

Freedom of Speech: the myth versus reality

by Phillip W. Weiss

Suppression of the right to free speech does not manifest itself through an outright ban on certain speech. It does not come in the form of legal edicts decrying what can and cannot be said. Rather, the denial of free speech involves a far more insidious process, and therefore far more difficult to stop. It comes in the form of shaming, name-calling and outright bullying, all designed to humiliate and crush all attempts at a reply. It is a form of pseudo-intellectual gangsterism with words serving as bullets with which to shoot down whatever ideas are deemed offensive to those whose self-righteousness and intellectual inflexibility fueled by an overwhelming and obsessive feeling of insecurity cause them to possess a totally closed mind.

It is hard to legislate closed mindedness out of existence. Ironically, the phenomenon of the closed mind predominates in the most unlikely of places, schools, that is, places that claim to respect free speech and develop minds. There is no milieu more fertile for instilling a closed mind than in schools, managed by teachers who are given the awesome responsibility and AUTHORITY to shape minds. This kind of authority is susceptible to abuse, and abused it is on a scale and in manner that is both insidious and dangerous. This is the case because teachers bring to the classroom their own biases, political and cultural, which then directly influences and shapes the content of what is being taught and

absorbed by the students who accept what they are being taught as the TRUTH, even if it is a bunch of lies. This process leaves no room for open and honest discussion and can tolerate no opposing ideas. That is the case because opposing ideas are perceived as a direct threat to the power of the teacher upon whom society has granted the authority to shape minds. Thus, the free and open exchange of ideas becomes an impossibility, especially in a highly politicized climate in which whoever controls the ideas holds all power.

While all of this may seem to be a bunch of hype, in reality it is occurring all the time. Far from being a benign process involving the friendly exchange of differing sets of ideas, the exercise of the right of free speech is full of danger and risk and always produces conflict as parties maneuver to gain control of the narrative and impose their ideas on others. This is just the way it is. Commitment to empiricism is used as a talking point to mislead others to believe that their ideas will be respected or at least given a fair hearing.

People are challenged to support their ideas with evidence, when in fact, no amount of evidence will change any minds that are permanently closed to facts. The empirical model works when all parties are open to discussion, but in a world corrupted by politics, facts themselves become subject to interpretation always to support a political agenda. This can be found in today's American colleges and universities who pass off closed mindedness as legitimate intellectual thought no matter how corrupted by politics. This process becomes outright dangerous when it incites and JUSTIFIES violence, as for instance,

evidenced by the waves of anti-Israel demonstrations that emanated directly from college and university campuses who were anti-Israel as part of their political agenda. Anyone who opposed were shouted down, called Nazis and fascist, heaped with insults and physically attacked. Hence, the colleges and universities led the way in efforts to crush free speech. The damage caused by this politicization of academia has been immense and may be too widespread to correct and reverse.

The politics of hate have become part of the mainstream of political thought and dialogue. Hardly a day passes without comment being made about the polarization of the political process and the unwillingness of political parties to work cooperatively to achieve mutually acceptable goals. This kind of zero-sum maneuvering automatically guarantees continued conflict, the source of which can be traced back to the fight for the control of ideas which is passed off as free speech.