

# Middlebury is tense as it defines political correctness

by Drew Lang

Political correctness was the prevailing theme in last week's issue of *The Campus*. The tension felt by students because of the present questions concerning the politically correct movement is apparent. One cartoon suggested that our language and our culture has been changed so drastically as a result of political correctness that people no longer know what is acceptable to do and say. Daniel O'Neil, in his letter to the editor, suggested that the politically correct movement is degenerative and limiting. Mr. O'Neil stated that attempts being made at Middlebury to open people's minds serve rather to limit people's choices and force them to think in a prescribed manner.

Another article written by Chad Bryant questioned how to define PC. Mr. Bryant was unable, however, to formulate a definition and concluded that

acting with "common courtesy" is more important than the intellectual battle being waged over the definition of PC. Beneath the sarcasm of an article written by Leland Hart lies a frustration and contempt for the PC movement. At the end of his article, Mr. Hart cried out for his freedom as an individual, wishing for the ability to exist apart from PC without being pressured by campus liberals. Regardless of one's position, I think it is fair to say that everyone feels the heat of PC.

Catherine Stimpson's recent presence on campus addressed the pressure which people are feeling in the face of PC. In her lecture, she spoke about problems that arise as a result of criticizing and mislabeling PC. She said that PC may be equated with liberal democracy and she argued that open-mindedness and an awareness of all human interests is at the heart of PC.

Chad Bryant was sensitive in his article to the significance of PC by pointing to common courtesy as the mode of conduct by which everyone should conduct themselves. I disagree with Mr. Bryant, however, when he discounts the importance of lectures and debate on campus. Lectures provide a stimulus for discussion thus opening new ideas, evaluating present conditions, and avoiding indiscretions.

Dan O'Neil, in his rejection of PC, and specifically of Middlebury's attempt to create an equal and informed community, rejects the notion of democracy and advocates individual favoritism on the basis of gender and privilege. All male fraternities, of which Mr. O'Neil argues in favor, are anachronistic and discriminatory in principle. Fraternity members may show consideration and openness to all people, but in prin-

ciple, fraternities are sexist and elitist institutions. Middlebury must commit itself to upholding and promoting democracy, openness, and awareness to the changing needs and demands of society.

Mr. O'Neil attacks the faculty, the administration, and the students on campus who promote these ethical standards. He refers to Old Chapel as an "authoritarian regime," and considers PC to be the thought police. I, too, feel the tension at Middlebury because of a limited vocabulary and I agree that

divergent opinions should be welcome from all people and factions here at Middlebury. I feel it is essential, however, that in expressing oneself a person must bear in mind the interests of others. Individual expression is important, but consideration of others, and for society as a whole, is imperative in today's pluralistic world.

Leland Hart suggested sarcastically that we should call the mail room "The Gender Neutral Room" or "The Receptacle for the United States Postal Service." I return to him his

charge of puerility and impudence against what he calls "liberated social organizations." We are not fighting a revolution here. We are trying to promote open-mindedness and awareness of the rights and the needs of every person on campus. Sacrifice and a willingness to compromise is necessary on the part of every student to relieve the tensions we now feel. Such conduct will create a level of high moral standards and solidarity within the Middlebury community where everyone is supportive of one another.

## DKE

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than that of DKE's. Those clubs were seen as discriminatory because women were being deprived of business opportunities being conducted within these all-male clubs. This kind of separation of the sexes violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and therefore substantiated the argument that those clubs should become integrated.

I should also add that the power of the so called "old boy network" is often greatly overestimated. Our national is merely an organizing center for its satellite chapters—our ties to it are explicitly social. It is not an employment office or a networking body. The same holds true for our local Alumni group.

Apart from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the United States Constitution continues to protect expressive associations which are political and/or intimate in character. DKE contends that it falls into the latter category due to the nature of the house and its brotherhood. So although many important shifts are occurring concerning the gender make-up of formerly single-sex institutions, the legal aspect of those changes do not directly apply to the DKE house at Middlebury.

By no means do I mean to suggest that DKE is ignoring those changes. I assure you that we are continually evaluating our place as a single-sex organization surrounded by coeducational institutions. With this in mind we proposed an alternative to the college's ruling on fraternities. This compromise would have allowed for the integration of men and women in the membership and leadership of the house. However, it was swept under the rug by the administration and never even reached the Trustees. At best, only a handful of students knew what this proposal was all about. Obviously, the administration refused to recognize any new views on the matter, and it kept to a decision which was, for the most part, made without student input.

