

No Struggle As Boycott Intensifies

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Molson's Attack Story

The recent Canadian student article supporting Quebec in their subsidiary of and calling for a on products, has in the Breweries' to.

"The Molson Victims", first McGill Daily in bed the fight for safe working 64 employees of Cowansville, 60 eal.

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the dispute is the provides a low uses for workers ace of production ed basic level of this "incentive" unbearable, the ads to debilitating idents.

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the Vilas dispute as picked up from by the features n University Press to appear in the al student news-gional meetings of the Atlantic and

Quebec then endorsed the boycott, and several student newspapers across the country have since announced they will no longer run Molson's advertising.

REACTION QUICK

Since news of the Vilas dispute and the Molson's boycott had been largely confined to Quebec and not received much attention elsewhere in the country, the Molson Company was quick to react when the article started appearing in the student press.

Company Vice-President, Public Affairs, G. Alex Jupp began visiting student newspaper editors in Montreal and Toronto to put the company's side forward, and to condemn the article as "the most erroneous one-sided piece of misrepresentation that has ever been seen in a university newspaper."

Jupp claimed the Molson Company "has absolutely no desire to interfere with the freedom of any paper to publish what it wishes" but that Molson's, and the student press, had been "victimized" by the CNTU affiliated union representing the Vilas workers.

His approach shifted, however, when he spoke with members of the CUP national executive in Ottawa. In a series of telephone conversations, Jupp repeatedly referred to opinions expressed by Molson lawyers that the article might be potentially libelous. He also made a pointed suggestion that CUP might be the target of a lawsuit. Jupp's request that CUP advise its member papers who had not yet run the article to refrain from doing so was rejected, but he was assured CUP would report on the Molson position when it was made available. He then prepared a 10-page "rejoinder" which, he claimed would clarify the situation at Cowansville Vilas, and refute the basic claims made in the earlier pro-union article.

Industry Accident Prone

Neither Statistics Canada or Labour Canada have any comprehensive data on the frequency of work accidents in the Canadian furniture industry. The Workman's Compensation Board in

Quebec City, however, does have informatin on accidents in the industry in Quebec.

According to WCB figures, the general rate of accidents in 1974 for all industries in the province was 26.6 per million hours worked. For the furniture industry, the rate was 72.5 per million hours worked, almost three times the general rate.

The problem with the WCB informatin is that no breakdown is available to compare the accidents rates in industries which are based on incentive pay systems and those which are not.

Consequently, there is no way of telling how much the difference in accident rates is due to the incentive pay system in the Quebec furniture industry, and how much is due to the nature of the tasks involved - cutting, sawing, sanding etc.

The Molson's rejoinder suggests that there is nothing at all dangerous about the incentive system. Union officials, however, claim that the rate of accidents in plants operating on the incentive plan are "at least" 3 to 4 times those which operate on straight hourly wages.

However, based on the data supplied by the WCB in Quebec City, it is possible to conclude that workers in the furniture industry are about three times more likely to suffer accidents than the average worker in the province.

Sweatshop Conditions

A spokesperson for the 2 million-member Canadian Labour Congress stated in a telephone interview that the CLC strongly oppose incentive systems, calling it a "throwback to 19th century sweat-shop conditions".

Molson's explanation of the incentive system is contained in the rejoinder: "The incentive system essentially rewards workers for their efforts expended, according to a pace which they establish themselves, in the context of a system which reduces the need for continual supervision".

Just how the furniture system "rewards" workers for their efforts has already been covered in the section above on wages. The reference to the work pace as being set by the workers themselves is also pure rhetoric. Furniture workers aren't there to engage a hobby, but to make a living. The cost of living is something they have no control over. As it increases, the incentive system demands that they increase the pace of production, whether they like it or not.

But the incentive system is well described as one which "reduces the need for continual supervision". Indeed, this is the essence of the system. The "boss" doesn't have to check periodically to make sure people aren't slacking off. The pay system does the "bosses" work automatically and is omni-present each working minute of the day.

Not only does the incentive system make the "boss" omnipresent all the time, it pits worker against worker where part of the productive process are dependent on one another, and completely destroys the co-operative nature of productive labour. And because it stresses "individual" efforts and isolates each worker, the incentive system is totally anti-thetical to the basic egalitarian principles that unionism is founded on.

Under the incentive system, the fast worker cannot have concern for those who cannot maintain the specified pace; on wages, all workers must be treated and paid equally for performing the same job for the same length of time.

Because the incentive system represents an attack on the dignity of labour and on basic collective principles, the Vilas workers are not alone in their active struggle against it. At the present time there are no less than 6 other strikes in progress in Quebec over the same issue. And, according to CNTU officials in Montreal, the union movement in Quebec is committed to actively supporting every worker's struggle where incentive pay schemes are under attack.

The Vilas struggle is very important, however, because a victory for labour there would set a precedent which would force other furniture manufacturers and other industries to abolish the incentive system. As one union official put it "workers have always dreamed of abolishing incentive programs, but only recently has it become realistic to actively struggle for this goal."

What can students do? We can boycott Molson products individually by refusing to buy them, and collectively by refusing to stock them in student unions, student pubs, and at student organized functions. And, through our own media and outside media contacts, we can bring the message to others, particularly to trade unionists in our communities.

What will this do? It will put pressure on the Molson's Company. Maybe Molson's will then decide to direct their full attention to arriving at a just settlement of the Vilas dispute instead of wasting their time publicly condemning the union and harrasing media which dare to explain the worker's just demands.