

Perspectives

Wal-Mart challenged with labor, price war accusations



Candice Carr
Columnist

I am writing to all of you UNCA students to ask the seemingly impossible. Please don't feed the monster. I know that Wal-Mart is cheap, but cheap prices mean that somebody got shafted — probably a whole lot of people.

A survey done by the National Labor Committee (NLC), a group that targets the use of sweatshop organizations, showed that 85 percent of Wal-Marts merchandise was manufactured overseas, according to a July 30 article in *The Washington Post*.

Sweatshop workers get paid cents per day, often under violent coercion and dangerously unhealthy conditions. How can we allow an organization that uses these labor tactics to continue hauling in billions of dollars in sales?

The Ethical Trading Action Group has also accused Wal-Mart for selling things made in sweatshops, often despite repeated claims

that they do not source from countries like Burma, although their imports from there have actually increased in the past year.

Even if you are callous enough not to care about the human rights violation, it is simply bad for the American workforce for America's largest retailer to import such a large percentage of their merchandise from other countries so cheaply.

When Nike, Tommy Hilfiger and other name brands sue Wal-Mart for selling imitations of their brands, Wal-Mart just pays the bill. They have a budget bigger than Sweden's. Wal-Mart is like cancer. They're only interested in growing, spreading and accumulating more. Their latest trend is to vacate their old "little" sprawl-marts and build massive mall-ish super centers. Perhaps this increases the amount of staff people walk out with that they did not walk in for.

The ultimate myth about Wal-

Mart is that people spend less money there. No, they spend more, studies show, than if they went to other stores. The reason is that they walk out with all sorts of junk that they saw coincidentally, and bought because "it was cheap."

I've done it — we all have — you go in for spray paint and batteries, and you come out with three bags of crap. Nobody needs glow in the dark dinosaur stickers, but they were only a dollar! Plastic watergun earrings made in China are really quite extraneous, but there they were near the checkout.

Let's face it, in comparison to the rest of the world, we Americans are rich. If we can't survive comfortably without forcing people to work in horrible conditions in the military dictatorships that our government supports, maybe our survival is really not going to go over so well with the other 95 percent of the world's population. Wal-Mart's smiley-face logo is the ultimate symbol of the greedy, ignorant and apathetic American.

In the local battle against the Wal-Mart super center, the score is 1:0, and Asheville is winning. The Board of Adjustments denied the requested variance (a variation from the Unified Development Ordinance, Asheville's zoning legislation) that would have allowed a 220,000-square-foot Wal-Mart

Super Center to be built on a beautiful green floodplain of the Swannanoa River that boasts massive old sycamores and cherry trees. Although three of the five board members voted for the variance, that was not enough to pass it. It would have needed 4 votes.

The battle for Asheville isn't over. The Wal-Mart corporation purchased the old Gerber plant on Highway 25 in Arden and demolished it. Usually they lease, but this one they bought, and plan to build a Super Wal-Mart there. Yes, the plans were originally to have two in Asheville. The Gerber plant area is already inundated with grocery stores and sprawl (easy customer base to steal by strategic underselling) and the traffic could quickly become a nightmare.

Super Wal-Marts include an entire grocery store, a fast food restaurant, and all of the other usual Wal-Mart merchandise, creating a true one-stop-shop and global nightmare.

Last week, Germany ordered Wal-Mart to raise its prices for household staples in the 95 stores it has there, as they have been aggressively underselling German stores, inciting a price war in which German chains illegally sold products below wholesale cost, according to a recent *New York Times* article. Wal-Mart is accused of "predatory

pricing" everywhere it goes.

In America, no one tells them to raise their prices, we just watch Mom and Pop go out of business, and we wave good-bye to true selection and ethical shopping standards.

Wal-Mart is one of the highest violators of labor-law regulations in almost every state. They employ people too young, too late at night and for too many hours without overtime. They offer low-paying jobs without benefits, and aggressively fight labor unions. After the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), a labor union, began their national campaign against Wal-Mart, Wal-Mart began to show a video to all of their employees about the "evils" of unions that are out to "attack you and your family" and "destroy America."

Wal-Mart is one of the largest initiators of urban sprawl, placing its stores halfway between two major hubs, encouraging driving, pollution, road building and strip-

malls. Because of their low, sprawling form of development, they are a giant space-waster.

I encourage you to read what the NLC and labor unions like the UFCW have to say about Wal-Mart, as well as the site sprawlbusters.com.

There is a small group of people at UNCA who are compiling a list of stores around Asheville that sell things for which people normally just go to Wal-Mart.

Just think — what did people do before Wal-Mart? What effect is it having on our community, and what effect would a Super Wal-Mart have? What would go out of business?

In this modern capitalist world where the economic system controls the political system, remember that your dollars are the real votes, so be careful whom you give them to. Money will determine the fate of the world. Will you vote liberty or death?

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The Blue Banner welcomes submissions of letters and articles for publication. All submissions are subject to editing for clarity, content and length, and are considered on the basis of interest, space, taste and timeliness.

