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# 'We the People: The Market Basket Effect': Film Review

10:40 AM PDT 4/25/2016 by Frank Scheck



Courtesy of FilmBuff

**THE BOTTOM LINE**  
Perfectly geared to the current political climate.

Tommy Reid's documentary chronicles the employee and customer boycott that ensued after the beloved CEO of a regional supermarket chain was ousted.

It's rare for documentaries about corporate greed to have a happy ending, but it's true of Tommy Reid's film about the 2014 corporate battle within the New England supermarket chain Market Basket that resulted in a walkout by thousands of its employees, a boycott by millions of its customers and a victory for its embattled CEO. Chronicling this real-life story with a Capraesque fervor, *We the People: The Market Basket Effect* is perfectly timed to capitalize on the current political climate.



The story technically begins more than a century ago, when Greek immigrant Athanasios Demoulas moved to Lowell, Mass., and opened a butcher shop. Offering its customers low prices and generous credit, the shop eventually became a supermarket, and then a chain of supermarkets run by his sons George and Mike. Mike's son Arthur, known as "Arthur T," later became CEO, while his cousin, "Arthur S," assumed a leading role on the board of directors.

The Market Basket chain, which had grown into a Northeastern powerhouse from the 1970s-1990s, prospered even further under Arthur T's reign. Following his grandfather's policies of offering low prices to customers and high wages to employees, he was enormously popular. The film includes testimonies from several longtime employees who ardently attest to their boss' generosity and compassion.

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But he was also known to be a tough and fierce business negotiator, and dictatorial in his management style with the board, who resisted his vigorous policy of reinvesting profits into the company and its employees rather than the shareholders. When in early 2014 his sister-in-law mysteriously switched her allegiance to Arthur S, it resulted in a Shakespearean-style power struggle that led to Arthur T's ousting.

And that's when the real drama began, with a grass-roots movement developing in the summer of 2014 involving both the employees and loyal customers of the chain. The revolt, which resulted in the company losing some \$3 million a day, used a drawing of a giraffe for its logo, and the phrase "Stick your neck out" as its slogan.

Meanwhile, lower-income customers suffered as they were forced to pay higher prices in other stores. The situation became a well-publicized regional crisis, with New Hampshire's governor Maggie Hassan, interviewed in the film, comparing it to a "natural disaster."

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It all reached a happy conclusion when Arthur S, feeling the pressure, agreed to sell the company back to his cousin. Arthur T was reinstated as CEO, although he had to take on more than a \$1 billion in debt in the process.

Narrated by actor Michael Chiklis, who hails from Lowell, the film is more effective as an emotional appeal for better corporate behavior than a stringent analysis of the complicated scenario. Arthur T, who was dubbed by Bloomberg News as "America's Most Beloved CEO" offers only a brief soundbite, while Arthur S, not surprisingly, refused to be interviewed. The procession of talking heads that are on display — including journalists, authors, customers and others peripherally involved — are of varying interest, and the endless aerial shots of rallies, etc., eventually prove tiresome.

Nor can the film be accused of subtlety, with the segment about Arthur T's reinstatement accompanied on the soundtrack by "America the Beautiful." But considering how rarely the good guys win in corporate battles, the filmmaker's enthusiasm can be easily forgiven.

*Distributor: FilmBuff*  
*Production: NBTV Studios, Hammer Productions, Dundee Entertainment, Bunclow Media + Entertainment, Fortland Productions*  
*Director: Tommy Reid*  
*Screenwriter: Jeff Pinilla*  
*Producers: Nick Buzzell, Robert Friedman, Ted Leonsis, Tommy Reid, Paul A. Nero*  
*Executive producers: Mike Buzzell, Todd Hoffman*  
*Directors of photography: Stashç Sliński, Nick Girard, Justin Simpson*  
*Editor: Dan Halperin*  
*Narrator: Michael Chiklis*  
*Not rated, 98 minutes*

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