

EDITORIAL

"Learning the Lingo"

by Lynne Wanyeki

Over the course of this term, I've noticed a rather curious development of thought on campus. There are numerous illustrations of this peculiar phenomena, of which I'll give only two.

The first example can be found in the latest issue of the *Aquinian*, STU's student newspaper. The paper ran a cartoon entitled *Esoterereric*s by Bri, in which a man who had just broken up with his girlfriend contemplated suicide while carrying a gun. A friend of his came along and they discussed ways for him to find another woman. The first, no longer depressed man proposed three possible "pick-up" lines which included: "Nice hoots" and "Hey, Baby! I have a gun and I know how to use it!". Both of these were dismissed as being unworkable by his friend because they weren't "politically correct enough". He finally came up with a third line which they agreed was good enough to be tried up at the Social Club. This line was "Hey, Baby! Help me alleviate my guilt over years of female oppression by going to bed with me!"

The second example took place at the Social Club on Monday night. Every Monday night, the Social Club hosts "Open Mike Night", where amateur musicians from the campus and Fredericton communities get the chance to play and sing to an audience. I enjoyed listening to the various performers, most of whom played folk-rock cover songs accompanied by their own guitar-playing. However, one performer saw it fit to sing what he termed "a breaking-up" song. He stated emphatically before he began that it was "not meant in any way to be offensive". Naturally, I listened closer than I perhaps would otherwise have done to the words of his song after that statement. The lyrics went something like this: "Get out of my face, you bitch, you slut, you whore ...". A mere breaking-up song??? Apparently, a large group of people at the front table thought so: they gave him a whooping round of applause.

Both the cartoon and the song could be analyzed to swift death by anyone with even a grain of common sense, let alone feminist or pro-feminist sensibilities. But I think that quite apart from the content, they highlight what is fast becoming a widespread reaction to what is termed politically-correct. For the characters in the cartoon and the performer of the song both implied that they recognized that some of their statements were likely to cause "offense". However, they also implied that they neither understood, agreed with nor took seriously the reasons for that offense, and thus they were unrepentantly, hypocritically and condescendingly "apologetic" for their statements.

A friend of mine refers to this type of trivialization and tossing-aside of genuine concerns as "learning the lingo". They hear the words, they memorize them and are even capable of regurgitating them but never take the time to examine what exactly is meant by the words. So we end up with a population of people who are at least on the surface "educated" as to the issues, but who have never cared to question with any integrity what exactly the issues mean to them and their day-to-day lives.

The problem is that people who have learnt the lingo tend to impose a strange kind of censorship on the conversations they have, the material that they read and the events that happen around them every day. As soon as they hear a phrase or an argument that they feel is part of that lingo, they turn themselves off - after all, they've heard it all before. Terms like "oppression", "exploitation", "patriarchy" have become utterly devoid of meaning to the ears of such people, if indeed they ever really understood the meaning of such terms. And so, the words of the person to whom they are speaking or the material that they are reading can be dismissed, to be immediately classed away that terribly convenient index of so-called politically-correct propaganda.

The reverse side of this is that the people to whom they are talking, the people who write material that seems to fit under that blanket classification eventually realize that their words are being deliberately turned-off, like so much noise on bad programs over an ill-tuned radio. They are placed in the awkward position of trying to articulate their concerns in "jargonless" [sic!] and "rational" language - their own language is under attack as being both "subjective" and "irrational". They too impose a self-censorship on themselves, trying desperately to speak in terms that will be listened to and seriously considered. This strived-for "objectivity" can be frustrating to the point of being literally crippling. Soon, their silence is achieved and the status quo has won.

Finding or reconstructing a voice under these terms is hard. Perhaps the solution lies in consciously refusing to even try to speak under these terms, which are defensively reactive and ultimately destructive. "Objectivity" is a myth. Define and maintain your own terms of speech, and forget about learning the lingo of those of have learnt yours.

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