

Thought police stifle campus freedom

by Dan Gardner

The modern Right has always been seen as the force most destructive of the principle of free speech. And rightly so. The Right has been enforcing "morals" legislation—laws forbidding speech offensive to the "public" morality (whatever that is)—from Cromwell to his spiritual successor, Jesse Helms. It was also the Right that created McCarthyism, the most offensive limitation on political expression to have occurred in the modern West.

Very often, the only voice of opposition to these attacks on civil liberties came from the Left. It was primarily the Left that faced down McCarthyism, that attacked laws forbidding "immoral" sexual practices, that demanded that artists be left free to choose any form or content of expression without fear of contradicting a disapproving public. And in this way, the Left has become synonymous with free speech. But the last few years have exposed the Left as the greatest modern source of censorship.

On campuses across North America, the Politically Correct (essentially the latest form of traditional social democrats) are successfully pressing for codes of "appropriate" conduct and speech that will choke the attitudes of free expression and tolerance that universities should champion. Vaguely defined terms such as racism, sexism, "classism", "ageism", and "ableism" are placed in sanction-backed documents that, if used aggressively, could be stretched to forbid virtually any thought other than that of the Politically Correct creators of the documents. To a Marxist, for example, most non-socialist political theory seeks to perpetuate the oppression of the labouring class: should such thought therefore be forbidden as "classist"? These codes—because they are demands for compliance rather than simply being arguments for decent behaviour and expression—are nothing more than well-intentioned censorship.

The new intolerance of the Left has already had a significant effect on expression law. The obscenity laws of Canada and the United Kingdom, the elastic codes that have

protected the pure-of-heart from everything from "Lady Chatterley's Lover" to cheap B-movies to hard-core pornography, require that something offends "community standards" to be declared obscene. But left-wing feminists argued that any "degrading portrayals" of women should be forbidden by the obscenity law regardless of community standards. A term that could cover material as diverse as pornography, beer posters or "Charlie's Angels" would be enshrined in law as grounds for censorship and imprisonment without even a nebulous "community standard" to limit the law's overly zealous application. Incredibly, the Supreme Court of Canada accepted this argument and enshrined it in law in *Towne Cinema Theatres v. the Queen* (1985).

The fact that it is now often the Left that presses hardest for various sorts of censorship is not really such an extraordinary change. Both Left and Right have demonstrated again and again that the only idea which they consistently uphold is the use of the government monopoly on the use of force to censor, regulate, tax or otherwise constrain whatever irritates their prejudices on a given day. Rightists favour tossing into jail as "obscene" artists whose views on sexuality they find personally repugnant. Leftists want any "unacceptable" expressions concerning women outlawed. And the list goes on. Each side pays lip service to Voltaire's famous demand that everyone's right to speech be defended regardless of the content of that expression and then smugly turns around and forges new forms of censorship. Indeed, the modern Left probably outdoes even conservatives in ridiculous hypocrisy: witness the spectacle of many American leftists rising to the defence of artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe and at the same time demanding that the loony fringe of the Right (the kind that get their kicks by wearing imitation Nazi uniforms) be silenced by law.

Of course the supporters of these new assaults on free speech are outraged by any suggestion that there is no fundamental difference between old-fashioned "public morals" legislation and their new limits on speech. The Leftist theorists who successfully pressed for the expansion of the obscenity law to include degrading portrayals of women, for example, defend this potentially vast new form of censorship by saying that it will prevent "social harm".

But the term "harm" is never defined. And since, in the sense it is used, "harm" obviously is not limited to its literal meaning of damage resulting from the use of force by one against another, it is an undefinable concept that encompasses anything that is not socially desirable. Is there any real difference between this and the Victorian censorship laws which referred to morality as their basis but also were really concerned with forbidding any idea not particularly welcome in society?

Degrading portrayals of women and expressions of hatred toward minorities are certainly "socially undesirable." But is it just to punish someone for expressing anti-social ideas? The only state ever to do so explicitly was Nazi Germany. And yet this, in essence, is what the Left is

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Who are these Objectivists?

by Barbara Pirsch-Steigerwald

On March 21, 1991, a group of people attended a lecture by Professor John Ridpath entitled "Capitalism: the moral social system for men?" They watched and discussed a videotape of Ridpath and Bob Rae debating the morality of capitalism.

