

# EDITORIAL

## Sexism in language

When I came in this morning I realized that I had nothing written for an editorial.. To be honest, I was dry for any ideas at all. So I present a guest piece taken from Scientific American (Nov. 1982).

Andrew Watts

Usually the storyteller begins, "A professor was giving a lecture on the fate of the solar system, and he said...." The professor is almost always made out to be a male. This may reflect the sexual statistics for astronomers, but individuals are not statistics.

How could the story be improved — gracefully? Well, there is a delay, not a long one but still a delay, between the first mention of the professor and the word "he." It is long enough for the default male image to get solidly, even though implicitly, implanted in the listener's mind. So just don't let that happen. Instead make the professor a woman from the start. By this I certainly do not mean you should begin your story, "A woman professor was giving a lecture on the fate of the solar system, and...." That is horrible.

My solution was to give her sex away by her name. I invented the pseudo-Slavic name "Professor Bignumaska," whose ending in "-a" signifies that its owner is female. To be sure, not everyone is attuned to such linguistic subtleties, so that for some people it will come as a surprise when a few lines down they read the phrase "according to her calculations." But at least they will get the point in the end.

What is worse is when people do not miss the point but rather reject the point altogether. In the French edition of *Scientific American (Pour la Science)* my "Professor Bignumaska" was turned into "Monsieur le professeur Grannombersky." Not only was the sex reversed but clearly the translator had recognized what I was up to and had deliberately removed all telltale traces by switching the ending to a masculine one. I was disappointed. On the other hand, I was pleased to see that in the German edition (*Spektrum der Wissenschaft*) the professor's femininity remained intact: she was called "die namhafte Kosmogonin Grosszahlia." Not only her name but also her title has a feminine ending.

This practice of referring to members of some professions by explicitly feminine and masculine words certainly makes for trouble. What do you do when you are talking about a mixed group of actors and actresses? Unless you want to be verbose you have little choice but to refer to "actors." Why does a word such as "waiter," with the completely non-committal ending to refer to a male? We are hard put to come up with a neutral term. Certainly "waitperson" is an awful concoction "Server" is the best I have heard. On the other hand, it is nice to see "stewardess" and "steward" gradually being replaced by the general term "flight attendant."

Douglas R. Hofstadter

## Crime and assertion

It is wrong for a man to say he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty. This is what agnosticism asserts.

T.H. Huxley, 1889  
Agnosticism and Christianity

## Cold war

Unless the signs are very deceiving, the U.S.S.R. is preparing for war against the western democracies. Indeed, as Burnham rightly says, the war is already happening in a desultory way.

