

PARTICIPACTION COULD UNDERMINE PUBLIC SUPPORT

Recreation Canada, No. 34/1/1976, p. 41.

GARY LEVY

There are probably few people in Canada and fewer still in Saskatoon who have not heard of *Participaction*, the Canadian movement for personal fitness. It is dedicated to motivating people to become physically fit through the use of advertisements—newspapers and on television and radio. Despite the deluge of publicity, how much do we really know about this organization? Where did it come from? How is it financed? And most important, has it been successful in improving the physical fitness of Canadians?

**How are you going
to chase girls
if you're not
in shape?**



Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.

The first inkling that *Participaction* might be less successful than its promoters would have us believe came in a June 1975 working paper by the National Advisory Council on Fitness and Amateur Sport. The paper suggested, "if the federal government, in its wisdom, employs motivational campaigns which utilize behaviour modification techniques, then every campaign should be accompanied by sophisticated, rigorous, evaluative research designed to measure the effectiveness of the techniques." That is certainly a most charitable conclusion about an approach which puts a premium on high pressure salesmanship, glib exaggeration, oversimplification and outright gimmickry. Before considering exam-

ples from the Saskatoon campaign it is perhaps useful to give some background information about *Participaction*.

Over \$1,300,000 of federal funds in four years

The origin of the idea that physical fitness can be "sold" to Canadians like a box of soap can be traced to the *P. S. Ross Report on Physical Recreation* commissioned by the Trudeau government in 1969. That report indicated that Canadians spend as much as 85 per cent of their time in passive activities such as watching television or driving a car. To remedy this, the report suggested among other things, a "new approach to advertising" modelled chiefly on a system in the United States where most federal government advertising is handled through an organization known as the American Advertising Council which conducts public service campaigns (such as crime prevention, youth opportunities, etc.) on a voluntary, non-partisan basis. The council engages advertising agencies to do the creative work free of charge and approaches the mass media for contributions of time or space. The operating budget of the council is financed by sponsoring and constituent organizations and by voluntary contributions from American business firms. It receives no public money.

**Join
the Canadian
minority group.
The Fit.**



Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.



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The P. S. Ross Report noted that in Canada there was no organized system of handling public-service advertising. The extent of contributions to any volunteer campaign often depended less on the importance of the cause than on the pressures a particular volunteer agency was able to exert. As a result of conversations with people in the advertising industry, the report concluded Canadian advertising firms would volunteer a substantial contribution towards a campaign directed at improving the physical fitness of Canadians if they were approached by some non-profit, independent body. The study added, however, it was probably unreasonable to ask this body to parallel the example of the American Advertising Council by being strictly privately financed. Therefore, it recommended the federal fitness and amateur sport directorate "open negotiations with some of the leading members of the industry to enlist a contribution towards government advertising on behalf



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of physical fitness and recreation . . . If anything is to be accomplished on a broad basis, it will probably be necessary for the industry to form a new body."

The chairman of the National Advisory Council on Fitness and Amateur Sport, Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, was enthusiastic about this idea and recommended it to the deputy minister of National Health and Welfare who received approval from the Minister to proceed with the idea. The Toronto consulting firm of Break, Pain and Watt was engaged to do a feasibility study and concluded that the establishment of an organization to convince Canadians of the need for more physical fitness was feasible *given assurances of substantial government funding*. In 1971 Sport Participation Canada (Participation) was founded as a private non-profit company, although the federal government provided it with \$200,000 in 1971-1972; \$400,000 in 1972-1973; \$294,469 in 1973-1974; and approximately \$500,000 in 1974-1975.

Saskatoon to set the example for Canada

Participation differs from previous programmes mainly in the method it uses to promote fitness. According to its national co-ordinator, Russ Kisby, (see issue No. 30/2/1972), "the idea behind the formation of Sport Participation Canada dictates that the company . . . employ modern marketing methods to accomplish its goals." Participation does not deal with a single advertising agency, rather it engages various firms on a "cost plus" basis to do the creative work for its commercials. The company then approaches the media to donate space or air time for these messages. In mid-1972 a national advertising campaign was launched, and at the same time Participation decided on a pilot project where it could conduct an intensive campaign and monitor the results. The city chosen for this experiment was Saskatoon.

