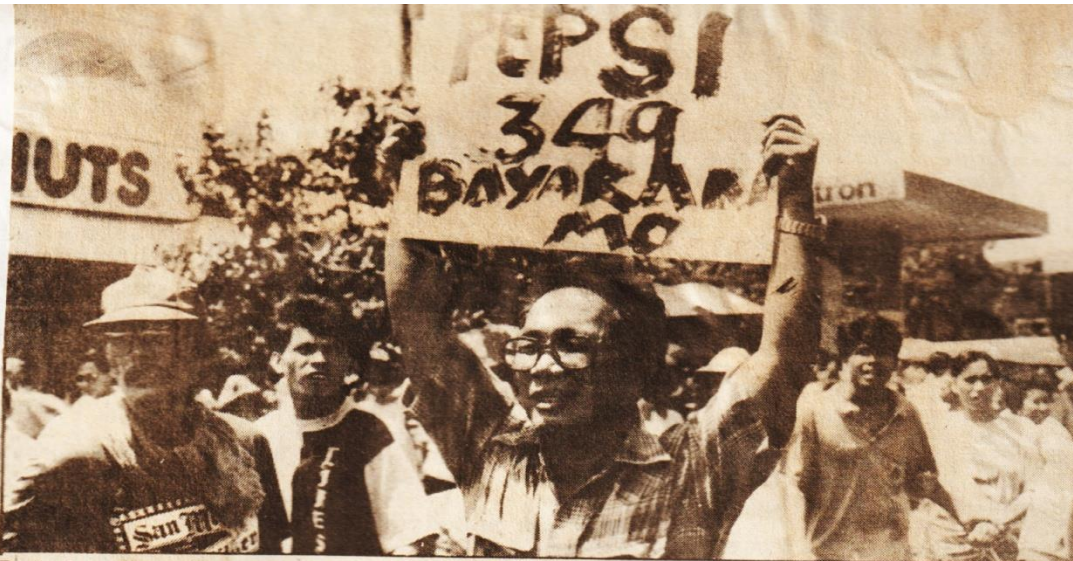




(ERNING MENDOZA)

The 349ers Holders of "winning" bottle caps in the controversial "Number Fever" promo continue to lay siege on the softdrink firm's Aurora Blvd. plant as Pepsi stands firm on its refusal to pay off. Others, however, agreed to surrender the caps for P500 each such as this man (inset) who settled for P7,000 for his 14 "winning" crowns. (Story on page 12)



Protesters demanding redemption of winning Pepsi crowns.

Staff photo by JOAN BONDOC

Pepsi: 'Number Fever' promo stopped

(Continued from page 1)

The trade department was also investigating to determine if Pepsi had violated advertising laws.

Thousands of winners had been swarming on the Pepsi offices on Aurora Boulevard, Quezon City, since Tuesday to demand redemption of their 349 crowns.

But the company told them that the flashing of the number 349 on television on Monday was an error and that the correct number was 134.

More than 100 winners went to the trade department on Tuesday to complain. One of those who believed they had won P1 million, Benjamin A. Palacol of Santa Cruz town, Laguna province, told a news conference yesterday that he was suing Pepsi for damages.

Others went to the Criminal Investigation Service yesterday to complain but a CIS officer who investigated the foul-up returned complaining that he was snubbed at Pepsi.

The officer, Chief Inspector Timoteo Zarcas, head of the CIS special investigation group, said the agency was studying whether to file a class suit against the soft drinks company.

Zarcas said he would go to the trade department to find a way of settling the controversy. He said he would try again to see Pepsi officials for an explanation and if they refused to honor the winning crowns "we will have no choice but to file a class suit against the com-

pany."

Following an order from Trade Secretary Lilia Bautista, Pepsi announced all the winning numbers yesterday. The winning numbers were 014, 036, 059, 064, 087, 091, 117, 132, 146, 163, 180, 199, 205, 229, 246, 251, 277, 284, 319, 347, 355, 358, 373, 388, 401, 425, 440, 466, 481, 493, 513, 529, 534, 565, 571, 587, 609, 613, 634, 658, 675, 687, 703, 716, 721, 750, 762, 798, 816, 818, 835, 854, 879, 890, 901, 936, 964, 978, 982, 996.

For the extension period, the winning numbers are 013, 046, 069, 116, 134, 173, 213, 243, 273, 349 (with correct security codes), 380, 404, 439, 506, 530, 585, 622, 674, 698, 713, 763, 806, 819, 927 and 977.

Bautista had demanded an explanation from Pepsi for the 349 crowns. Pepsi told Bautista that 349 was indeed on the list of winners for the extension of the "Number Fever" promotion but this number had a security code as safeguard against tampering.

The company said crowns with the same number also went out but they had the security codes L-2560-FQ and L-3560-FQ. These crowns were not the winning 349s, the company said.

According to Pepsi the winning 349s had different security codes, which could be verified from a list deposited in a safety box to which only Pepsi and the trade department had access.

The company said it would honor the 349s with the correct security codes, but not those bearing

L-2560-FQ and L-3560-FQ.

One of the protesters, businesswoman Leny Basano, said the advertisement for the promotion mentioned nothing about security codes.

"The advertisement mentions only winning numbers, not security codes," Basano said.

Pepsi president Rod Salazar said yesterday that to settle the controversy, the company decided to redeem the wrong 349 crowns at P500 each.

As of yesterday afternoon, 1,706 crown holders had accepted the consolation prize, the company said.

Luigi Tabuena, manager of entertainer Martin Nievera who, together with his wife Pops Fernandez, appears on the "Number Fever" television advertisement, described the foul-up as unfortunate.

"We don't feel good about what happened. But we don't think Pepsi wanted to fool anyone or try to pull a fast one," Tabuena said in a telephone interview.

"I called Pepsi and the [trade department] and asked them what happened and they said it was a mistake," Tabuena said. "There is no mystery regarding the security codes. It probably was not fully explained. As far as Martin and Pops are concerned, they still have faith in Pepsi. We think it's a good product and we are still behind it. We will continue to represent Pepsi. We hope Pepsi can rectify the error." (With reports from Dionisio Pelayo and Leni Sison)