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Coke workers have a lot to lose

by Eleanor Brown
 SAINT JOHN (CUP) — The hand-lettered sign at the left of the door reads "Scab Alert: Hit a Scab Week". A list of 22 strike-breakers' names and addresses follows.

The message at the bottom

reads, "If you know or recognize any of these scabs, feel free to let them know how you feel. Ban the Scabs."

A walkout at Coca-Cola's three unionized New Brunswick plants — there are five in all — is going into its fourth month.

While management refused to comment, the union is in the middle of a drive to hit the soft drink bottler in the pocket-book. Residents of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are being asked to boycott all Coke products, and cans on Nova Scotia shelves all come from Brunswick Bottling.

"These guys (strikers) are average citizens," said George Vair. "They've never been in trouble with the law in their whole life. Now they're breaking windshields. The emotions take over."

And the representative of Local 1065 of the Retail Wholesale Department Store Union (RWDSU), headquartered above the Vern's Doughnut and Pastry Shop, blames strikebreakers for the scattered skirmishes in front of the Saint John's Brunswick Bottling Ltd.

"It's pretty hard when people go on strike — you're fighting for your job, then the employer brings in somebody and they take your job," said Vair.

But the strikers are not the only ones who occasionally resort to violence. In what may be the first such decision in Canada, an injunction against the

company forbids the assaulting of picketers.

The union says its members were assaulted by Brunswick Bottling employees. And on July 15, Mr. Justice Alfred Landry served an injunction which forbids management from harming picketers or counselling others to do so.

Grievances date from 1982 and include allegations of attempted union-busting and unwarranted mass firings.

According to shop steward Dave Brown, company owner Ralph Hawkes hired his friends to replace unionized workers.

Brown said a spring bargaining session saw management attempt to remove seniority provisions from the contract. Employees in Moncton, Saint John and Edmundston walked out May 28.

Saint John's fifteen strikers are feeling the pinch. A court order restricts the number of picketers to ten and the blue-collar workers are receiving \$100 a week in strike pay. The other union locals in town are being

encouraged to "Adopt a striker" and match their take-home pay.

Shop Steward Brown said the strikers can stick it out.

"Nobody's put a time limit — we can hold it indefinitely," he said.

The workers have a lot to lose. According to New Brunswick law, strikers can be fired without penalty. Twenty-eight employees province-wide have already lost their jobs.

"The boycott is the only thing that's stopping (the owner). We're putting economic pressure on him (to negotiate)," Vair said.

"We're willing to talk on any issue, with the exception of seniority," added Brown.

Brown said 50-year-old employees who lose seniority and get fired will never be able to find new jobs because they are too old for today's employer.

And Brown said the Coke boycott is working. Production is down, sales are down and some major food chains have agreed to purchase Coke products from Newfoundland.

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Boycott

COKE

by Eleanor Brown

S SAINT JOHN (CUP) — The striking employees at three New Brunswick bottling plants are asking students in the Maritimes to boycott Coca-Cola products.

"The only way they can win the strike is to put as much economic pressure as we can on the company," said Dave Brown, the shop steward for Local 1065 of the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU).

Coca-Cola products include Coke, Schweppes, Minute Maid, Sprite, Pure Sun, Fresca, Fanta, Five Alive, Tab and A&W.

The company ships its soft drinks throughout New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and to parts of Nova Scotia.

The strikers say the boycott is already working. Major food chains in New Brunswick with the exception of Sobeys are not

promoting Coke.

Distributors in Bathurst, New Brunswick, Halifax, and Cape Breton are buying their supplies elsewhere.

An industry spokesperson said other soft drink companies aren't increasing production loads.

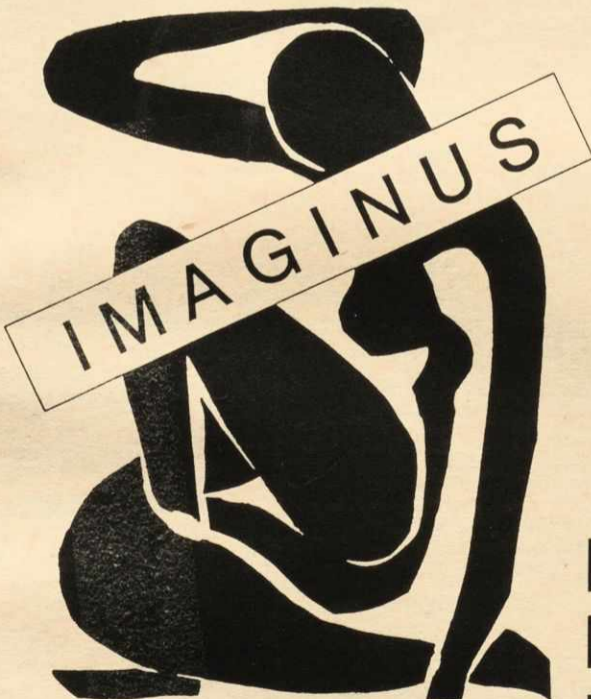
"The boycott hasn't hurt (competitors) — but they certainly didn't go out and take advantage. If the shoe was on the other foot we'd like to think there'd be no mud-slinging from the other side."

According to RWDSU officials, shipments to the Saint John plants have fallen from a high of ten or 15 loaded trailers a week to six.

"We see the boycott as being effective. We feel we can win — they cannot continue to operate this way," said union representative George Vair.

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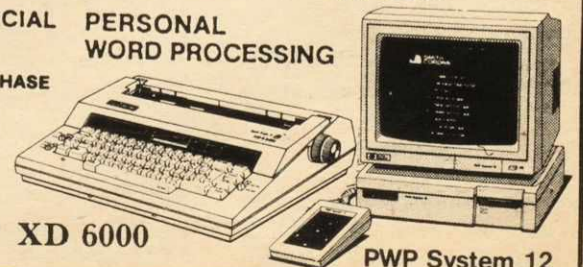
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