No doubt there were many reasons for choosing Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. *continued on page 45*

PARTICIPATION ET L'APPUI DU PUBLIC POUR LOISIRS

Gary Levy, qui est actuellement au service de recherches de la bibliothèque du Parlement, est originaire de Saskatoon en Saskatchewan, où il a vécu plus de 20 ans. Il a même joué au football avec les Hilltops de Saskatoon. Après avoir quitté la Saskatchewan, il a étudié aux universités de Carleton et de Laval, puis il a enseigné les sciences politiques pendant deux ans à l'Université d'Ottawa. Il est l'auteur d'articles et d'études sur divers aspects de la politique des sports et des loisirs au Canada.

Dans cet article, il décrit les événements qui ont mené à la fondation de Sport Participation Canada (Participation) en 1971, en commençant par le rapport P.S. Ross sur la *récréation physique* demandé par le gouvernement Trudeau en 1969.

Après avoir fait remarquer qu'en 1969, le Canada ne possédait pas d'organisme destiné à s'occuper de la publicité des services publics, (l'équivalent du American Advertising Council aux Etats-Unis), le rap-

port Ross recommandait que la direction générale sport amateur et santé entame des négociations avec certains des grands noms du monde de la publicité pour obtenir leur contribution au programme de publicité fédéral de soutien à la santé et aux loisirs. Pour que ce projet soit efficace, il fallait que le secteur crée un nouvel organisme.

En expliquant les méthodes utilisées par Participation, M. Levy cite le coordonnateur national, Russ Kisby (dans le numéro du 30/2/1972 de *Récréation Canada*) qui déclarait: "cette nouvelle compagnie privée utilise des méthodes de marketing modernes pour atteindre ses objectifs". La compagnie, qui dispose de fonds allant de \$200,000 à \$500,000 pour chacun de ses exercices financiers, s'assure les services de diverses entreprises à un coût minime pour ses travaux de création publicitaire. La compagnie communique ensuite avec les médias et demande que l'on passe ses messages gratuitement. La première campagne à l'é-

chelle nationale a été lancée vers la mi-1972 et on a choisi la ville de Saskatoon pour une campagne intensive, dont on contrôlerait les résultats.

La campagne de Saskatoon a débuté en juin 1972 par un sondage d'opinion de 200 familles choisies au hasard. D'après ce sondage, moins de cinq pour cent des personnes interrogées avaient fait un exercice physique quelconque durant les deux semaines précédentes, et la plupart des membres des 200 familles en question n'avaient pas fait d'exercice depuis plus d'un an. Après dix semaines de publicité intensive, une enquête téléphonique auprès de 300 personnes a démontré que 93 pour cent des gens avaient entendu parler de *Participation* et croyaient que c'était une bonne idée; de plus, 13 pour cent d'entre elles avaient fait de l'exercice au cours des deux semaines précédentes.

15 mois après le premier sondage de juin 1972 et après huit mois de publicité, une troisième enquête par téléphone a révélé que 18.5 pour cent des gens avaient fait de l'exercice au cours des deux semaines précédentes. Enfin, la dernière enquête, qui a eu lieu en mai 1974, après 17 mois de publicité continue, a permis de conclure que *Participation* avait remporté beaucoup de succès à Saskatoon. En effet, à ce moment-là, 82 pour cent des gens interrogés (300) avaient fait de l'exercice au cours des deux semaines précédentes et un grand nombre d'entre eux s'y étaient adonnés à plusieurs reprises. Monsieur Levy souligne ensuite les déclarations de Russ Kisby, qui faisait remarquer que *Participation* avait dépensé moins de \$5,000 de fonds provinciaux et municipaux tout en bénéficiant d'une publicité gratuite valant plus de \$500,000 accordée par les médias. D'autre part, des campagnes analogues devaient être lancées dans d'autres villes au Canada.

