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PAGEBC

MEC: the Co-op That Acts Like a Corporation

MEC is about as green as “Mother Nature’s Gas Station”, and now makes the un-coolest bike on the Canadian market. Don’t buy one.

By: Patrik Parkes

If it talks like a corporation, walks like a corporation, and acts like a corporation, then it must be a corporation. On June 12, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) held a “Bikefest” with a “free barbecue, entertainment and dance performances by... [a] bike-based dance troupe, clowns, some music and information.” You can bet the “information” had nothing to do with cycling, and everything to do with promoting their new line of bicycles. (And shame on the performers for joining this shameless corporate promo event.)

MEC has for some years now aimed to be nothing but big. It dominates the market for hiking and camping gear, and now aims to dominate the bicycle business as well. MEC is a master of greenwash, with little to show in terms of walking the walk. In other words, it’s about as green as Chevron, “Mother Nature’s Gas Station”. MEC sees no contradiction between its purported green, ethical mandate, and shipping products halfway around the world in smoke-belching freighters and employing factories in human rights deficient locations like China and Israel. MEC’s co-op credentials are further eroded by its moves to restrict members’ decision making input. So-called ordinary resolutions can no longer be made from the floor of MEC’s annual general meeting, and must be vetted first by Directors. Earlier this year, when I enquired about these changes, Sara Golling, Director and Chair of MEC’s Elections and Member Communications Committee, was unable to be clear on why vetting was necessary. When I asked if it might have something to do with an Israeli boycott resolution that was moved in 2009, she replied, “I doubt very much that had this year’s change in process been applied last year that the board would have acted any differently. We did not flinch from the vehemence of that debate, nor would we on any other debate where strongly held opinions are expressed regarding MEC’s business. That is simply not our history or culture.” Then why the change?

This was not my first encounter with Golling. Some years ago, she replied to a concern I had about MEC retail employees’ wages being not much higher than those at other comparable businesses. She seemed to think it was good enough simply that they were higher. Apparently it was of no concern they were inadequate in Canada’s high-rent cities. Perhaps this is because Golling has never had to survive on retail wages, or work in a Chinese factory making athletic wear. Upon a perfunctory look at their resumes, the same seems true of MEC’s other Directors. This might explain why human rights – and environmentalism – is for them simply a marketing tool. MEC no longer lives up to the expectations we have of co-ops, and should do the right thing and register as a corporation. In short, MEC now makes the un-coolest bike on the Canadian market. Don’t buy one

The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them. – George Orwell