

Quebec students stop exclusive cola deals

By Cristina Campisi
Source: The McGill
Daily (McGill
University)

MONTREAL (CUP)

- Student opposition to exclusive beverage deals at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and Université Laval has led both universities to cancel their cola contracts.

The move is making some students hope the same thing can happen at McGill University.

Student protests at UQAM began last November when the university signed a

10-year, \$5.9-million exclusivity deal with Coke. More than 60 students were arrested, while both the University's teachers' and employees' unions came out strongly against the deal.

Despite the lucrative benefits the deal would have brought to the University, it was cancelled because the administration decided it would divide the UQAM community.

Similarly, in a recent referendum at Laval an overwhelming majority of students rejected their university's plan to give either Pepsi or Coca-Cola exclusive rights to pop sales on their campus. Following the vote the Laval administration decided to suspend the plan.

Daniel Vigneault, a protest organizer at UQAM, said there are many reasons for overwhelming student opposi-

tion to the Coke deal.

"Over consumption is a major problem and students inevitably buy more when pop machines are readily available," said Vigneault. "Course material could also be at risk as universities become further dependent on the private sector."

As for the loss of much-needed funds, he replied, "The government should be responsible for funding education."

Vigneault and other students believe the cancelled deal is an example of students' successful ability to mobilize. And students at McGill are now wondering if they too can hold a referendum on their own exclusive cola deal.

"If there are problems with the deal, and if democratic voices are in opposition to it, they must be addressed at any time," said Mike Leitold of Corpwatch. "The student groups which have been a part of the consultation process are those groups which stand to gain financially, including faculty associations. The larger student population has not been a part of the process."

But Kevin McPhee, vice-president (operations) for the Students' Society at McGill University (SSMU), argues a referendum is neither realistic nor feasible.

"The best time for a referendum would have been a year-and-a-half ago when the process began," he said.

Nevertheless,

McPhee admitted that if the majority of students were in opposition to the agreement it would have been difficult for the administration to pursue the deal, as was demonstrated at UQAM. He also indicated that students have been involved in the process through the faculty associations.

A major concern voiced by McGill's Law Students' Association and Science Students' Association is that SSMU lacks full party status in the agreement.

Without full party status, the Students' Society cannot properly protect the rights of its members.

Since the terms of the deal are currently kept secret its consequences for student rights are not known. Given McGill's recent bookstore deal - which prohibits faculty associations from holding their own book sales - it is possible that the cold beverage agreement could inhibit student groups from fundraising through bake sales and sponsorships.

Increased funds and sponsorship remain the incentive behind the Coke deal, said McPhee.

"Once government funding increases we won't have to look for alternatives, but for now, the money generated from the agreement is a positive alternative that can be used to fund bursaries, sports teams and so on," he said.

But McGill Physics Professor Shaun Lovejoy is worried about exclusivity deals on campus.

"Commercialization has been visible for some time, from the advertising in the university bathrooms to the growing corporate presence" on campus, said Lovejoy. "But it also shows itself at the research level and the hiring of faculty level where commercial interests hold enormous and growing influence."

Lovejoy also observed that the federal government's White Paper, released last May, proposed that universities be required to include the marketing of goods and services as a "core" mission in their charters. This would, in effect, force professors who are prejudiced against the private sector to commercialize their discoveries, according to Lovejoy.

"Even without this bigger picture the justification for the Coke deal is pretty sorry and is quite revealing about the working of the higher administration," he said.

"On the one hand we are not told the exact value of the deal, which will probably be between \$50,000 and \$100,000 a year, [and] is peanuts compared to McGill's overall budget and deficit. While [McGill] Principal Shapiro justified this by saying he would do about anything to get more money, this money is coming out of students' pockets via increased beverage consumption."

Currently, the McGill Association of University Teachers, the organization that represents McGill's academic staff, has not taken a position on the Coke deal. □

Federal education funding won't intrude on provincial rights: Dion

By Chris Bodnar
Source: Ottawa
Bureau Chief

OTTAWA (CUP) - Stéphane Dion, federal minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, says Ottawa will continue to fund education through its own program, while simultaneously respecting the role of the provinces to take overall responsibility for education.

In an exclusive interview with Canadian University Press, Dion said the federal government is supporting post-secondary education through the Millennium Scholarship Foundation, but added that the provinces are ultimately responsible for deciding what is taught in the classroom.

Provincial governments have accused Ottawa of ignoring its responsibility to provide more core funding to post-secondary through federal transfer payments.

The federal Liberals have cut health and education transfer payments to the provinces by \$7-billion

Education Funding

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