Au début de son analyse de *Participation*, Gary Levy cite un marchand d'articles de sport de Saskatoon selon qui aucune autre campagne de publicité n'avait eu d'effet semblable à celui de la campagne *Participation* sur ses acheteurs. L'auteur s'interroge sur la validité des méthodes de sondage utilisées, en ce qui concerne le nombre de personnes interrogées,

soit de 200 à 300, et du fait que le premier sondage a été fait en personne et les autres par téléphone. L'absence de mesure d'augmentation de l'activité physique est sans doute l'une des carences les plus sérieuses des sondages en question. En effet, l'auteur se demande si, pour certaines personnes, l'exercice ne consistait pas simplement à aller à pied jusqu'à l'arrêt d'autobus suivant!

Monsieur Levy soulève trois autres objections en plus du manque de précision des méthodes employées lors du sondage de Saskatoon. Selon lui, il est ridicule de conclure que des campagnes qui encouragent 60,000 personnes à parcourir deux milles par jour durant trois journées consécutives (dans un concours avec une ville suédoise) prouve leur bonne condition physique. Selon lui, *Participation* a employé des méthodes de marketing de produits pour commercialiser un concept et a ensuite mesuré son succès avec des normes utilisées pour des produits commerciaux. Pour mieux illustrer son point de vue, il souligne que l'exemple bien connu de *Participation* du Suédois de 60 ans et du Canadien de 30 ans ignore le fait qu'il n'existe aucune étude comparative complète de la forme physique des Canadiens par rapport à celle des citoyens d'autres pays.

Sa deuxième objection concerne le fait que, d'après les sondages de Saskatoon, moins de deux pour cent des gens s'opposaient aux campagnes de publicité. Gary Levy se demande quelle attitude le public adopterait si *Participation* devenait une grande controverse politique à cause de l'importance des fonds qu'elle reçoit du gouvernement fédéral. Il se demande enfin si l'on peut se permettre de dépenser les fonds publics pour de la propagande et souligne qu'il y a là un pré-

cédent permettant au gouvernement de subventionner des organismes privés encourageant des actions plus ou moins louables, que le public ne peut contrôler par l'intermédiaire de ses députés.

Bien que certaines personnes définissent la campagne de *Participation* comme éducative, l'auteur estime qu'il faut plutôt la classer avec le concept totalitaire selon lequel on ne peut pas éduquer les masses et qu'il faut plutôt les berner.

Selon le professeur Saul Ross de l'Université d'Ottawa, les habitants d'Ottawa semblent consacrer de plus en plus de temps aux exercices physiques, et ce, sans motivation extérieure. L'auteur déclare donc que le gouvernement devrait d'abord déterminer les motivations existantes, dont le travail réalisé par les services locaux, avant de consacrer de l'argent à tenter de modifier la vie courante des citoyens. Il parle également de l'exemple qu'offrent des gens actifs bien en vue comme Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

Selon le document de travail de juin 1975 du Conseil consultatif national sur le sport amateur et la santé, l'auteur estime que *Participation* risque d'avoir moins de succès qu'on ne le croyait d'abord. Selon ce rapport, si le gouvernement fédéral, dans sa sagesse, utilise des campagnes de motivation où l'on emploie des techniques de modification du comportement, il faudrait alors que chaque campagne soit suivie de recherches rigoureuses et sophistiquées visant à en évaluer l'efficacité.

Gary Levy termine son analyse de *Participation* en concluant que si les partis politiques peuvent accorder ces travaux à coûts minimes à une agence ou à une autre, ils risquent en définitive de miner l'appui du public pour les politiques légitimes de sports et de loisirs. ✓

Participation's billboard perhaps best known in English-Canada is that proclaiming "... the true north strong and free." with "strong" having been changed, graffiti style, to "soft." Here, the French-Canadian version.

**Occupez-vous de ce qui vous regarde...
gardez-vous en forme!**

**...marche, cyclisme, natation,
faites quelque chose!**



Keeping fit vital all year round

ACCENT on Participaction

How the neighbors reacted

ParticipAction gets support

Saskatchewan physicians braved sleet and drizzle, risk of cold feet. All in the name of fitness. The doctors, members of the Saskatchewan Medical Association representative assembly, interrupted their annual meeting Saturday to join the executive committee of Participaction. Saskatoon in a brisk walk for runs around several blocks. "Saskatoon without has the worst weather in Canada," Dr Sam Lande,

muscle chairman, told the assembly. That is why the city was chosen to be the test site of Canada's success of

do not appear to practice what they preach about physical fitness," said Dr. Monka. "When compared with society as a whole they are no more

even blocks) rather than the center. It is sure to make us aware of our own

Charles Shantz is a good thing emphasis on well there, sure a bit says

Why Saskatoon?