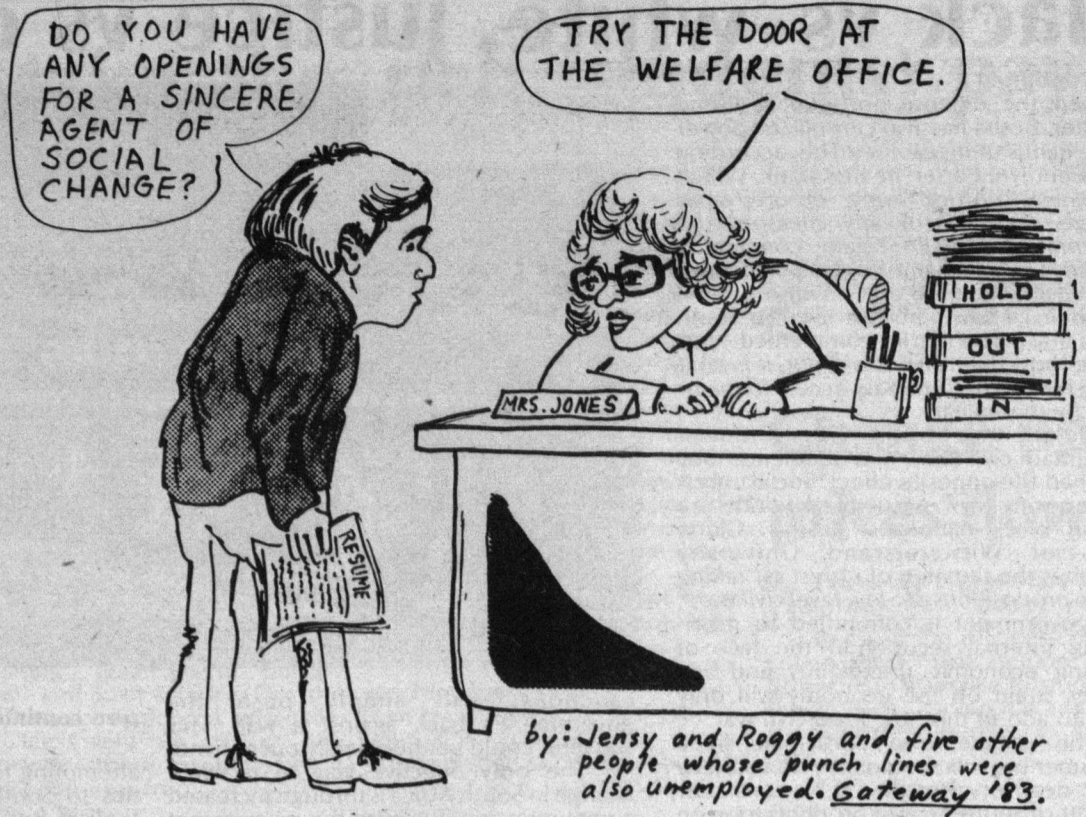
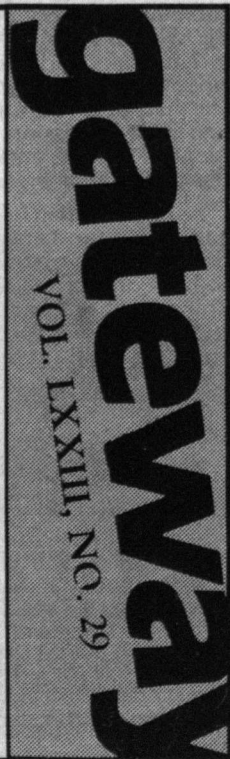
George Orwell, 1947  
Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle

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### Staff this issue:

In the metaphysical mind set of John Algard....Peter block and Martin Beales set out towards the walls of consciousness, only to encounter Nate LaRoi and Margaret Baer near reality. Being-for-themselves, Heather-Ann Laird and Kent Blinston locate Gilbert Bouchard and John Roggeveen, Being-in-themselves. Bill Inglee seeks Truth, while Karen Redford searches for absolutes. Charmaine Roux rejects reality and settles for the world of Ken Lenz. Mar'in Couatts drifts from being into nothingness... Good night 51!

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## « LETTERS TO THE EDITOR »

### Gateway ahead of its time

It was reported in the Jan. 13 issue of the Gateway that I said that the number of warheads in existence "lies in the hundreds of thousands." What I actually said was that the U.S. presently has 11,000 central strategic nuclear weapons and 22,000 euro-strategic nuclear weapons, totalling about 8,000 megatons. The USSR has 7,500 central strategic nuclear weapons and 8,000 euro-strategic nuclear weapons, totalling 11,000 megatons. These weapons, in addition to those of the U.K., France, and China (and perhaps others), contribute to a world total of over 50,000. And if the present rate of development continues, the U.S. alone will have an additional 17,000 nuclear weapons by 1990. The Soviet Union can be expected to match this increase if their economy can stand the strain.

If the "hundreds of thousands" figure is reprinted in the Gateway, say in 1995, it will probably be correct. Given the present nuclear situation, there is a 50% probability that the Gateway will be here at that time. As I mentioned at the Council meeting, that is an optimistic probability.

