Sugar Profit Too Much

To the Editor:

I find your Sunday editorial "Sugar Ain't That High" very disturbing. I am wondering if the attitudes and fallacies expressed there are as unacceptable to others as they are to me.

The assertion that "people...are over reacting..." to a profit of 1.200 per cent on sugar is astounding. Surely people can be expected to over react to a 1,200 per cent profit during an inflation which threatens to overturn our entire economic system.

Profit, according to Webster and our generally accepted use, is "the excess of the selling price of goods over their cost." The 1,200 per cent profit, then, was realized after the raw product had been paid for, and refining and marketing costs, taxes, labor, transportation and capital investment allowed. If short supply and large demand did, as you suggest, cause an outrageous profit, was any part returned to the grower in the form of higher payments for his efforts? Did the farm and factory labor receive any part of the windfall? Published explanations so far are unsatisfactory to a thoughtful person.

The cliche, "It's not the cost, it's the principle," is an automatic reaction to your remarkable statement: "In comparison to other food prices, 49 cents a pound is still a bargain." Have the profits on other food items you mentioned, margarine, produce, been as exorbitant as that on sugar? If so, this should be disclosed to the consumer. The argument that we can afford these items is no justification for excessive profits. No one in our economy suggests that equitable profits are unfair or immoral. But a profit of 1,200 per cent is not an equitable profit. Any industry dealing with those necessities of life, food, housing and basic clothing, cannot realize more than a reasonable and fair share of the consumer's income without the public over reacting in its own defense.

You further suggest that housewives buy refined sugar and bake at home. If we continue to use 100 pounds of sugar per capita annually, the food which the sugar is used is immaterial. In doing so we still contribute to inflation and the world food shortage. We cannot justify over-consumption or waste of such necessities of life as food and energy upon which depend the health and eventual survival of other human beings.

I think housewives are truly angered over excess profits, not the cost per se, of sugar. I believe many may begin to use corn syrup, sorghum, honey, maple sugar and artificial sweeteners even though these may cost more per unit than sugar, simply as a matter of principle. Faced with a world food shortage, many women will voluntarily reduce their family consumption of shortening, wheat, and sugar, turning to fresh and dried fruit, popcorn, juices and nuts for family snacks, and serving desserts only once or twice a week or for special occasions. To do otherwise would be a moral compromise for some of us.

Finally, the responsibility of a free press in a democratic society is to use its influence to preserve that economy and inform people of excesses against the public interest, not to rationalize or excuse these excesses. Your editorial overlooks the larger issues of ruinous inflation and world-wide food shortages and suggests that we maintain an excessive use of sugar. It is sick to suggest that we continue our extravagant addiction to sugar on the basis that we can afford it!

Lately the shadow of starving Indian children and living skeletons grubbing in the trash of Latin American barrios drifts around the kitchen with the scent of the food I prepare. The clang of the garbage can lid sounds disturbingly like an echo of the word "Bangladesh." Even though our budget will buy sugar, Mr. Editor, I'm wondering if I can really afford it. Or if I even want it.

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Alliance