

Teamsters urge NCAA to drop Coke sponsorship

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Union Cites Labor, Human Rights, and Environmental Abuses

WASHINGTON - Teamsters rallied today at NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament games in Buffalo, New York; Lexington, Kentucky and Sacramento, California to urge the NCAA to drop key sponsor Coca-Cola. The union cited concerns about Coca-Cola's destruction of natural resources in developing countries, its worker and human rights abuses in the U.S. and abroad, and the elimination of good-paying U.S. jobs at Coke bottler and distributor Coca-Cola Enterprises (CCE).

Throughout the March Madness playoffs, the Teamsters will hand out leaflets informing NCAA fans about Coke's troubling environmental and human rights record-including Coke's possible contamination of water and farmland in India, a current lawsuit against the company for allegedly allowing death squads to murder pro-union employees in Colombia, and a record-breaking \$192 million Coke paid to settle a case involving widespread racial discrimination.

The NCAA has designated Coca-Cola as the first official NCAA Corporate Champion. Coca-Cola is a key sponsor of the tournament, and is paying the NCAA \$500 million in an 11-year beverage marketing and media rights deal reached in 2002.

"The NCAA should stand for what's best and brightest in college athletics, including fair play, integrity, and sportsmanship," said Jack Cipriani, Director of the Teamsters Brewery and Soft Drink Workers Conference. "Coke's record sure doesn't match those high ethical standards. A company that pollutes, discriminates, destroys good American jobs and may have played a role in the murder of workers is not a company that kids should be looking to as a role model. NCAA Tournament fans deserve to know the truth about a key sponsor of the games"

Here in the United States CCE, Coca-Cola's largest bottler, plans to eliminate and restructure thousands of middle-class jobs in the U.S. under a new business model. Coke and CCE are engaged in a concerted campaign to destroy job security, pension benefits and health care coverage for the workers and their families. In February, CCE announced plans for job cuts during an investors' telephone conference call despite Coke

executives portraying their economic outlook as "solid."

"For us, our members come first," Cipriani said. "But, with Coca-Cola and CCE, workers get the short end of the stick. All this while the current CEO of Coca-Cola was given a 2006 salary, bonus, incentives and perks in excess of \$20 million. And the former CEO of CCE was awarded \$10 million in cash, stock and other perks in his lavish severance compensation package. The NCAA truly tarnished its image of a fair player when it teamed up with Coca-Cola."

The Teamsters Union represents more than 14,000 Coca-Cola and CCE employees in the United States and Canada.

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