

SPECTRUM

METANOIA

BY JOHN VALK

CULTURE OF SHRILL

The worst form of enslavement is enslavement to public opinion." Pierre Elliot Trudeau, *Memoirs*

One of the most valued freedoms of the West has been the freedom of speech; the right to the free expression of views without fear of recrimination. That right exists in a democratic nation to protect not the majority but the minority; those who go against the grain of majoritarian view.

Free expression is not an absolute right. It has limits. Advocating violence, uttering threats, spreading hate literature, etc., are not tolerated, even in a free society.

Apart from such retrogressive forms of expression, we have historically encouraged the exchange of views, ideas and opinions. The media—news-papers, magazines, television—is one

forum for such exchange.

The university has traditionally been another such forum. It has always been asserted that we all gain through the free interchange of ideas, theories and points of view. Through discussion and debate—quiet listening and respectful speaking—we can all become the wiser. That case is made especially for the public university—an institution open to Canadians from a wide variety of religious, cultural and economic backgrounds—for we recognize that all truth lies in no one person or group.

Events of the recent past have perhaps cast certain doubt on those traditional ideals. The current climate seriously threatens the fruitful exchange of views and opinions, both in the media and in the university. Should we be concerned?

Not uncommon today is for an audience to shout down a speaker whose views may not quite be deemed "politically correct". Great disrespect, in the form of verbal abuse, has even been shown to invited speakers at some universities. Closer to home, a UNB professor was subjected to tirades of verbal assault, hostility and abusive language—particularly from students—for expressing views contrary to popular opinion. Ironic it is then that he was considered the threat.

Deborah Tannen, in a *Globe and Mail* article entitled "Triumph of the Yell" (28 Jan. '94.), laments that our forums of discussion no longer promote the healthy exchange of ideas. Disrespect, even verbal intimidation, set the tone, especially regarding current "hot" topics. Decimating an opponent's po-

sition, often by shrill tactics, is considered fair game. The endeavour is not to uncover insight, truth or wisdom, but to score points, by rendering one's opponent stupid if necessary. The cardinal sin is to grant any validity to another's argument.

The result, argues Tannen, is that those perhaps less articulate, but nonetheless with solid ideas, are reluctant to enter the fray. There is the understandable fear of being made to look silly by a more articulate opponent, even by a fleeting camera shot. Should we be surprised then when a Hollywood actor, famous for his one-liners, was able to ascend to the highest public office in the United States? Was he truly the best and the brightest this most "advanced" country had to offer?

Much is made today of embracing the correct popular views. But is "political correctness" merely the latest euphemism for censorship? And, does the media not have a distinct way of manipulating public opinion, making it difficult for anyone whose views deviate from the majoritarian position? In

fact, do we not frequently dismiss someone's view by labelling it as "mere opinion"?

Have we advanced ourselves in this new climate? Perhaps, especially if we feel a public exchange is merely an information exchange. That fits in well with our computer age, where "megabites" of factual information at our finger tips is deemed most advantageous.

But humans are fortunately more than memory banks. They have been endowed with skills far superior to any computer. Some have even been blessed with insight and wisdom. In a politically correct climate, however, we may find the latter in rather short supply.

A culture of shrill may "correctly" shape the views of the majority. It may also, unfortunately, produce a "tyranny of the masses". The freedom and opportunity to exchange ideas, views and opinions—without recrimination from the state, or from unbridled masses—ought not to be taken lightly.

Dreams of hardwood ridges, flushing partridge, fleeting white tails, and fluffy snow quickly departed as the clanging of the old alarm clock brought me to reality. The thought of leaving my warm sleeping bag almost tempted me back to sleep but when I heard my hunting partner, Rod, crawl out of his bunk, I knew it was time to head for the hills yet one more time. High in the mountains of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, however, I knew I would not have far to go. In the darkness, the floor boards were cold on my feet, creaking as I stumbled across the camp in search of the kerosene lantern. Moments later, shadows leapt across the room as the lantern hissed to life. Rod was working on the fire as I lazily pulled on my hunting clothes, making sure to dress for the worst.

It was still dark when we stepped out onto the porch, but not too dark to notice that the forest floor of crisp leaves and twigs had been replaced by a thick blanket of snow. We looked down across the apple orchard, down the mountain, almost parallel with the bright stars, and wondered if there would ever be another time like this. The snow was soft and quiet under foot as we edged our way into the softly fading, frosty darkness.