Letters should be typed, single-spaced, and should not exceed 300 words. Letters for publication should also contain the author's signature, classification, major or other relationship with UNCA. The deadline for letters is noon on Tuesday. If you have a submission, you can send it to *The Blue Banner*, Karpen 244, One University Heights, Asheville N.C. 28804.

The deadline for display ads and the FYI calendar is Monday at 2 p.m. Classified ads are due at 5 p.m. on Monday.

Letters to the Editor

Investment club for students

Dear Editor,

We would like to thank *The Blue Banner* for this space that gives us the opportunity to put forward certain concerns and suggestions we have.

In the past few semesters, we have

become more aware of the increasing number of students who are searching for long-term monetary security, as well as those who work numerous jobs and still continue to face short-term financial problems.

What really concerns us about the latter is that many of them work odd demanding hours that really do not benefit them financially. They continuously complain about having an inadequate amount of money to spend or save. Are these

people are trying to solve their financial problems the hard way?

So what do we have to offer to our fellow students looking for long-term monetary security and those that continually face financial difficulty? A way of making your money work for you instead of you working for it. A new way achieving long-term financial stability. An opportunity to be a part of an investment club.

The UNCA financial investment

club is coming soon. There is an interest meeting on Thursday, Sept. 28 at 7 p.m. in the Highsmith Center Lounge. If you cannot make it to the meeting, contact us on phone at (828) 255-7176, or email: investment_club@hotmail.com.

Andrew Hainsworth
Junior, Political Science
Marasi Mwencha
Junior, Biochemistry

Finding heritage

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to Susan Ketner's letter commenting on the article "Students journey to Ghana."

Ms. Ketner and the *Blue Banner* readers should first know that I in no way made a 'comparison' between the quality of experiences of the white and African American students. The *Blue Banner* writer, at best, drew conclusions without

the benefit of my input. I am still at a loss in understanding what I said that would give the writer the impression that the two white students only went to have "great fun."

You should know, however, that I did talk at length about the African American students connecting with their African heritage, an awareness quite common among African American travelers to this part of the world. While I do not doubt that Susan Ketner may have experienced a more basic human connec-

tion with the Ghanaians, this is, quite likely, different from that much needed affirmation reported by those students able to construct, for the first time, a positive identification with Africa.

Since my interview with *The Blue Banner* was reflective only of my efforts in preparing the trip and what I had been told by some of the students, I recommended speaking with the travelers to solicit first hand each student's story.

As the history of North American slavery informs us, the chance to

connect a positive identity with blacks in Africa is a much needed salve for African Americans. Readers should get from Ketner's letter that she did enjoy and learn much, but should also know that what was experienced by the African American students was unique to them, and in no way was meant (at least by me) to diminish the significance of her own transformation while in Ghana.

Dolly Mullen
Assistant professor, political science

Theft prevention not invasion

Dear Editor,

It was much to my dismay that the news article "Students object to new program" that appeared in the Sept.

14 issue of *The Blue Banner* did not disclose all the facts.

As a police officer with more than 14 years of service, I fully respect the privacy of any private citizen and their personal domain. The article incorrectly stated that the S.T.O.P. slips were "slipped under the door or left in rooms".

I assure you and your readers that no dorm rooms were ever entered.

While I was making my "safety check rounds," if I found a student's dorm room open, I taped a S.T.O.P. on the front of the students' door.

At no time did I enter a student's dorm room with the crime safety tips flyer, nor invaded anyone's personal haven.

In the future, may I suggest your staff verify all the statements that are made to assure that all the infor-

mation received is accurate.

As always, we at the Public Safety Department appreciate the public service announcements your paper places for us as well as the events on the FYI calendar that pertain to safety issues.

Vicki Harris
Officer and victim/witness advocate, Public Safety Dept.

Free music fun or infringement?

Dear Editor,

Is Napster right or wrong to display mpeg layer 3s (MP3s) on the Internet free of charge? I thought about the possibilities of what each position had to offer.

Position one is that Napster is

right in distributing MP3s because it allows free information over the Internet to 20 million users (no wonder it's so slow). This in turn gives the artist more exposure to music fans out in the chaotic world of "corporate rock."

Position two is that Napster is wrong in giving away free MP3s because of the copyright given to the artist by the government and FCC. This, in turn, slows down record sales, which have declined

this year, and takes whatever little power the artist has in their hands and gives it to John Smith of Boredom, USA.

Both positions are fierce in their arguments, and I don't know which is right or wrong. Napster does give more exposure to bands and also takes some power of copyright away at the same time.

So I say let the artist decide what to do. Let them have the music or let it flow. Metallica does have the

right to decide on their music. They don't want it there? Then remove it. Limp Bizkit wants their music on Napster, so let it stay on.

Whatever the outcome, I'm going to download off Napster, no matter the length of time, and use a moral judgment to not download objecting artists to make sure their voice is heard a little step at a time.

Jason Moore
Freshman, undecided

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