

Coke vs. Pepsi: The Eternal Argument

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Okay, so we know Coke and Pepsi are both bad. They're both corporate entities that have well-documented cases of social justice abuses, both in the United States and abroad. But at Stony Brook University, we were concerned with *strategy*, and as a strategy, we wanted to hurt Coke's profits and image as much as possible. We never supported Pepsi, and have noted the dangers of an exclusivity contract in general.

Long-term exclusivity contracts are dangerous, because if a corporation ever commits unforgivable atrocities, the University is obliged to honor X amount of years of the contract. And be assured that if a union in Colombia called on a boycott of Pepsi for union busting, we would be launching a Kick Pepsi Off Campus Campaign as soon as the workers called for international solidarity.

But no workers in Pepsi's bottling plants have requested solidarity from international human rights activists. No active union has been organizing against Pepsi for nearly ten years. But SINALTRAINAL has been calling on Coca-Cola to meet their demands for almost that long. And as allies of this Colombian union, we kicked Coke off Campus to support their campaign.

Ideally, when we first started the campaign, we wanted to have local, more "healthy" options for our campus community. We didn't want another Corporation to grace us with its sugary, addictive drinks. But then reality set in—as tuition increases and students are forced to take on one and two jobs in addition to being full-time students, they need sugar and caffeine. So we got off our hippie high horses and looked for local soda companies.

But with a University of Stony Brook's size, we need a *lot* of drinks. Years ago, Long Island Beverage Corporation supplied our university, but we were smaller then. The University has grown to corporate size in the past ten years, and unless Administrators are willing to financially support an independent company, no local companies exist that are big enough to adequately supply such a large university.

We *want* to move away from the corporate model. We want to have local options. We really do. But these projects take time to develop, and it would be hard to sell unhealthy, sustainable options (like Coke) in a healthy, sustainable way (locally grown and produced).

The larger problem is that sustainable options are few and far between, and the immediate problem is that union workers in Colombia are being murdered, that the workers are calling for international solidarity, and that it's either Coke or Pepsi—which one do we choose?

Pepsi. We chose Pepsi. Our University now has Pepsi everything. Diet Pepsi. Pepsi with cherry. Regular Pepsi with Lemon. Fountain Soda Pepsi. Shirts with Pepsi logos.

Administrators smiling as they're drinking Pepsi. Students giving the thumbs up sign as they watch Britney Spears dance in Pepsi commercials. Maybe I'm exaggerating, but you get the point—instead of students becoming lifetime buyers of Coke, they're becoming lifetime buyers of Pepsi.

We know the situation isn't ideal, but at the same time, the Coca-Cola Corporation *lost* their cult-like following on our campus because of their labor rights abuses. We are increasing the pressure on Coke to work with SINALTRAINAL, shut down their Public Relations machines, and make a serious commitment to respecting worker's rights internationally.

And if we want to develop local alternatives, we need to start building them up in our communities, so that ten years from now, when Stony Brook (or any other university) has the chance to sign a new contract, Administrators will sign a contract with an independent company that contributes to the local economy. But if we're not willing to make these alternatives a priority and support a new, non-reactionary way of organizing, then we'll have corporations on our campuses forever.