Saskatoon was selected for the test site of Participaction because the national steering

Saskatoon, or any other city, with money. The federal government is now



Aim of new plan is physical fitness

Saskatoonians will be first in Canada to begin the new year jugging, jumping and running in the spirit of "goya" to show their fellow countrymen it can be done.

The committee is made up of representatives from the medical profession, parks and recreation, the business community, mass communication, the

Fitnic scheduled for Father's Day

Saskatoonians are invited to pack a "fitnic" basket and walk, jog, ride their bikes or even take their cars to "Father's Day Fitnic" planned for city parks

"All of us distinction of nations in the company's na community rep launch of Particip

Mr. Kisby as physical fitness with Swedes found old Canadian mail

May 23, 1973



Taking a walk for ParticipAction

INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS ORGANIZE OWN PROJECTS

Schools in swing of things

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1973

ParticipAction widely known

Mr. Brantstetter said additional locations. Mr. Brantstetter said Segar Weaver Park, are being arranged for Segar Weaver Park, Dielenbaker Park and Nutana Kiwanis Park. These locations have not been confirmed

Fitness: 'Sad state,' says

Instead, they will project ideas and leave it up to the individual school to organize

average Canadian male of 30 are exercising more and playing more sports than other people. They eat more intelligently and have a superior standard of living, giving them more things.

Mr. Kisby said it will be a most difficult to create the general



Senior citizens ParticipAction Exercises

Fitness testing project starts at university

The University of Saskatchewan, in cooperation with National Participaction, Recreation Canada and Particip

Action Saskatoon began a five-week fitness testing research project today. The goal will be to test

visible core muscle possible to when the it

Getting in the swing

The Brantstetter family of 11 Summers Place got in the swing during walk, as did thousands of city residents, to the accompani

Facilities are not needed for personal participation



Mothers enjoy gym

Participaction is going strong at Brewster Park School where 83 mothers have enrolled in twice-a-week exercise classes for the month of February.

Participaction principal of his students. These exercises and Thursday response was on the role, than 30 mothers for the class ed by Dr. Brantstetter in instructor school

katchewan, not the least of them being its tradition of community pride and involvement in athletic and other accomplishments over the years. More important perhaps, it was at that time the largest city in Canada served by only one television station and one daily newspaper which meant it would be fairly easy to saturate the media with Participaction messages. In any case, in June 1972 an attitudinal survey of 200 randomly selected households in the city was commissioned. Among other questions it asked, "Have you done anything of a physically-active nature in the past two weeks, specifically for your health and fitness?" The survey showed that less than five per cent of those interviewed had done anything of a physical nature during that period. Other findings indicated that most members of the 200 households had done nothing physical for over one year, did not understand what was meant by fitness, nor realize how little time it takes to get fit.

**If your heart
can't do the job
who fills in
for it?**



PARTICIPACTION
The Canadian movement for personal fitness

Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.

"These findings on the beliefs of Saskatonians concerning their personal fitness condition, plus other findings obtained from this study,

On the adjacent page, a mock-up of some of the newspaper headlines from the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix — an indication of the press support achieved. Scattered throughout the article are examples of small print ads used in the Saskatoon campaign. All illustrative material courtesy Participaction.

Sur la page ci-contre, une illustration de certains des titres de journaux du Star-Phoenix de Saskatoon indique l'appui fourni par la presse. Un peu partout sur l'article, on remarque quelques annonces à petits caractères employées durant la campagne de Saskatoon. Matériel offert gracieusement par Participaction.

will be used by the Participaction and Saskatoon committees as they plan their educational and motivational strategy to get all people in Saskatoon more physically fit in 1973. To become Canada's most fit city is our goal and Saskatoon, as announced earlier, will be demonstrating to all Canada how to go about achieving this end."

Other cities to undergo a similar approach

The first step was to get as many people as possible to walk around their own block for fitness, on a cold January evening. Citizens' committees, schools, radio and television commercials, and newspaper advertisements all promoted the idea and in fact thousands of people turned out.

