

Concordia students stay away from Red Cross blood drive

By Derek Fong (CUP)

A Red Cross blood drive at Concordia University last week fell well short of its goal, probably because of a boycott organized by some groups on campus.

The poor turnout for the first day of the blood drive may be attributed to the boycott organized by the Concordia Queer Collective (CQC) and other student groups on campus. By 5 p.m. Monday, the Red Cross hadn't collected even a third of its goal of 225 units for the day.

The two-day blood drive was sponsored by the Concordia Engineering and Computer Science Association (ECA).

"We oppose the blood drive because of the way in which they discriminate against those wanting to give blood," said Joe Coombs, co-external co-ordinator of the CQC.

The CQC argues that some of the Red Cross' questions are discriminatory. They say that rather than asking people about sexual behaviour which could be considered risky, the Red Cross completely discriminates against an entire group.

"Each individual is different," Coombs said. The Red Cross "should be asking people if they have engaged in any activities which put them at high risk."

The Red Cross' criteria for determining whether a person is in a high-risk category, which the CQC especially opposes, reads as follows: "If male, having sex with another man, even once since 1977."

If the person answers yes to this question, his blood cannot be used in a blood transfusion. Coombs calls this pure discrimination.

"They simply say that what they're doing is protecting the blood supply and therefore the Canadian public," he said. "But what they're really doing is promoting stereotypes."

Faisal Hanafi of the ECA was not aware of a student boycott, but defends his association's sponsorship of the blood drive.

"I don't see any reason why we shouldn't be doing it," said Hanafi.

He added that the boycott "is more of a blow to the Red

Cross and to society in general."

Despite the CQC's objections to the blood donor questionnaire, a nurse working at the Red Cross blood drive said she sees this discrimination as a necessary precaution.

"We do some discrimination, but we don't have a choice," said Jocelyne Beaulieu.

She believes the Red Cross is justified in classifying homosexuals as belonging to a high-risk category as it protects the blood supply from contamination from the HIV virus.

She says it is very difficult for the Red Cross to accurately assess someone's risk level of having AIDS.

"A high percentage of the homosexual population is high risk," Beaulieu said. "It's the only reason [we have such criteria]."

According to her, the Red Cross is open to recommendations and is willing to revise its questionnaire.

She referred to an older blood donor questionnaire which considered Africans, Haitians and anyone who had "travelled to or lived in a country where AIDS is common" as belonging to a high-risk group.

The offending questions were removed after the Canadian Human Rights Commission suggested it.

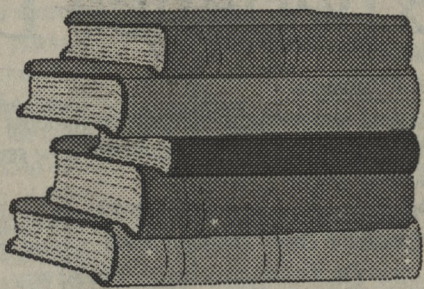
Beaulieu acknowledged that the Red Cross's discriminatory measures haven't helped the organization's blood drives. The Red Cross was hoping to receive 450 units of blood from the two-day blood drive.

The blood is destined for babies who need blood transfusions at Montreal's St. Justine Hospital. Beaulieu said the hospital desperately needs the blood.

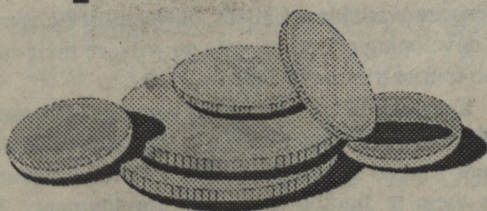
"It's a very bad thing for us because we need the blood," Beaulieu said, as nurses stood around waiting for donors.

She said she could not understand why people would boycott the blood drive. "If these people had a baby, they would not have a boycott." The University of Victoria has also boycotted the Red Cross this year because of its questionnaire, and is awaiting a British Columbia Human Rights Council decision on the issue.

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Rantings & Ravings

Ecotourism: Animal Care or Exploitation?

By Kathy Giesbrecht

Recently the IFAW was in Charlottetown taking anyone who could afford it out to the ice flows where the newly born harp seals are storing up fat to grow. The money raised is used to protect the seals and provide an revenue alternative to the money brought in from hunting. The visitors not only go to see the pups, but also attended lectures about their protection. The pups are spared, and money is still made-- sounds like the perfect solution, doesn't it? It sounds so perfect that government officials from numerous countries came to see what was going on. But is it really so perfect?

I went to the IFAW headquarters located at the Kirkland Motel and talked to a few people there. As well, I took home some of their literature. The booklet I received was not much more than a propaganda sheet to provoke terror and unfounded worry in people.

They claimed that seals are becoming endangered, the hunt is a mass slaughter and that the cod crisis is not caused by seals. The only one of those statements that is entirely true is the cod stocks. Seals have not caused the fish shortage. The hunt, I found out from other sources, is no more brutal than the methods they use for killing cows at an abattoir. Granted, it looks a lot worse because a little spot of red on a field of white stands out profoundly.

But disregarding anyone's opinions on hunting, this type of ecotourism doesn't exactly appeal to me. All of the tourists are allowed to hug and pet the pups, which to me seems quite inappropriate. If they want to protect the seals, they should let them learn a fear of man, not a friendship. I applaud the preservation of nature, but when people take things to the extreme, they often forget their original goal.