

The candidate, the "horribly" offensive sign and the age of protest

By KENT BRUYNEEL

The Gospel according to Milton Acorn . . . Oil fires on the sea wall . . . The "horribly offended" few . . . "Fear and Loathing" on the moral high ground

Bless you Andrew Peppin, wherever you are. Bless you for a sense of humour, of adventure; and a willingness to be interesting. Milton Acorn said that the best thing about PEI is the fact that every voice counts; well, Acorn never lived in these litigious reactionary times, where even an innocuous opinion about an inane subject will land you on the cover of the Provincial newspaper.

And the great nude photo debate is not the first such incident. Citizens living near the waterfront complained about the noise during this year's Canada Day celebrations (Incidentally, we should be launching rockets of the Confederation Bridge and igniting oil fires around the sea wall to celebrate Canada's birthday, in this its birthplace) and they were featured on the cover of the Guardian too.

Now this latest dilemma. Should a person be allowed to write "Free Nude Photos" on a campus poster to garner the attention of an apathetic and mostly disinterested student body? Or should he be afraid that a few militant people will launch an angry protest because they are "horribly offended?" My God, horribly offended? The only thing horribly offensive at UPEI these days is the hockey team, and their season, mercifully, is over.

If the accused had ac-

tually given away said photos, or if he degraded anyone with his signs, well then I'd be in agreement with the angry few. But that is not what has happened here.

The problem with a place where every voice counts is that even the moronic get to hold the microphone sometimes. Now, admittedly, that is a situation that is far greater than enforced silence, but, come on, horribly offended? The APEC disaster, where people's eyes bled from the pepper spray, is offensive. A sign saying "Free Nude Photos" is a joke, and those who think it is immoral have an ethical code so tightly wound they do not belong in a university. For it is hard to learn anything new, or grow into new directions of thought, when one's feet are so firmly planted on the moral high ground.

The Trouble with Playboy . . . "Sexual McCarthyism" . . . Paint the Walls in a Martyr's Hue . . . Heavy Sedation Followed By Massive Deprogramming . . . The Spirit to Fight.

Censorship is really what we are talking about here. Across the bridge in Halifax there is a mad debate raging over the ethics of Playboy Magazine hosting parties in and around the campus. One can empathize with the protestors in that case. Playboy is a multi-national corporation built, rightly or wrongly, on the backs of women. One can see the conflict that arises when the student body is forced to see bunny logos around campus; they are clearly not adding anything to the area, save a good time or two.

On the other hand Mr. Peppin, by all accounts a smart and involved individual, seeks the office of Student Union President, a noble, if puzzling goal, and in order to do so places a few signs around campus. Now I am a firm believer that anyone seeking a role in student government should be heavily sedated, and summarily de-programmed.

But there are those who have a passion for leadership, and willingness to submit to a campus wide popularity contest, and they should be applauded, at the very least, for their bravery. Unless we want to force these poor saps into "meet and greets" in the various buildings around campus, then signs are their only chance of winning some kind of name recognition. The need to create noticeable signs for one's campaign is indisputable, and should not be argued by either side, so long as those signs do not demean or proliferate hate to anyone.

One wonders, in a university that averages five percent voter turn-out, where all these impassioned voices have been hiding. Kudos again to Peppin; at least we now have some kind of debate, however sad and misguided it may be, in the realm of UPEI campus politics.

It would seem that we have reached an age, which Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz calls "Sexual McCarthyism," where the purpose of a campaign and the content of a candidate's character are secondary to the moral and ethical indignation, and feigned outrage, of a pious few. The re-action one should have to a non-friendly sign is simple: cast your voice elsewhere, instead

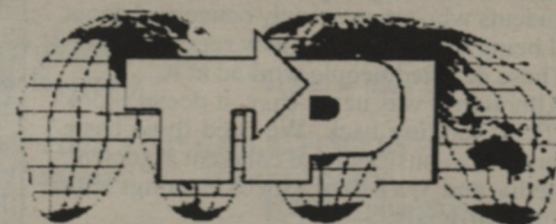
of a mad midnight run to the newspaper, where one can be famous, or notorious depending on your point of view. The complaining, offended parties are missing something so crucial, so obvious it pains to have to say it. Words are free, no one is being exploited -- there are no toppers blondes on the covers of late model mustangs -- there are three words written on coloured paper. So tactful are the words that they do not even cite gender -- no toying with the idea of submissive males, or dominant females; non-threatening words, like silent rain, if you don't like it go inside. Instead of crying, make your own sign, paint the walls in a martyr's hue and pretend you have something to fight for. That's all that is left you when the facts are inescapable. Surround yourselves with able yes-men(-women) who cite the opponent's every fault as proof of his nefarious intentions. Allow no room for creativity or free expression;

that's for other people.

The supreme court basically says on obscenity, I can't define it, but I know it when I see it. Well I saw the "free nude photos" and I didn't think it was obscene, I thought it was a goof, a gag meant to gain attention. And it worked.

Maybe the only thing that can arise from this sad fiasco is an increase in voter turn-out. Maybe the angry militants will burn young Andrew in effigy for his atrocious crimes, or maybe they will all come to their senses and realize a sense of humour is at least as important as a sense of righteous indignation. Either way Andrew can rest easy knowing he has made campus politics a little more interesting, and had the good fortune to offend the easily offended. It makes one wonder about a time when something, or someone truly offensive and hurtful comes along; will these disingenious militants still have the spirit to fight.

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