



Death to Khomeini?

The facts are as follows: A large poster was put up in the cafeteria. It read, "Death to Khomeini. Down with Iran." It apparently stayed up only a short time and was then taken down. Very simple. No fuss, no bother. Right?

Wrong. The question arose as to why the poster was taken down, and who had taken it down. So, my fearless, crusading editor (I have to call him that; it's in my contract.) sent me to chase down some answers. The first person I talked to was Dr. Michael O'Brien, Dean of Student Development.

Dean O'Brien began by saying he accepted full responsibility for removal of the poster. He stated that he got a call from Dennis Hyatt, of the cafeteria Hyatts, who told Dean O'Brien about the poster and asked him what should be done. Dr. O'Brien said he thought it was "inflammatory" and should come down.

Dean O'Brien said he hoped the issue of censorship would not come up. He also said he was not against dissent, just this particular form of dissent. He felt the expression "Death to Khomeini" was a pretty heavy statement, in opposition with President Carter's discouragement of inflammatory rhetoric towards the Iranian situation.

I mentioned the impression I had that there were no Iranian students at Mars Hill, and that I didn't believe your average Mars Hill student had the persecuting mentality, anyway. He agreed, but still believed that he had done the right thing.

I then wended my weary way to Founder's Hall, to talk to Dr. George Peery. He was rumored to have strong ideas on the subject, differing from those of Dean O'Brien's. Which is what makes journalism interesting.

Dr. Peery said that when he saw the poster he was primarily pleased. He was pleased that an international event had received such prominence. It was an indication, to him, that the students were aware of the world outside this college. He also said that whether or not the phrasing offended him was irrelevant, that the issue involved was not the wording of the poster, but the arbitrary removal of it.

The main point that Dr. Peery made during our talk was that since there is no school policy concerning what posters may be put in the cafeteria, singling out one poster and removing it because of one word is censorious. If the word "Death" seems objectionable in a political framework, then should it not be equally offensive on a poster about a sports rivalry? In other words, death and violence are fine for sports, but not for politics.

The issue is complex. Does Dean O'Brien have the authority to order a poster removed because he personally doesn't approve of the wording? Is Dr. Peery's use of the word "censorious" unjustified? Or am I personally making mountains out of molehills? All I know is that my fearless, crusading editor can sure come up with some real winners.

Ron Johnson



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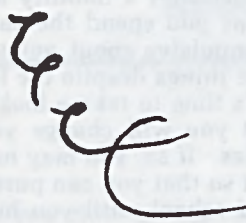
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