

Tekst 7

The bottom line

Book Reviews

The Wal-Mart Effect

Charles Fishman

Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 294pp, £12.99

Reviewed by Martin Vander Weyer

Salmon used to be a luxury for the average American family, but nowadays it is a weekly staple – because Wal-Mart sells fillets of it for as little as \$4.84 (£2.66) a pound. The fish are farmed by the millions in the fjords of southern Chile, processed in low-wage factories there, and freighted unfrozen to arrive pink and gleaming, within 48 hours of being killed, on the counters of thousands of Wal-Mart superstores across the US. The price per pound, Charles Fishman points out in this well-researched book, is less than the postage it would cost you to mail the fish back to Chile.

The impact of that price on American grocery bills and eating habits, on the economy of Chile and on the ecology of a distant corner of the Pacific polluted by industrial quantities of fish food and faeces, is what Fishman calls the “Wal-Mart effect”. It is, in his view, neither wholly bad nor wholly good – but it is very, very big. The Arkansas-based chain, founded by Sam Walton in 1962, is not simply the biggest private-sector employer and the biggest retailer in the US. Its low-price strategy, so influential that other stores follow suit even when they are not direct competitors, plays a principal role in holding down US inflation; its relentless demand for low prices from suppliers has been a major driver in the disappearance of US manufacturing jobs to China and elsewhere.

But it is a relief to find that Fishman is not just another journalist on a mission to expose Wal-Mart as a monstrous conspiracy against the little guy. Fishman is clearly troubled by Wal-Mart, but he exercises an open mind. He recites the long list of cases against Wal-Mart for using and abusing illegal immigrant labour, and for buying goods from cruel third-world factories, but he acknowledges that the company now has a clear code of conduct for suppliers and a – relatively small – team of inspectors trying to make it stick. He repeats accusations that Wal-Mart is excessively secretive and that its employees and suppliers speak to the press at their own risk, but he accepts that there would be no profit for the company in giving away valuable commercial data.

He reminds us that other supermarkets and vast numbers of downtown grocery stores have gone bankrupt because of the arrival of Wal-Mart’s soulless giant sheds. But he observes that Wal-Mart is not simply a predator. It does not just lower its prices until the competition has been destroyed, then raise them again: it keeps them low, as its slogan says, “always”. And that is why even customers

35 who declare themselves in surveys to be “conflicted” – actively disliking Wal-Mart for its impact on communities and jobs – still shop there more than once a week, spending almost as much as those who declare themselves to be Wal-Mart’s “champions”.

40 In effect, Fishman concludes, Wal-Mart does nothing more sinister than sell a \$3 item of merchandise for \$2.97. The frugality and determination that have enabled Wal-Mart to do this consistently for 44 years are largely to be admired, even if they include forcing suppliers to install toll-free phone lines so that Wal-Mart does not have to bear the cost of calling for deliveries. Sam Walton himself, an authentic American hero of capitalism, drove a dog-chewed pick-up long after he became a billionaire.

45 Yet Wal-Mart today is no longer the company that Walton left behind when he died in 1992. It has multiplied in scale and reach at home and abroad, acquiring unprecedented market power – and this angers unions, environmentalists and journalists. 22, its managers do not have a secret plan to rule the world; they just sell as much cheap stuff as they can. If there is anything sinister in that, it is
50 the hypnotic effect it has on American shoppers. They happily bought Wal-Mart’s \$2.79 gallon jars of pickled cucumbers even though they could not possibly eat them all. When the price of underpants was slashed, they bought astonishing quantities and stockpiled them.

55 In an era of excessive over-consumption, don’t blame Wal-Mart for the “Wal-Mart effect”: blame its customers, especially the “conflicted” ones.

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<http://www.newstatesman.com>

Tekst 7 The bottom line

- 1p **16** Wat is de belangrijkste functie van alinea 1 van de tekst *The bottom line*?
- A De aanleiding noemen voor het schrijven van deze tekst.
 - B De hoofdgedachte van de tekst kort samenvatten.
 - C Het belangrijkste onderzoeksresultaat van het in de tekst besproken boek uiteenzetten.
 - D Het tekstonderwerp inleiden met behulp van een voorbeeld.
- 1p **17** What are lines 13-18 ("The Arkansas-based chain ... elsewhere.") meant to illustrate?
- A How Wal-Mart has managed to become the leader in its field.
 - B That Fishman's book is about Wal-Mart's position in the US only.
 - C That Wal-Mart plays a key role in the American economy.
 - D Why Fishman is mainly positive about Wal-Mart.
- 2p **18** Geef voor elk van de onderstaande beweringen aan of deze wel of niet in overeenstemming is met de inhoud van alinea 3 (regels 19-28).
- 1 Fishman used only one source to collect information about Wal-Mart.
 - 2 Fishman passes a balanced judgment on Wal-Mart.
 - 3 Wal-Mart has often been accused of exploiting its employees.
 - 4 Working conditions at Wal-Mart's supply companies have deteriorated.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- "Wal-Mart is not simply a predator" (regel 31).
- 1p **19** Welk argument geeft de schrijver voor deze bewering?
- 1p **20** What kind of customers are "'conflicted' customers" according to paragraph 4 (lines 29-37)?
Customers who
- A buy a great deal at Wal-Mart but have moral objections to some of its company policies.
 - B come to Wal-Mart for the best bargains but shop at other grocery stores as well.
 - C often shop at Wal-Mart but suspect the company of not giving them enough value for money.
- "Sam Walton ... a billionaire." (lines 42-44)
- 1p **21** What is the function of this sentence?
- A To criticise Wal-Mart's extreme meanness.
 - B To illustrate the mentality underlying Wal-Mart's financial policy.
 - C To point out that Wal-Mart's founder remained a conservative man all his life.
 - D To show how difficult Wal-Mart's first beginnings were.

1p **22** Which of the following fits the gap in line 48?

- A** Besides
- B** Consequently
- C** In short
- D** Still

“the hypnotic effect it has on American shoppers” (regel 50)

1p **23** Vat kort samen wat dit effect was volgens de voorbeelden in regels 50-53 (“They ... them.”).

1p **24** Which of the following agrees with Martin’s review of Charles Fishman’s book *The Wal-Mart Effect*?

- A** It is full of facts and anecdotes but does not take a stand.
- B** It is highly informative and refreshingly objective.
- C** It is rightly critical but overlooks the shoppers’ responsibility.
- D** It is well written and justly praises the company.