How your money funds prisons in Oz

Sodexho isn't just about cafeteria food

by Darren T. Robertson



Brendan Doyle Illustration / *The Brunswickan*

Women's prisons are reportedly deplorable under the management of Sodexho Alliance.

In North America, it is estimated that Sodexho Alliance (SA) rakes in $1.2 billion a year from students and their parents. What is so special about SA that warrants them to collect such revenues? They are on campuses all across North America, and putting your money towards turning a profit in the prison management industry.

In Canada, Sodexho Alliance gobbled up Marriott Management Services in 1998. The company went by Sodexho Marriot Services until the acquisition was complete, and now we know them as Sodexho USA.

So, what do we know about Sodexho USA? They are the leading food and facility management services company in North America, and administer the food services for UNB.They employ over 100,000 people in the corporate, healthcare, and education markets which includes food services, housekeeping, grounds keeping, plant operations and maintenance, and integrated facilities management. The parent company, SA, is based out of Paris. And aside from the practices listed above, SA is also into profiting from private prison management.

Why does a catering company own shares in the private prison management industry? The answer: profit. SA utilizes their profits from their campus food services and purchases shares in the profitable private prison system. On October 10, 2000, SA announced plans to sell its eight per cent stake in the world's largest for-profit private prison company, Corrections Corporation of America. This news came much to the delight of the student-based Not With Our Money!

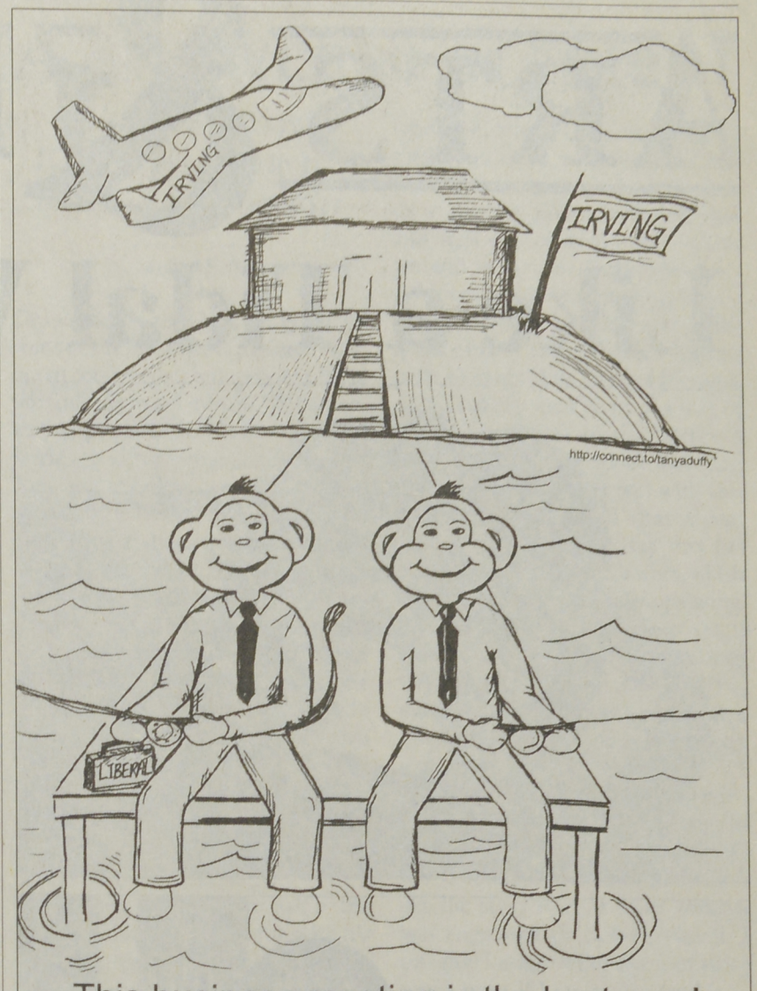
NWOM! is a coalition of students who lobbied to keep their campus-spent dollars out of the private prison management industry. The students joined to question SA's knowledge of "human rights abuses in private prisons, including brutality, denial of medical care and retention of prisoners beyond the time required by law." By forcing the hand of SA to sell its eight per cent stake, NWOM! scored a major victory. Or did they?

The joys of a capitalist system means a company can pull investment out of one region, and in turn invest in another region. This is what SA has done, softening the excitement of the NWOM! victory. SA turned its focus to private prison management in the UK and Australia. It has fully acquired the UK Detention Services and the Corrections Corporation of Australia, now renamed Australian Integrated Management Services. Despite the name change, prison conditions in Australia are deplorable under the management of SA. At one women's prison, there are reports of the forced medication of teenage girls, the first use of tear gas against women prisoners in the history of the state and extraordinarily high rates of self-mutilation and attempted suicide.

SA obviously defends its position, because it has the financial capabilities to do so. The reality is that we know this is not right. A company should not be allowed to sell its stake in human abuses in one region, only to increase the abuse in another. For whatever reason, SA must have thought North America would go blind once they divested their North American shares in the private system management industry. This is not the case. NWOM! continues to raise awareness and vows not to cease their campaign until SA has completely extracted itself from the U.K. and Australian private prison management industries. In North America, campus dollars are still funding the management operations in the U.K. and Australia. Considering SA owns 48 per cent of Sodexho USA (Sodexho USA generates 52 percent of SA's total revenues) we can be certain our campus dollars are being spent in the UK and Australia.

But what do we do about it? Admitting I have to take the easy way out, the easiest solution is to continue to raise awareness of SA's practices. We need to withdraw our support of SA, which I realize is not an easy task when they monopolize campus services. Students deserve better than to have what little money they possess fund human rights abuses over the world. Building on the momentum of NWOM!'s victory in October of 2000, we need to continue to expose SA for who they really are.

Darren T. Robertson is the environmental representative for the Fredericton NDP Club.



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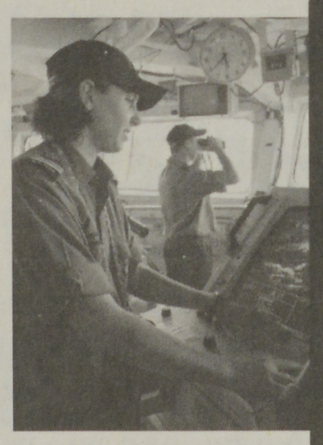
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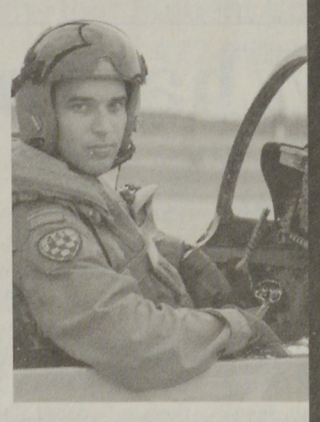
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