

# EDITORIAL

by Lynne Wanyeki

Last year, while sitting in a class which dealt with Maoism, a professor whom I greatly respect made the following statement in mild critique of those who would rigidly adhere to any given politic: "Any ideology only carries you as far as the limits of that ideology - and that far only if it is even remotely successful". I thought about that statement for a long time afterwards. Today, I consider the lesson I drew from that statement to be one of the most valuable I have received during my entire time at this university.

On Monday night, watching Spike Lee's latest movie *Jungle Fever*, I saw a scene to which my professor's statement is applicable. The scene is crucial because it hints at the essence of Spike Lee's overall message. In it, the Italian owner of an ice-cream parlour in an urban, predominantly Italian neighbourhood is reading a book. A younger, slightly more hot-headed Italian man comes in and asks him what the hell he's reading for. The owner replies that he's reading simply because it interests him, and proceeds to explain what he's reading. He tells of five Italians from the north who go down south sometime in the 1930's and eventually, they start up a factory. They hire Blacks to work the factory, and are promptly lynched by the other Southerners. The younger man asks belligerently what the owner's point is: to him it's obvious that the five Italians got what they deserved. The owner stares at him for a while and then simply replies that that's not *his* point - and leaves it at that. Somehow, he had recognized that the mindset that allowed Italians to be lynched was no different from the mindset that kept segregation rigidly in place and Blacks rigidly oppressed in the South.

According to our backgrounds, our present social situations and our values, we individually develop belief structures or frameworks - "ideologies" so to speak. It is into this framework that we deposit information gathered every day - from more formal processes of learning, as well as from simple observations made in our day-to-day living. It is by our respective ideologies that we understand and conceptualize "life as it *really* is". Thus convinced of our individual absolute truths, we ignore the fact that our ideologies can (and sometimes do) shift and alter as we absorb more and more conflicting information. We ignore the fact that our individual answers may complete the picture for each of us individually, but may utterly fail to account for the reality of the person standing next to us. At best, an ideology can merely give us a different perspective on a given situation - it could not possibly account for the situation in its entirety.

Is there a problem with that in the context of this university, this community that is Fredericton? I believe there is. For if we cannot understand (or at least tolerate) the multitude of different ways in which we individually function, we risk losing sight of the fragile threads which do exist between us. For even if we do succeed in growing "to the limits of our respective ideologies", if those ideologies have not at least *sought* to be all-inclusive, we will achieve, at best, only rather short-sighted aims which demarcate the limits of said ideologies. During this week, designated AIDS Awareness Week on campuses across the country, Fredericton witnessed just such a potentially divisive politic in action.

The AIDS Awareness Tables rotated around campus, giving out information on many aspects of AIDS and on how the virus affects different segments of society. An international display of AIDS posters, Visual AIDS III, went on exhibition at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. And two talks were given: one by the curator of the exhibition; and one by people living with AIDS. All very positive events, which hopefully increased our understanding of AIDS, and (even more hopefully) decreased the stigmas associated with it.

Yet perhaps the events planned for AIDS Awareness Week should have involved more of the community-at-large, rather than focusing primarily on the university community. Maybe it is the community-at-large which is in need of heightened awareness. For this week, I learned that a woman whose son is HIV-positive is interested in starting up an AIDS support group for those who contracted the virus through blood transfusions. She says the group is sorely needed, because of the tremendous discrimination that those with AIDS face from the public. But why does she feel that the group is necessary, in view of the excellent work done by both AIDS NB (Fredericton) and AIDS St. John? Because, to her mind, both those groups cater primarily to gays.

I cannot help but be saddened by her viewpoint. As a friend pointed out, on a practical level, another AIDS support group will mean the completely unnecessary duplication of already scarce and dwindling government resources. Yet, more importantly, people living with AIDS are stigmatized no matter how they have contracted the virus. One would expect that the realization of this would heighten sensitivity and tolerance in other areas, not decrease it. For surely the point of AIDS support groups is to help those concerned *live* (in the present and the future) the best way they can with the disease, not to quibble over "deserved" and "non-deserved" contraction of the virus in the past, which is gone forever. And the failure to recognize the connection between the discrimination experienced by her son as a person living with AIDS and the discrimination faced by gays living with AIDS is about the best example I can see of reaching the "limits of one's ideology" only to find that, ironically, that very growth has stunted growth in another direction.

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