A few months later Participaction took a second survey in which 300 people were interviewed by telephone. This time it was established that after ten weeks of intensive advertising, 93 per cent of the population knew about Participaction and thought it was a good idea while only two per cent thought it was a bad idea. This survey also revealed that 13 per cent had been physically active within the previous two weeks.

In September 1973 a third survey was undertaken and it found 94 per cent of those interviewed knew about Participaction and what it was trying to accomplish. Again only two per cent thought it was a bad idea and they based their views "on the belief that the media should not try to tell the public what they should do." The survey showed that after eight months of promotion, 18.5 per cent of those interviewed indicated they had been active during the previous two weeks.

The final survey was taken in May 1974, again based on approximately 300 telephone interviews. It indicated 98 per cent of Saskatoon's adult population knew about Participaction and concluded "after 17 months of continuous promotions and special events, we find an amazing result. Over 82 per cent were active during the recent two weeks. The great majority were, in fact, active a number of times during this period. Participaction Saskatoon has worked!" Only two individuals

(0.1%) felt the Participaction project was bad mainly on the grounds that public money could be better spent. "In actual fact, all of the Participaction Saskatoon advertising, over \$500,000 in value over the past eighteen months, has been donated by the media in Saskatoon as their contribution to this project. Less than \$5,000 of provincial and municipal funds have been spent on administration."

**Don't think of it
as fitness,
think of it as
funness.**



PARTICIPACTION
The Canadian movement for personal fitness

Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.

Based on the results of this campaign a similar approach is to be tried in Peterborough, Penticton, Medicine Hat and other centres.

How fit is "more fit" in an anonymous telephone survey?

Participaction may have cost little in terms of local funds but what did it accomplish? A Canadian Press story quoted the manager of a large sporting goods store in Saskatoon as saying the promotion was the best of its kind he had seen in a long merchandising career. "Even good retail advertising can't measure up to the effect the Participaction campaign had on buyers." The experiment also proved conclusively that intensive advertising over an extended period can make nearly 100 per cent of the population familiar with a particular programme. On the basis of this and other surveys, Participaction claims over 30 per cent of the Canadian population can identify its logo and, given a few verbal hints, the number increases to over 50 per cent. Using this information, Participaction sold companies such as Colgate-Palmolive Ltd. and the Borden Co. Ltd. on the idea of buying exclusive use of its logo for advertising purposes in their particular industry. All this is very interesting, but what about fitness? It is true that during the fi-

nal months of the Saskatoon campaign more than 60,000 persons walked two miles a day in the three-day "Great Ga Lunka Lop"—a competition between Saskatoon and the Swedish city of Ulmea. But, was there any real improvement in the fitness of Saskatonians as a result of this and other Participaction gimmicks or advertising?

**Be the first
on your block
to be able to
run around it.**



Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.

Participaction claimed more people were active as a result of their campaign; but a look at their methods raises doubts about that conclusion. In the first place, their entire case rests on a sample of 300 people. In fact, the first survey consisted of personal interviews with 200 households while subsequent surveys dealt with individuals over the telephone. These factors alone would account for some of the differences in response. More important, the entire analysis is subjective, based on an individual's assessment of his or her personal activity. There was no definition of what constitutes physical activity nor any attempt to measure it. How many people

who answered in the affirmative may have done nothing more strenuous than walk to the second closest bus stop? Furthermore, common sense suggests that after the initial publicity about the unfitness of Saskatonians, many people may have said they were physically active (particularly in an anonymous telephone interview), if only to redeem Saskatoon's good name and help it reach its objective as "Canada's most fit city"!

No control through elected representatives

Aside from the questionable methodology employed in the Saskatoon project, there are at least three other objections to the motivational approach to physical fitness. First of all, to argue that the "Great Ga Lunka Lop" or other "Walk-Around-the-Block" campaigns indicate anything about fitness is about as ludicrous as claiming that "Tide" is superior to "All", as a laundry detergent, because more people use it. Participaction employed devices intended for the marketing of products in order to market a concept, and they measured success by standards used for commercial products. This not only makes their conclusion highly doubtful but has the effect of oversimplifying the exceedingly complex problem of how to measure accurately the physical fitness of a population. For example, their well known claim about 60-year-old Swedes and 30-year-old Canadians ignores the fact that no

comprehensive comparative study on the fitness of Canadians with citizens of other countries has ever been completed!

