

Marks & Spencer's row over Muslim refusal to sell alcohol

LONDON, UK: British retailer Marks & Spencer faced criticism after it emerged that it allows Muslim staff to refuse to sell customers pork or alcohol.



A row is brewing after a cashier at Marks & Spencer refused to handle pork or alcohol when serving a customer. Image: Marks & Spencer

More than 8,000 people have signed a Facebook page calling for a boycott of the chain after an "extremely apologetic" Muslim checkout worker told a customer they would have to wait for another employee to sell them a bottle of champagne.

M&S, which is Britain's biggest clothing retailer as well as selling food and homeware, said that when employees have religious beliefs that restrict what foods or drinks they can handle it tries to place them in a "suitable role".

"We regret that in the case highlighted we were not following our own internal policy," a company spokesman said.

"As a secular business we have an inclusive policy that welcomes all religious beliefs whether customers or employees," she added.

But the "Boycott Marks and Spencer" Facebook page said the policy was an affront to "common sense".

The issue emerged after an unnamed customer told the Daily Telegraph the worker had refused to sell them champagne at a London store and that they would have to wait for another till to become available.

"I was taken aback," the customer told the newspaper. "I was a bit surprised. I've never come across that before."

Drinking alcohol or consuming pork are forbidden by Islam. The row highlighted differences among British retailers' policies on whether staff should be allowed to refuse to sell certain products on religious grounds.

Like M&S, supermarket chains Asda, Morrisons and Tesco said Muslim staff would not have to work on the tills if they objected to handling specific products.

But the head of high street retailer John Lewis said staff should not have the right to refuse to serve customers.

"This is taking it one stage beyond common sense," managing director Andy Street told BBC radio.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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