

# American Apparel silences theatre group

## Optative Theatrical Laboratories kicked out of store after trying to stage an anti-consumerism scene

By Jacob Serebrin

A small group of theater activists attempted to stage a scene inside an American Apparel store on Friday.

The "culture jam," organized by Optative Theatrical Laboratories, was staged as part of Buy Nothing Day (BND).

"We chose to do American Apparel because they've kind of been passing as an ethical company because of one ethical aspect, they treat their employees fairly, which is good. But it's not really anything to give praise about. It's something that should be expected from a company," said group member, Jay Lemieux.

Nevertheless, American Apparel labelled the scene as nothing more than a publicity stunt staged by the theater group.

The group planned to perform what Lemieux described as a "mock commercial slash soft-core porno, because that's basically what their ads are."

When the group arrived at the

St. Laurent American Apparel store they were surprised to find that the company was ready for them.

"When we showed up to American apparel, there was about five or six undercover security guards there. So the second we showed up, they were already on to us, they knew what was happening," said Lemieux. "They had the element of surprise."

The group believes that one person who showed up at their meeting before the protest was actually a spy for the company, an accusation the company denies. The alleged spy went to the store with the group but after arriving began assuring store employees in removing the protesters.

"The next thing I know, I'm being shoved by the guy that I was just talking to and bonding with," said Lemieux.

The man later emerged from the store briefly and flashed an ID at the protesters before going back in.

Maurice Charney, president of

American Apparel Canada and father of the company's Senior Partner and owner Dov Charney, was at the store and accused protesters of lying.

"Is that the theatre you want to do? Go ahead and lie." Charney said.

One member of the protest group, Jason Mclean, who was playing Dov Charney, accused Maurice Charney of being anti-union.

"We're not anti-union" Charney responded.

The group claims that American Apparel fought a union in California during a union drive by the Unite Here union at their Los Angeles plant. Both sides accused the other of misconduct during the drive. There was no vote on unionization at the plant and charges filed against the company by Unite Here with the United States National Labor Relations Board were settled when the company agreed to post a document in the factory saying that it would not conduct anti-union activity.

The group performed their scene

on the street in front of the store, hoping they would draw attention to the company's advertising, which they claim exploits women.

However, the company said that their ads are no more sexual than Charney, who has appeared in the ads himself.

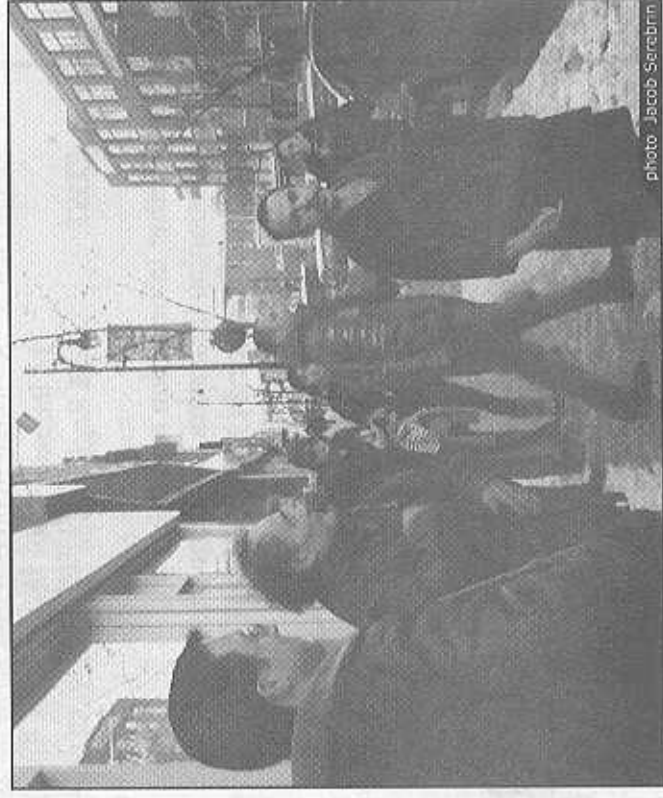


photo: Jacob Serebrin

A theatre group was escorted out of an American Apparel store after trying to stage a scene inside.