

Just say No to SAKCoke

While the CRO's ruling is harsh, it's necessary in order to maintain some sense of order leading up to this year's contentious plebiscite question



ROSS PRUSAKOWSKI

With only a handful of days remaining until reading week and the escape it offers from the frigid wasteland that is the University of Alberta, thoughts have already turned towards Monday, 26 February and the kickoff to this year's Students' Union elections.

However, while this is the legal start of campaigning—the point when posters can go up and pamphlets can be handed out—it seems that the Students Against Killer Coke (SAKCoke) can't seem to follow crucial election rules. It's this flaw that's justifiably cost them enormously.

On Friday, more than two and a half weeks before elections are actually supposed to begin, Chief Returning Officer Rachel Woynorowski fined the No campaign for the plebiscite question that would extend the current exclusive beverage deal between the SU, University and Coca-Cola. At \$900, the fine represents 90 per cent of the No side's campaign budget. It's a massive, but entirely just, penalty for SAKCoke's violation of pre-campaigning rules that are in place to ensure that all sides and candidates have equal opportunity to express their respective positions.

For plebiscite questions like that of the Coca-Cola contract extension,

both the Yes and No sides are prohibited from putting up posters and stickers, speaking in classrooms or handing out campaign-related paraphernalia from the time the question is approved by Students' Council until the election begins. However, once the question was approved on 6 February, SAKCoke began plastering Coke machines with stickers and bulletin boards with pamphlets—about as flagrant a violation of SU election rules as there could possibly be, and something that justified the CRO's decision and subsequent fine.

This could have been a great example of the opportunities and avenues available on campus for freedom of speech and expression.

In her ruling, Woynorowski noted that a leader of SAKCoke and other members of the group indicated they would be running or helping to run the No side during the election. While it's noble that they feel strongly enough about the proposal to actively participate in the election, this only serves to underscore why the fine is the right decision.

As an organization funded by APIRG, SAKCoke has used student funds to print and distribute stickers and posters outside the period of pre-campaigning period.

This could have been a great example

of the opportunities and avenues available on campus for freedom of speech and expression. Instead, the actions of APIRG—a group that had an eye to participating in the election and that had, according to the written decision, been informed of the rules—are reprehensible and an egregious misuse of hard-earned student revenue. This also opens the door to questioning the principles and aims of APIRG itself.

While it's likely that SAKCoke or another party will appeal the ruling, it should be upheld to ensure that the fairness and transparency that the SU and students demand in our elections is preserved. The prohibitions on pre-campaigning are extremely clear and are backed up under threat of harsh punishment in order to ensure that students have fair and equal access to information—and so that a side can't simply win by outspending. If SAKCoke or other sides are allowed to flaunt these rules because of their fanatical opposition to proposals, it would degrade the quality and level of debate on the issues and ultimately hurt the student electorate.

As students themselves, the No side will be looking forward to a week of free time as well—time they'll need to do some serious thinking. How they decide to run the rest of their crippled \$100 campaign remains to be seen, but the No side, along with all other students, should take the CRO's decision as a signal that the Students' Union elections are going to be run as fairly as possible. Consider it a warm and friendly message to students escaping for Reading Week.

It's going to take more than 'action' to bring about real change



KAT HUTTER

Last week, students across Canada took part in a "National Day of Action," whatever that means. As it turns out, it was to protest being beset by tuition fees that leave them with massive debt upon graduation. But walking across campus in the days prior to the event, I noticed signs that spoke of "action," but with no other explanation besides a time and date.

I found this odd. Despite all of the possible definitions of the term, when we culturally literate North Americans come across a handmade sign referencing some type of action, we know it means we're being invited to a protest. But "action" on what, exactly? For what? Against whom? Eventually, I figured it out by searching online. But now, my question is, what use is this word "action" without some substance to back it up?

Words associated with the fight for social justice are very much linked to the popular stereotype of the hippy—you know, the granola-eating, hemp-growing variety. No one can deny

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that there exist particular cultures connected to particular political ideologies, and that subscribers to any political view tend to travel in the same social circles and use the same lingo.

When we have a culture of activists, we have to be careful about endowing the word "action" with too much meaning. When used as a substitute for the actual cause we're fighting for, are we implying that all action takes the form of a protest at a government building and uses the appropriate neo-Marxist jargon? Will it only be deemed a good or worthy cause as long as it's upheld by the counterculture culture? I doubt there are many activists out there who want their supporters to be unquestioning or uncritical of political discourse.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not against one taking action on a cause one believes in. I know that there are participants in such actions out there who fully research the issues using credible sources, and who consult both sides of a problem before they jump on the

political bandwagon (or solar-powered VW bus).

Those who wish to promote social change should consider that a more thorough presentation of their cause would probably convince more people that they have a valid point. Language that's ornamented with leftist clichés screams, to someone who doesn't identify him- or herself as a card-carrying member of the NDP, that the event in question is for, you know, Ani DiFranco fans.

In other words, action is a catchword that attracts people who tend to like action. Guess what: those who sing in the choir are already showing up at church!

If you would like to convince skeptical young intellectuals that your cause relates to them, how about appealing to their intellect. How about offering up real arguments about why, given the evidence that you have, they should support your cause. Or, as in the case of this particular event, how about at least being clear about what your cause is.

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