

# CENSORSHIP

## "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." — Voltaire

# Policing our thoughts or thought police?

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However, "political correctness" has broadened its sphere of inappropriate expressions to such an extent that we have the potential of significantly narrowing our thought base. Women are now "womyn," we refer to people who are deaf as "hearing impaired," and mentally challenged has metamorphosed into the vague "community living." People are consistently screening their thoughts before voicing opinions. Many people feel that this sensitivity has resulted in censorship.

Clearly, there is a point when

language verges on offensive vulgarity for a particular portion of society. But whose responsibility is it to draw the line where people feel their rights are being violated? Most people would rather pass off the responsibility of defining the boundaries to a higher authority, such as the church or the government.

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## Galhos describes atrocities in East Timor

officials called the event an "isolated aberration."

Owen claimed that other similar attacks have been committed, but this was the only one that foreign journalists were able to record on tape.

Galhos was present at the scene of the massacre in 1991, hiding among the gravestones to avoid being shot.

"We fight for freedom, for twenty years, with no help from other countries," she said. "We fight alone."

Galhos said she personally asked Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to speak out publicly about East Timor during his recent Canadian trade mission to Southeast Asia. She said he did not make any public statements, instead, "He prefers to whisper in Suharto's ears behind closed doors." Suharto is the ruler of Indonesia.

Owen said that not only has the Canadian government ignored the issue of East Timor, but Dalhousie University has, too.

"We have university publications which list East Timor as the twenty-seventh province of Indonesia, even though the occupation is illegal, and the Indonesian claim of East Timor as a province has never been recognized by the UN," he said.

Somebody asked Galhos if she is afraid of what the Indonesian military might do to her.

"Am I afraid?" she said. "It's too late now. I could be afraid before I defected. Now it's like I've taken a shower. I'm wet already."

For more information about East Timor, contact the East Timor Alert Network by email at aa088@chebucto.ns.ca, or by phone at 422-1265.

A university campus is an environment which encourages the censorship debate — it is a place where advocates and critics of censorship may argue their cases. In fact, university is considered a place where students have a responsibility to question and challenge everything around them. Campus papers often become the focal point of controversy since their unique position allows students to take risks that mainstream papers simply cannot attempt.

Mount Saint Vincent University's student paper, the *Picaro*, encountered protest on January 30, 1996 after publishing several articles with alleged sexist and homophobic content. About 12 students removed papers from several newsstands on campus and dumped them in front of the *Picaro* office. *Picaro* staff members hand-delivered the papers to students two days later.

A forum entitled "So What's Offensive?" was held a week later, assembling several *Picaro* staff members as well as those who protested the distribution of the papers.

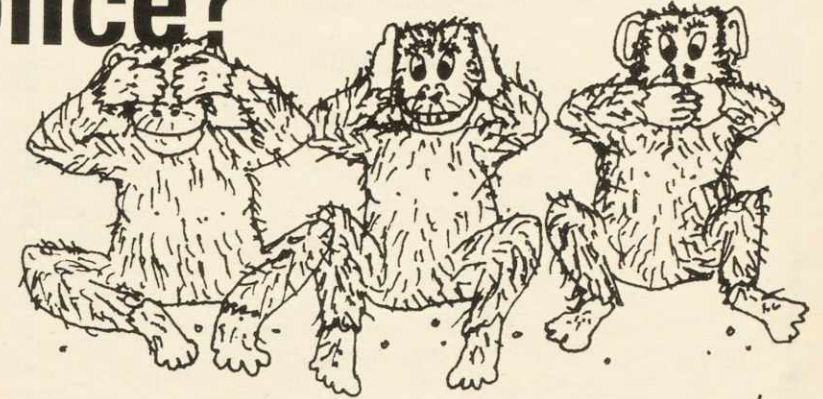
The protesters raised objections over the use of the word "fag" in one of the articles, and objected to the title of another article, "Drunk and Stupid in a Skirt," which they regarded as sexist towards women.

Two of the protesters claimed that they "do not believe in censorship," but that "...in a university that is supposed to represent 84% female views..." their opinions were not being communicated.

The question is, do these women resist the voice of the "minority" simply because it does not advocate their own beliefs?

The forum came to a close and "So What's Offensive?" remained unresolved. Such is the nebulous nature of the censorship debate.

Larry Amey, a professor at Dalhousie's School of Library and Information Studies, takes a special interest in intellectual free-



See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil...  
...then evil does not exist??

dom as a former editor of his university paper and in light of his contention that "libraries have been attacked from the very first time that something came off the printing press."

He believes that the *Picaro* incident is at most an example of "polite censorship" because the protesters did not go so far as to destroy the newspapers.

Last month, Dalhousie faced its own censorship controversy. Some students at Howe Hall created t-shirts whose message was deemed misogynist. The shirts were discovered, confiscated, and subsequently destroyed. Many people called the women's centre and contacted the residence administration, and their complaints resounded throughout the campus: "Never Trust Anything That Can Bleed for Four to Five Days and Not Die" was simply not an acceptable message in a supposed intellectual community that espouses common respect and decency. The originators of the t-shirts did not defend their message, as no one complained when the t-shirts were destroyed.

Yet will confiscation and destruction of a particular voice right the wrongs in our society?

Amey did not agree with the administration's action. He views the t-shirts as a "typical, vulgar campus prank," but "the university should not be mixed up in [the dispute] at all" because the message on the shirts, albeit sexist and degrading to women, is a form of free expression.

"The places where people can't do that, we remember what happens to them there," said Amey. "This is a student matter. If the women students disapprove and

would like to let the gentlemen know of their disapproval, that is free expression too, and I support that 100%."

"It is not as though by somebody expressing this that it is validated, or that we believe it," said Amey. "And what an opportunity! Somebody comes down the street wearing that, and you get an excellent opportunity to express your opinion to them."

It is evident that racism, sexism, and the growing militancy of political correctness are themselves forms of censorship.

What can people do to protest what they claim is a violation of their rights?

"If someone publishes something that you disapprove of, the course of action seems obvious," said Amey. "You write a letter, you do a demonstration out in front of the place, you go to student council and complain and make a noise. You make sure that your point of view is expressed."

As for intellectual freedom, "this is a university," said Amey. "If you don't express your views here, where are you going to do it?"

Ideas do cause action; that is undeniable. But the action may be of a negative or a positive nature. So can this action be anticipated?

The fascist and communist countries of recent history are proof that censoring thoughts will inevitably lead to censoring people. However, is absolute intellectual freedom feasible? In a world that is not black and white, censorship is a conundrum that perplexes society on a regular basis because each situation we encounter is unique and requires thoughtful deliberation.

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- Experience within a volunteer environment is an asset.
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- For more information, please contact Jennifer Horsey at 494-2507.