Ridpath is an Objectivist, and therefore is opposed to socialism. According to Objectivists, rational men (women are linguistically excluded—don't ask me why) live together under absolutely voluntary conditions. The Objectivist view holds that the State should not exist because it would intervene in economic choice and individual civil liberties and rights, such as the right to accumulate wealth.

The most shocking aspect of Ridpath's argument is his opinion that socialism fosters a society of "looters and moochers"—implying that people who depend on social security programs are looters and moochers. Sounds like "survival of the fittest," doesn't it?

The *Lexicon of Objectivism* says that socialism "grant[s] to the incompetent, the stupid, the slothful a right to the effortless enjoyment of the rewards they could not produce, could not imagine and would not know what to do with."

Real life conditions prove different. Women, for example, are certainly not incompetent, stupid or slothful—rather, they are economically disadvantaged as a result of the structural discrimination which hinders their opportunities.

In 1987, for example, the average salary for a woman working full-time in Ontario was \$20,710, compared to \$32,120 for a man.

Objectivists argue that a society based on voluntary actions is the only moral and just system 'because it is free' (it sounds incredibly convincing, doesn't it?).

Arguments supporting social programs are rejected by Objectivists because the programs are financed by people "who do not even use them." In other words why are some individuals forced to pay for others?

This absurd question reflects the stupidity of Objectivism—a philosophy which does not consider the different economic, intellectual and physical resources people have to compete in society. Not every person is able to "decide voluntarily"—some are economically forced to agree to certain conditions, such as unfair wage contracts.

For Objectivists, the State is not a regulator of public affairs—that would force individuals to act in a certain way (e.g., pay taxes). However, the State can function as a protector of "man's [sic] right of self-defense," as Ayn Rand says. Aside from this responsibility, the State is not allowed to intervene in private decisions.

In other words, certain individuals with great material and intellectual resources have the advantage of acting absolutely voluntarily—without State interference. Thus, a few persons would be able to control more wealth than others—hence the inequality gap would widen (currently, 40 per cent of the Canadian population control only one per cent of the wealth).

Although Objectivists strongly oppose State coercion, I cannot see a significant difference between the consequences of private coercion (the rule of property and wealth) and public coercion (the rule of the State).

In an objectivist world the strong will survive and the weak will have to struggle and possibly die because there does not exist an adequate health and income security system.

Perhaps these Objectivists should turn their minds from the justification of capitalism to a consideration of its consequences.

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The myth of the P.C. scare

by Alex Roslin

"Political correctness" (PC) has entered the ranks of the Great Scares of modern times—the Leper Scare, the Scare that victimized Japanese-Canadians during the war, the McCarthyite Scare, the Debt Scare.

This year, PC became the ultimate swear word. Individuals branded PC are easy new scapegoats for an increasingly troubled society.

The PC Scare is, like the others, an American-born Scare, first hyped by influential US publications like *Newsweek* and *The New York Times* last fall. Soon after, Canadian newspapers and newsmagazines joined the fight and were jockeying to publish the quintessential feature article about how crazed PC leftoids and extremists have seized the reigns of our society.

These individuals, or 'thought police' to their detractors, are said to operate out of fortified bases in aca-

deme, protected by armies of fanatic PC students and tenure. Their plan is to go about denying people's free speech and forcing everyone to think like Karl Marx or Malcolm X (it doesn't matter which).

The whole business is a bit Orwellian, of course. If anything, today's campuses are marked by a trend toward conservatism, not subversive attitudes.

At several Ontario universities last year, for example, anti-rape campaigners using the slogan 'No Means No' were answered with posters that read "no means harder." Bigoted bathroom graffiti against women, gay men, lesbians, Arabs, people of African descent and others have been increasingly replaced by open physical violence.

And, contrary to the media hype, academic posts remain the preserve of politically conservative White males. Of about 30 professors who've taught me at McGill University, only one was a woman; I've never had a

Black professor, a Native one, one who had a disability or one who was a Marxist.

Equally puzzling are the claims that campus radicals are depriving others of free speech. Indeed, an astonishing campaign of censorship did sweep Canadian campuses last year. But it was directed at progressive voices.

The Lexicon, a progressive student newspaper at York University, was shut down last spring by a right-wing student council, only to be subsequently reopened as a cheerleading rag for student politicians. In another notorious case, a Maritime student paper was censored and another almost lost its funding after reprinting an article on safe sex oriented toward gay men; police threatened a third paper, the one that originally ran the article, with a criminal charge: "corruption of morals."

At McGill University, an ongoing

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