

Company's prejudice, unfair labour practices cited

Coors faces gay boycott

by Jennifer Feinberg
Canadian University Press
MONTREAL (CUP) — The Adolph Coors Company and Molson Breweries are denying allegations regarding Coors' labour practices, although gay and other groups are still determined to wage a successful boycott.

"Our efforts are geared toward stopping the flow of money to Coors, but it must be made clear that Molson's as such is not a target," said Thomas Burnside, an official of the ad hoc boycott coalition. Molson's brews Coors products in Canada.

A letter from Molson's head offices refutes published criticisms: "Coors does not practice hiring and employment discrimination based on sexual orientation... does not search personal property or use lie detectors to check on sexual practices... does not support it... being boycotted by black, Hispanic or gay groups."

"Coors reached agreements some time ago with these groups (blacks, hispanics and gays) regarding minority hiring and community promotions," states the Molson letter.

Burnside said many groups in Toronto and San Francisco are still boycotting Coors products despite company claims. American gay groups and labour federations have boycotted Coors since the late 1970's.

"Official policy on boycotting Coors in Canada varies from one organization to the other," he said. "And although some gay bars still carry Coors, their customers rarely if ever buy Coors."

Nigel Crawhall, a member of McGill University's gay association, said they are impressed with initiatives of Concordia University's gay community to organize against Coors. A boycott of Coors at McGill dances is being considered, and members may distribute literature on the subject.

While support for a Quebec-wide Coors boycott grows, company officials say many criticisms are no longer valid.

John Meadows, director of community relations for Coors in Golden, Colorado, said the company no longer uses lie detectors to screen employees.

"Lie detector tests are no longer enforced, in fact, they were stopped about a month ago," said Meadows. "They outlived their usefulness. But we did introduce mandatory drug testing of potential employees about a year ago, like many companies in the States," he said.

When Coors attempted to make donations to the San Francisco Gay Tavern Guild in 1985, the money was rejected outright. According to the U.S.-based Lesbian and Gay Alliance, guild representatives were outraged by the offer, calling it "blood money".

That same year, Coors attempted to clean up its image with other minority groups by buying boxing equipment for Hispanic youths in Denver, reproducing paintings of black figures in history, and financing a documentary on a blind runner, according to the New York Times.

Recently, Coors has sponsored a task force on AIDS awareness, and has introduced affirmative action policies and clauses against discrimination based on sexual preference.

Meadows said Coors is using a \$190 million advertising budget to boost its all-American image.

"That is what public relations is for, to correct negative images that aren't real," he said. "Labour leaders in the States call our programs supporting minorities 'white-washing', but we don't think so. Only labour and gay groups are still boycotting us, and with labour its because we are a non-union

brewery."

But the American-based Coors Boycott Coalition in Santa Rosa, California, says that the practices that forced the Brewery Workers to strike in 1977 are still in force today, including searches by a private security force.

"Internal security does have the right to search employees if they have reason to suspect something, but searches have been used maybe three times in the last 10 years," said Meadows.

"In effect, you fit into the Coors mold or you are out," said Burnside.

"This makes it even more important that we bring attention to the Coors situation here in Quebec and throughout Canada. The American boycott has been apparently so successful that Coors has been forced to move into new market areas, read Canada," he said.

Many groups say the Coors dynasty has played a central role in establishing and bankrolling such influential right-wing organizations as The Heritage Foundation and The Committee for Survival of a Free Congress.

One leader of the latter group is quoted in the book God's Bullies as saying, "I know what you and I feel about these queers, these fairies.

We wish we could get in our cars and run them down while they march."

Meadows admits that vice-chairman Joseph Coors is one of the founders of the Heritage Foundation, but argues, "Even our friends at Anheuser-Busch, Coca-Cola, GM, and Kraft contribute to Heritage."

"But Coors is not a supporter of the Moral Majority. Once in 1979, Holly Coors, wife of Joseph, contributed about \$500 to them, but that was the extent of it," he said. "And yes, Joe Coors did give financial support to Ronald Reagan's campaign, and labour groups criticize that because of his anti-union attitudes."

"But to support somebody financially doesn't necessarily mean you support all of their policies," added Meadows. "We're not perfect, but the ultimate solution is to change attitudes."

Burnside hopes to build a network with groups across Canada, and to win a mandate from Concordia University to support the boycott.

"The documentation that I've accumulated on Coors will hopefully give a complete picture of what Coors really represents," said Burnside.

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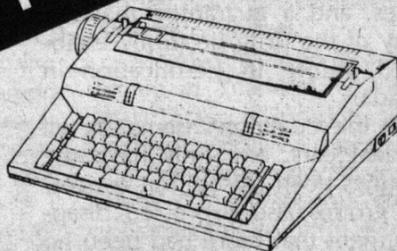
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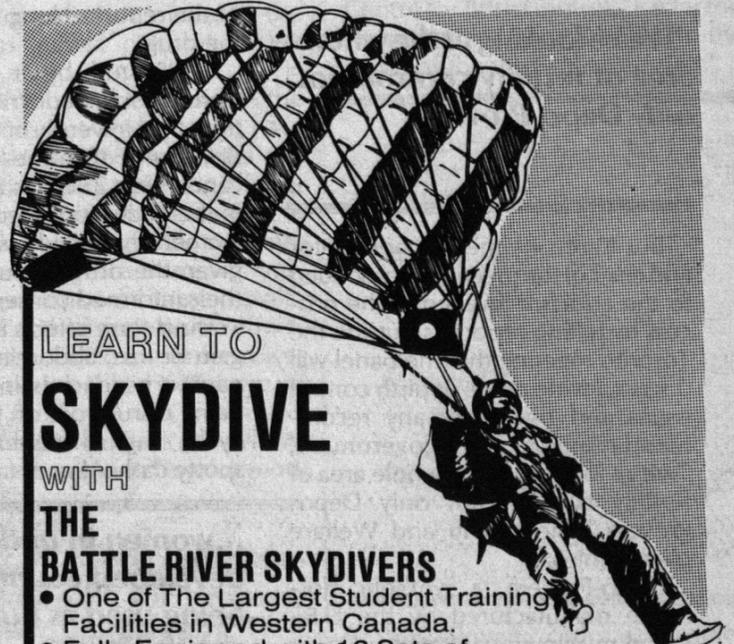


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