

**The Middlebury Campus - March 21, 1991 - Opinions**

## **Middlebury is tense as it defines political correctness**

by Drew Lang

Political correctness was the pervading 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 principle, 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.