FOREST BREEZE

BY RON VAUTOUR

THE CAMP ON THE HILL

The warmth of breakfast had long since departed when Rod noticed the fresh deer tracks in the deep snow. The two sets of tracks were heading where we had not planned to go, but we followed nonetheless to see where they would lead. We followed the tracks for hours... over hills, through swamps, under fallen logs, and across some of the most beautiful country I have ever travelled. Finally, when we came to a ridge where we could see down into the valley, we stopped to admire the view. We hardly spoke as we chewed on sandwiches my father had made the night before, passing the thermos to sip on hot coffee between mouthfuls.

Feelings rejuvenated, we started to make our way down the steep slope that the deer appeared to have travelled with ease. It was all we could do not to laugh at each other as we slipped and slid our way to the bottom... at which point it was no use as we both landed head first in a snow bank. After a good laugh, we decided it was time to pick up the trail again. About fifteen minutes later, I glanced down at the tracks and

noticed that another deer had crossed the trail that morning. Upon closer examination, we agreed that this deer was truly a monster and that there was reason enough to change our plans.

The large tracks turned and headed back up the same hill that had almost killed us a short time ago. I looked on as Rod started to amble on back up the slope, wondering if maybe the cold had got to his head. After a moment's hesitation, I too was scraping and clawing my way to the top of this ridge, stopping only occasionally to catch my breath. Finally, we came to the crest and plopped ourselves down in an opening.

After a short rest, we noticed that the deer had also stopped here, pausing to look down across the other side of the mountain. The view was magnificent... hardwood ridges rolling like fingers down the mountainside with white waters winding their way between them. It would not have mattered what happened next, this was a great day. We turned to follow the deer when I noticed Rod shoulder his rifle from the

corner of my eye, causing me to reach for the safety. Rod fired and suddenly the buck appeared, running broadside to me. I quickly took aim and fired, hitting him square in the front shoulder. The big 13-pointer collapsed in the snow.

As we sat around the wood stove that night, telling stories, and playing cards, I asked how anyone could question why I was up on the mountain

hunting deer. An older man spoke up "Yes... you are hunting deer... but you are also building friendships, spending time with your father, hearing of the past, respecting the land, growing, learning about yourself and so much more." I stepped outside to look down across the mountain one last time that day, and I wondered if anyone who didn't hunt could understand the way I felt. The cold wind blew the thought away as I stepped back into the camp to join in with the laughter and the good times. I'll always remember those words that night, and I'll never forget the camp on the hill.

(MORE) BLOOD & THUNDER

MIKE MANDEL

To the Editor,

This letter is in response to Nathan Weinman's critique of Mike Mandel's non-performance during this year's comedy night, January 25th. Nathan seems to be suggesting that Mike Mandel didn't perform because of some mysterious attitude problem on his part. Hey Nathan, wake up buddy!!

You mention that 65-70 people is an

adequate crowd for a comedian. You failed to realise that the evening was very poorly advertised. Last year, Mike Mandel put on a great show to a crowd exceeding 300 people. A hypnotist needs a certain amount of people in the crowd because he takes people on stage. With the small crowd that turned out this year, there would have been no one left in the crowd to laugh at the act.

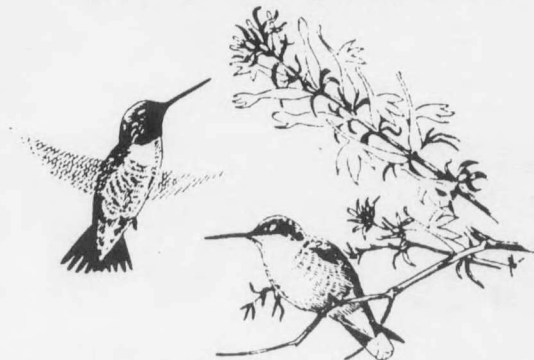
If you want to blame someone (it

seems you are quite pissed off) why not go down to the Student Union and talk to them. Better yet, why not help them advertise events like this. That way, you would understand how difficult it is to put on a show like this and hey, you might learn a thing or two about advertising.

Richard McDerby and Marcello Battilana

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