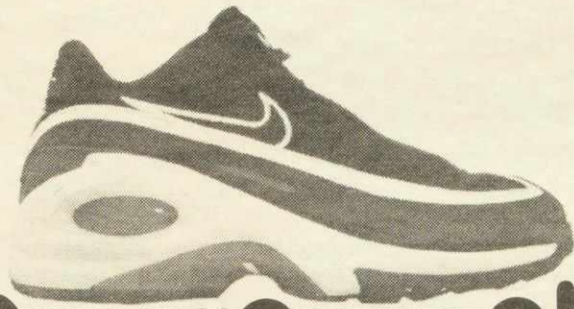


SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT



Nike, environment, and social activism in one breath?

BY MELANIE WRIGHT

The shoe distributors known as Nike have been at the centre of critical evaluation over unsafe working conditions for employees as well as harming the environment. The Nike corporation has about 500 plants in 45 countries including Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, China and Korea. The indigenous workers, mostly women, are apparently paid a wage which is normal for their country.

In response to criticism Nike has openly accepted their plan for "Corporate Responsibility" to address social and environmental concerns.

I attended a seminar on the issue at the School for Resource and Environment Studies (SRES) entitled "Nike and the New Environmental and Social Activism," with speaker Scott Wood. Having no clue whether Mr. Wood would take a pro or anti-Nike

stance, I expected and prepared myself for an evening filled with facts on Nike's atrocities against the environment and its employees. But my assumptions were wrong — the seminar took a positive approach.

Scott Wood has been at Dalhousie since 1964, and is a professor of Environmental Studies. Interestingly, he is also on the board of directors for Nike Canada.

According to Mr. Wood, Nike has recently been working on improving the methods used to make their running shoes. Since 1994, Nike has banned the use of solvents Benzene and Phenol, which are known to give off harmful toxic vapours. Wood claims that "80 percent of the solvents used in [new production] processes are water based," while prior to this change in production, volatile chemicals were used instead.

Other steps towards helping the environment have also been adopted. Shoes are now recycled, and made with new materials that will break down easier. Apparently, parts of used sneakers have been broken down and reused in furniture and the flooring for playgrounds.

Obviously, it would be somewhat difficult for Nike to perfect all their products in all their factories given the size of the corporation.

Nobody is perfect. However, that cannot be an excuse for pollution. Wood recognized problems with overseas environmental standards, as companies must comply with regulations within each country in which they are located. That itself can be a problem, especially when some companies take advantage of lacking environmental standards in foreign countries.

In the increasingly global economy "government has less and less ability to control the companies which have no mechanisms of accountability" said Wood.

This is essentially why the average person can make a difference. Since not all companies have strict environmental standards, protests can be effective in changing their practices. Protesting can be in the form of writing to the companies to show your concern for environmental degradation. Also, a company can be hurt in the market place. If people simply refuse to buy products that are not environmentally friendly then companies will have no choice but to change.

According to a pamphlet I reviewed from the seminar, Nike is reviewing all their products and assessing their impact on the

environment and on society as a whole. In addition to the current policies, Nike also has a Forest Resources Policy. They claim that they avoid purchasing wood or paper products from "native old growth or frontier forests." It appears that Nike's action on environmental issues is not as narrow as some might think.

Though the seminar focused more on social issues than environmental issues concerning Nike, this was mostly due to the content of audience questions. Despite this, I left the seminar with the sense that Nike is progressing in the environmental protection department. Perhaps the extensive public criticisms of Nike's previous atrocities has served to head Nike in a positive direction with respect to the environment.

Yet, many people are still very critical of Nike's actions. The internet is saturated with sites which are decidedly anti-Nike. People claim that Nike's environmental and social activism campaign is simply not up to par.

However, in the words of Wood, "Nike pledges to respond fully and completely to any complaints. I think Nike is doing a good job in addressing issues." But then again, he is on the Nike board of directors.



DID YOU KNOW?

Even though there is a special *Gazette* Buy Nothing Day feature out (shameless bit of advertising there) — I figured that you just can't get enough of a good thing. So for this week's tip on how to tread lightly upon the earth, here's some suggestions for pro-Buy Nothing Day activities:


- how about not buying anything? Become conscious of your consumer excesses, and then exercise your consumer power.
- write a letter to any of the many 'corporate evil-doers' to let them know you'll be boycotting their products because their poor environmental/employment/social justice standards.
- if you feel strongly about quashing our culture of consumerism, plan a Buy Nothing Day action — it's all about creatively cultivating consciousness around the issues.

But most importantly, take a long hard look at how much you buy, what you buy, and who you are buying it from. Think about where you could decrease your consumption to save the earth and a human culture free from corporate control. Choose alternative products to encourage a shift in societal meaning.



A wise man once said, you must initiate the change you wish to see in the world. His name was Gandhi.

ASK GREEN GIRL Environmental blues? Email me greengirl@Xweb.ns.ca



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DOWNTOWN DESIGNATED DRIVER ESTABLISHMENTS

Boomers Lounge, 1725 Grafton St.
 Breakers Billiards Club, 1661 Argyle St.
 Cheers Lounge, 1743 Grafton St.
 Dooley's, 1657 Barrington St.
 Jerry's Pub, 1717 Brunswick St.
 JJ Rossy's Bar & Grill, 1883 Granville St.
 Lawrence of Oregon Pub, 1726 Argyle St.
 Lower Deck Good Time Pub, Historic Properties
 Maxwell's Plum English Neighborhood Pub, 1600 Grafton St.
 Mercury Restaurant & Lounge, 5221 Sackville St.
 Merrill's Cafe & Lounge, 5171 George St.
 Mexicali Rosa's, 5680 Spring Garden Rd.
 My Apartment, 1740 Argyle St.
 Pacifico Bar & Grill, Salter St.
 Peddler's Pub, Barrington Place Mall
 Reflections Cabaret, 5184 Sackville St.
 Rogue's Roost Restaurant & Brew Pub, 5435 Spring Garden Rd.
 The Attic, 1741 Grafton St.
 The New Palace Cabaret, 1721 Brunswick St.
 Thirsty Duck Pub & Eatery, 5472 Spring Garden Rd.
 The Speakeasy, 5640 Spring Garden Rd.
 Your Father's Moustache Pub & Eatery, 5686 Spring Garden Rd. layout

Check out a complete listing of participating bars the third Thursday of each month in *The Chronicle-Herald*