape of sheriffs, policemen, secret agents and various embodiments of authoritative violence. Such endings pave the way for the conventional role models in the commercials which follow.

The advertising that would promote the political marketing concept, however, would have a different thrust and might have an effect on the medium itself. While traditional advertising needs programs with happy endings in order to set the consumer up for thoughtless consumption, advertising for political marketing would require programs and stories with unresolved crises, manifest contradictions and real-life dilemmas which would invite the active participation and intervention of the political consumer. Television stories depicting the true agonies of poverty and racism would be followed by commercials for politically motivated buying that would contribute to the solution of social problems.

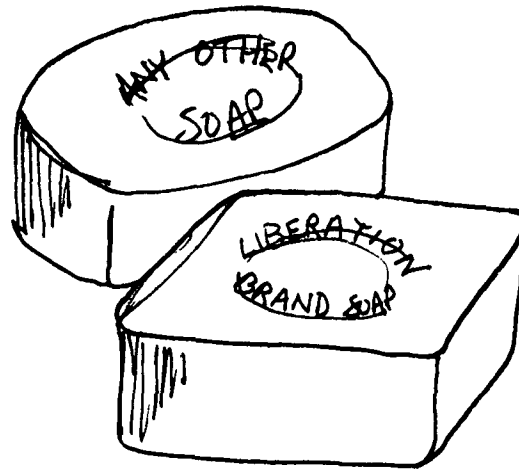
Not the least of the impacts of political marketing would be its effect upon the economics of publishing and broadcasting. The necessity of pleasing advertisers has almost certainly pulled the media to the right and dampened the fires of controversy. Former Senator Joseph Clark, for example, was unable to get any mass-circulation magazines to publish his views on truth-in-advertising, nor could Dr. Benjamin Spock find a large magazine to print his articles on peace until he was indicted. Because the advertising for political marketing would need controversy, non-sugar-coated treatments of unsolved problems and radical proposals in order to galvanize the consuming public, it would be a countervailing force to most advertisers.

The effect that political marketing could have on journals like *The New Republic* and *The Nation*, which are nearly bereft of advertising support, would be even more substantial. It is conceivable that these left-wing periodicals, recognizing a good thing, would carry free advertising supplements for Liberation products in the launch stage, later charging a fee that would lower their own prices, raise their circulations and bring political marketing to more people.

Published by Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository, 1971

Their soap will clean you as well as ours, but Liberation Brand helps clean up the community.

Don't just wash your hands:



Buy
Liberation
Soap

A Contribution to the Democratic Process

In many ways, political marketing can be seen as an opportunity to add new dimensions to the meaning of democracy in America. It would create a mode of decentralized decision-making, an alternative forum for political activity to the over-centralized Washington arena. It would enable consumers to give selective support to different groups in the society, not only through the Liberation brand name in general but also within the family of Liberation products.

Political marketing is actually more democratic than electoral politics, for democracy ultimately depends upon the concern, support and respect that citizens show for one another. If one man is ten times more concerned than another, democratic society cannot afford to restrict that concern to the yanking of a lever on a voting machine. A just, cooperative society must allow the fullest expression to those who have the greatest cooperative impulses. Political marketing enables every consumer to take effective political action every day by purposefully utilizing the time and money which he presently spends on self-centered consumption. He would "vote" as often as he shopped, and he would shop as selectively as he cared.

As a system of redistributing income, political marketing is more democratic than taxation. Taxpayers feel that a large portion of what they earn and therefore "deserve" is taken away and given as hand-outs to "people who won't work as hard as they do." In a sense, the complainers are right: there is no joy in giving to others through the taxation system. Money is demanded peremptorily, and one has little effective control over its use. And the taxes fall hardest on those people barely above the poverty line. Political marketing, in effect, asks those who are the most willing to shoulder the financial burden of helping the disadvantaged. Since liberals and radicals in his country are preponderantly upper-middle-class, such a system would represent a fairer distribution of the burden. It would be fairer, too, because it would be voluntary.

enable more people to choose more freely, but we cannot know or predict what use they will make of their choices. My own hope is that we would learn how to live cooperatively. But this proposal is not a magic formula that will make man cooperative. It is only a system that would make possible experimentation in the construction and development of cooperative counter-institutions.

I suggest that one prototype consumer marketing organization be established. Others will learn from its successes and mistakes. When additional C.M.O.'s arise—supporting, perhaps, new towns, communes, rehabilitation communities similar to Synanon or Daytop and even conventional businesses converting from defense work, as well as C.D.C.'s—we may be able to build a nation-wide organization within which we can find abundant opportunity to be free men making free decisions.

Conclusion

Political marketing specifies no ultimate political state. Rather, it suggests ways in which commercial relationships can be more equal, more authentic, more cooperative and more capable of incorporating non-materialistic values. What people would do with those improved relationships is not for us to decide. Through applied psychology, we may be able to create conditions which will