

# Newsbites

Compiled by A. Chisolm

## The Erotic Infobahn

Where can you get tips on secure and safe ways to tie up your loved one? Where can you get the dirt on the latest erotic films? Where can you get stories about absolutely anything? The answer is, of course, on the Internet.

As with many mediums, sex has become a very hot topic on the Internet. Newsgroups feature issues ranging from bondage, addiction, abuse, and sexuality in general. There are also groups dedicated to such subjects as pedophilia, bestiality, and necrophilia, as well as showing erotic pictures of children. This is where the controversy is beginning.

There have been calls for measures to control the content on the Internet, but no one can agree on what controls should be implemented, and if they are even necessary.

Some people argue that the Internet should be subject to the same regulations as television broadcasts -- as the information on the Internet is accessible to all, including young children.

Not all agree that censorship is the answer. Newsgroups can be invaluable source of information of a wide range of topics. One of the present advantages of the system is that all interest groups, including the gay community, can post to the Internet. Gays often at odds with censorship regulations. For example, Canadian customs officials regularly confiscate shipments to gay, lesbian, and bisexual bookstores.

The Internet poses difficulties in controlling it because it is so large and presently unsupervised. Perhaps the best way to control the Internet is through the users themselves. Users who find groups offensive should make that clear to other users.

## White supremacist seeks "Girl Friday"

A job posting at the Carleton School of Journalism has been temporarily suspended because of the employer's alleged white supremacist connections.

The job was posted Feb. 16 under the title of "Wanted: Girl Friday" and sought a research assistant for a book on media censorship. Fourth year journalism student Estelle Taylor was interviewed for the position, and became concerned when the author, Ian MacDonald began asking questions about why Germany was attacked for its actions in WWII. "He kept complaining that the press was censored by these powerful lobby groups," says Taylor. "It was implicit that he meant Jewish lobby groups."

After the interview, Taylor began to research MacDonald's background. She found a book stating that MacDonald was once former policy advisor to the Grand Wizard of the Canadian KKK and had hosted a neo-Nazi and white supremacist rally in 1990.

Bob Rupert, the Carleton professor in charge of job placement and internships immediately covered the posting with a sign stating the job was being investigated. He will be looking for specific information on the posting that will warn students. "Just because I don't share the same point of view as the posting, doesn't give me the right to pull it down," says Rupert.

Ian MacDonald feels that the issue at hand is that a student has violated the trust of a potential employer by talking about the substance of an interview. He says that he now doubts the ethical integrity of Carleton students and would hesitate to hire one. He also disputes the contents of the book consulted by Estelle Taylor. "It is largely, but not entirely, the product of his (the author's) imagination."

Once Rupert has received a complete description of the job and the employer he will pass it by the University lawyers, and then post it.

By Jim Munroe (CUP)

Coffee steam rises from the counters of greasy spoons and past the windows of ivory towers. Every stratum of society has its coffee drinkers, brown rings replicated on financial reports and sanitation department memos like an official seal of unspoken community.

Since the coffee break was introduced at the dawn of the industrial revolution, employers have been supportive of the productivity-enhancing beverage. A mild dose of caffeine gives an energy boost to the blue-collared and speeds up the intellect of the white-collared.

Many creative people also regard coffee as an artistic fuel -- their muse-in-a-mug. Cafes house a culture of intellectuals and dilettantes, self-styled rebels and free-thinkers.

Paintings scar the walls, conversations spiral in ever-tightening circles and a poet sits and scribbles, scribbles and sips.

It's hardly a surprise that coffee is the drug of choice for many creators. It's mind-altering without being debilitating, and the coffee house is an ideal place for introverts -- it's possible to socialize without being too social.

Unlike most food businesses, cafes place less of a focus on turnover and consumption -- in other words, loitering is allowed. And at an average of a buck a cup, it's very affordable -- probably a big factor in its popularity among a segment of the populace not exactly renowned for its disposable income.

Spare the cost of a coffee?

But why is coffee so cheap? In relation to other beverages, the mug o' mud is a steal. Let's compare it to the colas marketed by Coke and Pepsi, which are comparable in price to coffee.

Manufactured domestically, these products are sugar water with minimal natural ingredients. Coffee, on the other hand, can only be grown at a certain elevation and climate, goes through complex processing from its plant state to its final brewed state, and must go halfway around the world from its Third World producers to its First World consumers.

No matter which way you do the math, it just don't add up. The amount of resources and labour that go into producing an end product that sells so cheaply means that someone along the way is getting screwed.

OXFAM, an international development organization which funds self-help projects in developing countries, says that people are paying for the hype rather than the help.

"The [corporations] have developed a preference for packaging," says OXFAM chairperson Meyer Brownstone. "People should be outraged that they're paying for the packaging and advertising and not the human labour."

Because the price of coffee is set at a world market price, the producers are not paid in terms of their labour, but in terms of what other people have decided their produce is worth.

This inequality of power naturally results in the coffee harvesters being ripped off. But there are also instances of more flagrant human rights abuse.

Guatemalan human rights activist Rigoberta Menchu documents such abuse in her autobiography. Her stories of her time on a Guatemalan finca (plantation) include getting doses of toxic pesticides as she was forced to continue working in the fields during crop dusting.

## A Jolt of Reality: Waking Up to Coffee's Impact

Because it was the only way peasants could hope to avoid starvation, these work camps were essentially run with slave labour -- keeping profits up for the plantation owners, and cost down for the coffee companies. Conditions eventually killed Menchu's brother: "...the corporal told my mother she could bury my brother in the finca, but she had to pay a tax to keep him buried there... We didn't know what to do. It was impossible to take the body back to the Altiplano. It was already starting to smell because of the humidity, the heat, on the coast."

Introducing North American money into a developing nation's economy is like giving a crowd of drowning people a single air canister -- the most vicious and brutal tend to survive and hoard it for themselves.

Even in situations that are less extreme than those described by Menchu, gross inequities still exist. Lisanne Morgan, leader of the Student Christian Movement at York University, went on an exposure trip to the Dominican Republic.

She explains that the independent growers would not sell directly to corporations, but that there were intermediaries who would sell to corporations in more convenient bulk amounts. Usually store owners as well, these middle men would pay the growers in credit. If the credit ran out between seasons, they would lend them money.

"They would end up paying 200 to 700 per cent in interest," Morgan said, which resulted in many growers being perpetually in debt.

"It functioned like a small version of the IMF (International Monetary Fund)," she said. "They'd say, 'Here, let me loan you money so you can pay back your debt to me and I'll charge you interest on it.'"

Both Nestle and Proctor and Gamble direct any questions regarding their producer's quality of life to public relations agent Dave Wilkes from the Coffee Association of Canada.

Wilkes cites excellent relations with growers and points to a Costa Rican conference and programs like 'Coffee Kids' as industry initiatives. But "quite frankly, it's hard to be aware of each and every situation," he says.

OXFAM's Brownstone sees the "excellent relations" as doing very little for the farmers. "In the case of a corporation dealing with a plantation, you have two giants collaborating in a mutually satisfactory way."


### Second Sight

Alton McEwen, president of Second Cup, deals with plantations on a regular basis. He says he "sources" 14 per cent of his stock directly.

That is, he flies to the plantation and deals with the owners in person. Asked about exploitation, he says, "I've seen absolutely nothing of it." When pressed, he suggests that if there were "instances", they were "small and isolated."


McEwen says, "Sometimes I ask myself -- where would these people be without coffee?" At times, McEwen seems rather envious of the Third World peasant. "They're happy as can be. I've picked [coffee] with them; they have their children out there. It's really quite pleasant."

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