

PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Not All Consumers Remain Consumers

"Who Is a Consumer? An Analysis of the Politics of Consumer Conflict" by David Vogel and Mark Nadel, in *American Politics Quarterly* (Jan. 1977), Sage Publications, 275 South Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills, Calif. 90212.

Shifting allegiances often slow enactment of "consumer" legislation by Congress. Groups on the "consumer" side of one issue may jump to the "business" side in other, seemingly similar circumstances. Vogel, a professor of business administration at Berkeley, and Nadel, a staff member of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, analyze recent congressional struggles to prove their point.

Six years ago, initial support for a Consumer Protection Agency, later renamed Agency for Consumer Advocacy (ACA), came from "middle-class reformers" and organized labor. But the "reformers" soon bogged down in internal debates over an issue raised by businessmen—whether a single federal agency such as the ACA could effectively act as a watchdog over other federal agencies without creating administrative chaos. ACA has yet to get through Congress.

The labor unions—members and leaders—as "consumers" are usually strong advocates of protection against corporate power. But when tariff legislation comes up on Capitol Hill, they switch to industry's side and see themselves as "producers" whose livelihoods would be threatened by foreign low-wage competition.

Federal "no-fault" auto insurance provides a case in which an industry's self-interest has caused a producer-to-consumer switch. During the late 1960s, insurance companies joined lawyers in opposing the accident liability plan under which an auto owner's insurer paid damages, no matter who was at fault. By the early 1970s, however, many insurers found that without "no-fault" they were themselves consumers of increasingly costly legal services. The insurers switched; "no-fault" now has a better chance of congressional passage.