

Are campuses filled with censorship threats?

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seeking to do today through the camouflage of the term "social harm." The statements of an Ernst Zundel are sickening. But we cannot prosecute a man merely for stating ideas that we believe society would be better off without.

The traditional limits on free speech (such as shouting "fire!" in a crowded theatre) are not arbitrary choices made by society. They are justified when one person's speech brings another into immediate risk of physical harm because no one has the right to harm (in the precise sense of the word) any other. No one and no group has the right to interfere with an individual's speech for any other reason.

And what does it matter if some

The real brain cops

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case of censorship pits right-wing student politicians against the *McGill Daily*, a paper known for its progressive views and investigative journalism. The student council is using its control over the *Daily's* office space on campus to show its disapproval of the paper's policies. The *Daily* has been told to vacate its offices if it doesn't agree to pay a new yearly rent of \$18,000. That's up from the current rent of \$1 a year.

With all the concern about free speech and intolerance on Canada's campuses, one might expect some of these stories to find their way into the major mainstream media. For the most part, they haven't. Instead, the media accuses the campus left of being intolerant and of reviving McCarthyism — an interesting charge considering the real situation on campuses.

The PC Scare itself has acquired some of that original — right-wing — McCarthyite hysteria. Some observers suggest this new hysteria may be the prelude to a purge of humanities departments at universities across North America, or even a 'downsizing' of the entire humanities field.

Alexander Cockburn observes in a recent article in *The Nation* that close to a third of academics at many large North American universities will retire in the next decade. According to Cockburn, the PC Scare is a repetition of the Red Scare of the 1950s; the retiring generation of academics needs a pretext to appoint like-minded successors.

Other observers have argued that the PC Scare is simply the backlash of conservative forces against those who would challenge their position in the cockpit to our society. It is the cultural correlate of the economic restructuring of the Reagan Decade.

In either case, the rhetoric about free speech and intolerance is simply that — rhetoric. This much is obvious from the way the real situation on campuses has been ignored. Part of what makes the PC Scare so troubling is that Canada's universities do indeed face a crisis, one that desperately needs society's attention.

But the crisis is a result of funding cutbacks and the subordination of academic principles to corporate power. This, incidentally, parallels the reasons for the larger social crisis in Canada — collapsing finances, corruption and corporate free-wheeling. These problems require critical inquiry and real solutions — not scapegoats.

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very distasteful individuals lose their right to free speech? Expression is an integral part of human thought — ban expression and the first step toward thought control has been made. The drafters of anti-Communist speech legislation in the middle of this century (as well as every totalitarian regime) understood this. They did not simply intend that Communist ideas not be transmitted — they wanted no one to think Communist thoughts.

McCarthyism was the logical next step after anti-Communist speech laws.

And restrictions on thought, not just speech, are the logical next step for modern Leftist censors. In the April 3, 1991 issue of *Excalibur*, a full-page letter printed by a group that attacked racist material in previous issues of *Excalibur* was proudly headlined: "There can be no right to be racist".

The editor of a U of T newspaper stated in *Maclean's*: "all we are saying is that people can't be bigots. Big deal." There seems to be no concern at all that the bottom-line on these sorts of attitudes is "You can't say that; you can't think that."

I can hear them sewing the uniforms of the Thought Police now.

The Left dare not attack the idea of free speech in principle. But until the Left learn that a dedication to free

speech requires that one even defend the right to speak horribly offensive ideas — any ideas — they will only grow as a danger to freedom of expression. They must learn from George Orwell that "if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

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