

BARBARIANS AT THE GATE?

by Mike Retzlaff

Interbrew was formed in 1988 with the merger of the Belgian breweries Stella Artois and Piedboeuf. In 1995, they acquired Labatt's in Canada. In 2002, they purchased Haake-Beck in Bremen, Germany. In 2003, they purchased the Spaten-Löwenbräu Group in Munich. In 2004, Interbrew merged with AmBev of Brazil. Just so you know, in addition to producing many beer brands, AmBev is licensed to package Pepsi-Cola, Gatorade, Lipton Iced Tea, and Seven Up brands (in addition to many others) in S. America. After this merger, the corporate structure was adjusted to make the company compliant with US laws and the new parent company was named InBev.

Subsequently, InBev purchased Anheuser-Busch Cos. Inc. of St. Louis, Mo. in 2008. With that merger, the name of the business was changed to AB-InBev. Since its inception, this conglomerate (under one name or another) has purchased many breweries including Bass, Haake-Beck, Goose Island, Spaten, Hoegaarden, Labatt, Rolling Rock, Staropramen, Leffe, Whitbread, and Boddington. The last major acquisition was SABMiller in 2016 and the deal was complicated enough to warrant its own separate article.

The buyout of Anheuser-Busch by Inbev came as quite a shock to the beer drinking community here in the States. Far too many people of my acquaintance somehow see this as a threat to their security or of our American way of life. The recent purchase of Northern Brewer and Midwest Brewing Supplies further "proves" some conspiracy and a personal bugaboo; at least in the minds of many in the home brewing world.

InBev has stated that the positive aspect of these acquisitions is improved buying power of the raw materials and distribution of the final product. Some of that certainly makes sense. However, as is often pointed out, all businesses are in the business of making profits. AB-InBev is not in business to make life better for anyone but their stockholders. Many wonderful beers are now available in areas which never had access to them before. Only time will reveal the final cost of this.

I work diligently to ignore "bread and circuses" so that I can concentrate on those things which are truly important. Even with this AB-InBev distraction, I continue to focus on elimination of the ritual sacrifice of small furry creatures at the beginning of my brew day. This routine started several years ago to ward off free radicals and help delay the onset of the Zombie Apocalypse. Perhaps science will aid me in finding a simple chant or an inoffensive talisman as an effective alternative.

Who says the age of enlightenment is over?

