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Smith Committee Votes 7-2 to Exclude Coca-Cola From Beverage Contract Bidding Process; School Awaits Decision by Senior Staff

On Friday, April 27th, Smith College's Soft Drink Advisory Committee voted 7-2 to recommend that Smith not renew its exclusive 7-year contract with Coca-Cola Inc. and ban Coca-Cola from the soft drink bidding process. The recommendation has been forwarded to the Senior Staff, who have pledged to reach a final decision within 30 days.

The decision comes after a 3-year campaign led by Smith student group Coke off Campus to ban Coca-Cola from Smith due to its labor, environmental, and human rights abuses in Colombia, India, Turkey, Indonesia, and other locations. The Smith group is affiliated with an international movement, led by the Campaign to Stop Killer Coke and United Students Against Sweatshops, which has responded to calls from the Colombian food and beverage workers union, SINALTRAINAL, to campaign for institutional boycotts against Coca-Cola.

SINALTRAINAL appeals to universities and unions to work in solidarity for their demands regarding freedom to organize. Also, the union demands Coca-Cola takes responsibility and pays restitution for assassinations of 9 former organizers by paramilitary groups contracted by the corporation in Colombia

"We're really proud to go to a school that would take this step," said senior Emma Roderick, who has been working on this campaign since her first year on campus. "We hope the senior staff comes to a decision before students leave campus for the summer."

The Soft Drink Advisory Committee consisted of student, faculty, and administrative representatives. The committee spent two months researching Coca-Cola's labor rights record in Colombia and environmental record in India. Additionally, the committee was able to engage Coca-Cola's Director of Global Relations, Ed Potter, and Campaign to Stop Killer Coke's national organizer, Ray Rogers, in separate question and answer sessions.

"The committee worked really conscientiously to come to a decision," said student committee member Mary Burford. "The students are really pleased the school is living up to its rhetoric regarding social justice. We hope the senior staff approves the recommendation."

If Smith removes Coke from its campus, it will join over 40 other schools who have taken similar actions, including Hampshire College, Oberlin College and New York University.