**In Europe
they call us
"Canada Fats".**



PARTICIPACTION
The Canadian movement for personal fitness

Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.

Perhaps the most knowledgeable person on this subject is Dr. Don Bailey of the University of Saskatchewan, and he would be the first to admit that different testing procedures, sampling selection, and data analysis are only a few of the problems that discourage really meaningful comparison.

The Saskatoon surveys indicated less than two per cent of the population objected to the advertising campaigns. But what if Participaction were to become a controversial political issue—not an unlikely possibility given the large amount of federal funds it receives, and the questionable evidence on which it bases its conclusions? A controversy over the relationship between Participaction and the federal government could, among other things, raise questions as to whether physical fitness is simply a front to drum up

PÉPINIÈRE

BRAUN

NURSERY

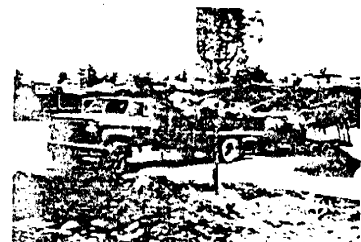
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The third objection relates to the thin line between public relations and outright propaganda. While any government has the right and duty to make its programmes known to the public, it is less clear to what extent public funds should be spent on motivational research, a fancy name for what used to be called propaganda. Physical fitness may be a worthwhile objective; but the precedent now exists for governments to subsidize private organizations advocating courses of action which may or may not be equally laudable, over which the public, through its elected representatives, has no control.

Undermining public support for other sport and recreation policies

Nor should *Participation* be viewed as an educational campaign. With its repetitious slogans and simplifications it is closer to the totalitarian concept that the masses cannot be educated but they can be bamboozled. The theory that our choice of deodorant or toothpaste is dictated by the loudest and most persistent propaganda was applied by *Participation* to the more serious business of altering life styles and values in keeping with a particular concept of how Saskatonians should be living and what they should be doing with their leisure time. The real lesson of *Participation* has nothing to do with fitness and everything to do with the reduction of citizens to the objects of propaganda.

Find a running mate.



The Canadian movement for personal fitness

Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.

According to professor Saul Ross of the University of Ottawa, interest in physical fitness has increased considerably in recent years. In the case of Ottawa, he

says "what is most remarkable about this change is that the citizens of Ottawa seem to be doing it on their own, in contrast with extrinsic motivation utilized in other places."

Run around with your wife again.



PARTICIPATION
The Canadian movement for personal fitness

Fitness. In your heart you know it's right.

Why do people decide to take part in sport or recreation? Is it due to the influence of sporting heroes, family example, the work of local agencies such as the YMCA, or because of programmes such as *Participation*? Before spending money trying to change the lives of citizens, perhaps the government should have tried to identify such motivations. Considering its personnel and general philosophy, *Participation* is an unlikely vehicle for such research. Even the National Advisory Council's recommendation for sophisticated evaluative research to measure its effectiveness could be an exercise in throwing good money after bad.

When former Governor-General Roland Michener goes jogging or when Prime Minister Trudeau goes skiing there is no doubt that people are influenced toward participation in physical activities, if only because it appears to be an "in thing". There is nothing wrong with this, in fact it is the type of leadership required if physical fitness is to have a high priority among Canadians. On the other hand, political party financing being what it is, *Participation* might eventually be viewed as a convenient way for a party in power to swing "cost plus" business to advertising agencies sharing its political philosophy. If this were shown to be the case, cynicism could develop about government involvement and *Participation* could actually have the effect of undermining public support for legitimate sport and recreation policies in this country. ✓

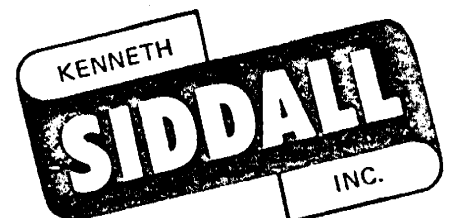


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