Brian Milligan  
Canada Peace Research Education Assoc.

### Disciplinary action for, not against, free speech

I am astonished by the views of those writers who have written to you recently concerning the disturbance at the Hillel-sponsored forum of December 3. It is obvious that these correspondents either were not at the forum and thus do not know what went on, or if they do know what occurred either lack the intelligence or the objectivity to understand the issues. There is one fact which is beyond dispute - the purpose of those who disrupted the forum was to prevent it from being held. They did not want the speech to happen, and they shut it down. To now argue that efforts to censure this type of conduct is an attack on freedom of speech, as Mr. Gerard Hayes has argued, is so ludicrous that it does not deserve comment. What does bother me about the letters which you have received in support of Mr. Oscar Ammar and his colleagues is the ease at which the writers lose the main issue - that is the right to speak, to listen and to associate - and get sidetracked by their pet peeves, whether it be defaced posters, booths or what have you. When the American Civil Liberties Union defended the right of the Nazis to march in Skokie (and lost a lot of members as a result), what was at issue was not the merits of being a Nazi, but the liberty that all citizens have to speak. I am afraid that your readers do not understand this and are prepared to grant freedoms not for its own sake, but only to promote their individual ideologies. I can only hope that their understanding matures or that I never have to be subject to their decisions or judgments.

Lewis Klar, Professor of Law

Should Oscar Ammar be punished for his actions if he is proven guilty? The law states that anyone who infringes on the rights of others should be punished. That holds true for Mr. Ammar, the people who deface posters, and everyone in our society. If my house is broken into, that does not give me the right to break into other people's houses. Therefore to imply that Mr. Ammar's actions were justified (by similar acts taken against the A.S.A.) is not valid.

Terry Volpel, Arts I

### You've come a long way

On behalf of the Engineering students, I would like to thank all the lovely young ladies who have participated in Engineering Week. It is so nice to finally see women actively involved in University functions. What energy and enthusiasm these princesses and their entourage have expended in

making campus life better for all. Think back thirty years: Who could have imagined female students making such advances toward filling these justly responsible roles in academic institutions? Incredible, isn't it? Year after year a new crop of girls are willing to show 'em what a University education can make of a woman. Shouldn't there be some official honour bestowed on these activists? Do the Engineering students sufficiently appreciate the time, effort, and whatever else that these girls are giving up on behalf of good ole' Engineering Week? Perhaps a special certificate ought to be presented to each young lady for her exuberant performance. The certificate could read:

We the Engineering students do greatly admire the efforts that you, **Ms. D. Blond**, have made in making Engineering Week indescribably exhilarating, and we can assure you that you have embedded in our minds what the true place of women is in University life.

A most suitable honour. So little ladies, stand up for your rights and demand the appreciation that you so desperately need and deserve!

Vicki Parker, Commerce III

## Manifesto



FLODDSS - Federation for the Liberation of Oppressed Doctor of Dental Surgery Students

For the safe return of the Father of Modern Dentistry, Dr. G. V. Black, to his residence on 5th floor Cameron Library, we the people of FLODDSS demand the following from the U of A at large:

1. New Dentistry Building with—
  - a. Private walkway to HUB Java Jive
  - b. Elevators
  - c. No Pharmacy students
2. Increased enrollment of Hygiene students
3. 50-foot-high monument to Dentistry in the center of quad
4. The recognition of Dentistry as the ultimate profession
5. Respect

These demands must be met, or the sum of \$2.18 be provided in small coinage. If not, G. V. will "Get the heat". Contact will be made with the Gateway which will act as our neutral liason. Cooperate, and everyone will be "a head" of the game.

## LETTERS

Letters to the Editor should be a maximum of 250 words. Letters must be signed, and include faculty, year and phone number. No anonymous letters will be printed, although we will withhold names. All letters should be typed, if possible, or neatly printed. We reserve the right to edit for libel and length. Letter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Gateway.