What is important to note is that the changes being imposed on DKE are not coming from within the fraternity itself, but from without, and this we believe is wrong? If you take a close look at the history of the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, what you will find is that the amendment in 1964 was not the work of divine inspiration on the part of Congress and the President, but it was instead the result of years of endless protest by millions of

citizens who felt there was a serious wrong which existed in their society. The leaders were enlightened by their constituents, not vice versa.

Likewise, changes on this campus during the 1960's were initiated by the students when Middlebury men and women were faced with the glaring fact that the fraternities were still racially exclusive. Several fraternities, acting on their own, separated ties with their racist national organizations and admitted black members. While the school may have played a role in this decision by fostering progressive thinking, the actual changes were not implemented by the administration, but by the students themselves.

By forcing us to change, the administration is denying us the opportunity to examine and respond to this issue on our own—a right which we feel we possess as an off-campus organization. If the college succeeds in its action against DKE, then the important lessons of gender awareness will be lost. Instead of coming to terms with this issue on our own, and thereby drawing important experiences from it, we will merely be forced to recognize an administrative interpretation of what is better for us as students of Middlebury.

## Four years later

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the houses next year. The apparent problem is the noise.

I am astounded that for the past twenty years noise was never enough of a problem to ban live music. I have played in a band on this campus for three years and have had to shut down because of noise only once. Yes, the first time was at DKE, but the noise complaint, however, was filed by a resident near KDR at least a half a mile away. Who's kidding who? Our band has had more complaints of noise from playing over at Cook SDU than playing at all of the other houses combined. Apparently because the school runs Cook, they feel that these noise complaints should be ignored. Perhaps some students could care less about what is happening to the social life, but nevertheless, student rights are dwindling and

new rules may soon affect everyone. This kind of hypocritical policy to further regulate our lives is so obviously contrived that it's sickening. More power to the school, no power to the students.

Students are being treated like children in more ways than one. Not only are we told what we should believe in, but there are many decisions that are made concerning the students themselves that we never hear about until too late. A prime example of this was the raise in tuition last year. I now understand the school's needs to raise the tuition to such an extent, but to be slapped in the face on one day with such unexpected news was inexcusable. The students should know of such considerations. Additionally, the current project concerning the new eighteen million dollar art building is a mystery in itself.

The project was conceived

because students were running out of space in Johnson and Wright. Before any considerations for what needed to be done were set in motion, however, a man named Wendell Brase was brought in from outside the school to assess the situation and examine the needs for arts. Mr. Brase decided that indeed the music, dance, art, and theater departments needed more space. The faculty and trustees agreed with this notion so the building was started. The plan seemed noble, so money was raised partly through the capital campaign and mostly through gift giving for the building itself.

But who are Mr. Brase, the faculty, and the trustees to say that a new eighteen million dollar art building was a number one priority for the students? Yes, more space was needed, but is that the primary item that needed attention? I am certainly

not passing judgement on the decision that was made, but I am suggesting that students may have other needs than what the school has coined "the premier facility in New England for the arts."

When the whole idea was originally conceived, two million dollars were set aside to start the project. It is amazing to think where just some of that money could have gone. The art department itself is suffering from budget cuts for supplies and other basic needs. The important job of the visiting professorship was even in danger of being lost because of money problems. It seems to defeat the purpose of having a new art building when there won't be enough money to legitimately run the departments themselves. Who cares if you have "the premier art facility in New England" when it can't even be run properly?

Students should have been asked what was needed. Perhaps there could have been some fund raising to aid the lost faculty positions in the film department. Perhaps money could have been used to repair the treacherous upper A lot. Perhaps the school could raise money to fix the heat in DU where I live. I've been told by the head of the service building that "The facility used to heat DU isn't adequate for its size. What the building needs is a whole new heating system." Well put one in so that people who live there in the future don't freeze to death. However, other students on this campus may require something that takes priority over my need for heat. So be it, but let the students have a say in what that is.

Although many people complain about campus security, there are still not enough officers to properly insure the

safety of the students. On Friday night, there were only two security guards on duty for the entire campus. Right now the school cannot even afford to pay needed overtime to the workers in the dining halls and the service building. But the school can afford to look good by constructing a *monstrosity* of an art building. The school has decided what its long term goals are and it will follow through with them. Right now the students are not their priority.

Everyday it seems that students are less and less in control of their own lives at Middlebury. I imagine that this trend will continue until the school has shaped student life into its restricted ideal, including the new proposal to ban kegs from social houses. I am sure that one day I will return to Middlebury but I doubt that I will be able to recognize any aspects of its exterior.

