

opinion/editorial

Exclusion of males from poetry class reprehensible

"The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a public university committed to providing a quality education for as many students as possible. Admission to UNL is based on academic qualifications without regard to race, age, color, religion, sex, marital status, veterans status, national or ethnic origin or disability."

In light of this commitment by the university, the action taken recently to exclude two UNL men from a poetry class is reprehensible.

On Aug. 29 during an evening class of English 253A entitled Women and Poetry, the women of the class, voted to exclude those men from active

participation.

Whether the instructor or the class members suggested the vote is unclear, but it was explained that some members said they would be uncomfortable reading their poetry in front of men. The situation, according to the professor of the class, wasn't that of "not wanting men, it is wanting all women."

That appears to be discrimination. Excluding a man because he is a man is discrimination. And it is apparently a violation of UNL bylaws which state that no one can be discriminated against on the basis of race, age or sex. It is also a violation of the commitment to provide quality education to as many students as possible. When one's access to a class is limited, that person's educational experiences are limited.

This action apparently taken by one professor and the members of one class reflects, in the end, the entire university. And it will be the entire university which will be subject to penalty

for a possible violation of Title IX, the federal law which prohibits discrimination based on sex.

But it is not only a legal concern. It is an ethical matter as well. If a class decides that it does not like men, another class can choose to exclude the handicapped, the next class may not like Jewish members and another, in a perfect irony, may choose to exclude women!

And what about the feelings of men involved? "They (women class members) made me feel worthless. They were telling me I didn't think and that I didn't have any emotions," said one of the men.

One would think that women who are sensitive to discrimination against themselves, would be just as sensitive to the feelings of others subjected to the same treatment. Apparently this is not so.

This is a public university, an institution of higher learning. We should have learned long ago that discrimination is wrong, no matter who it is against.

letters

I was appalled to read the article concerning the male students who were voted out of Ms. Johnson's Women and Poetry class (Sept. 27). The kind of mentality underlying this action is as reprehensible in this case as the same mentality was in the not-too-distant past when women were excluded from 'men's' classes deemed inappropriate for women. Such thinking sets the feminist movement back years.

The main fear voiced by the other members of the class seemed to be that, as men, Mr. Wright and the other man would be insensitive and not understanding of other women's feelings and thoughts. The very fact that these two men wanted to take the class indicates a sensitivity or a desire for greater sensitivity on their part. That some of the women were uncomfortable reading their poems in front of a sexually integrated class is just a cop-out.

Ms. Johnson acted in a very questionable manner and such action must not be allowed to occur again, especially within a university setting. A sexually integrated class might have been the catalyst for a unique learning and sharing experience—one that will obviously not occur now.

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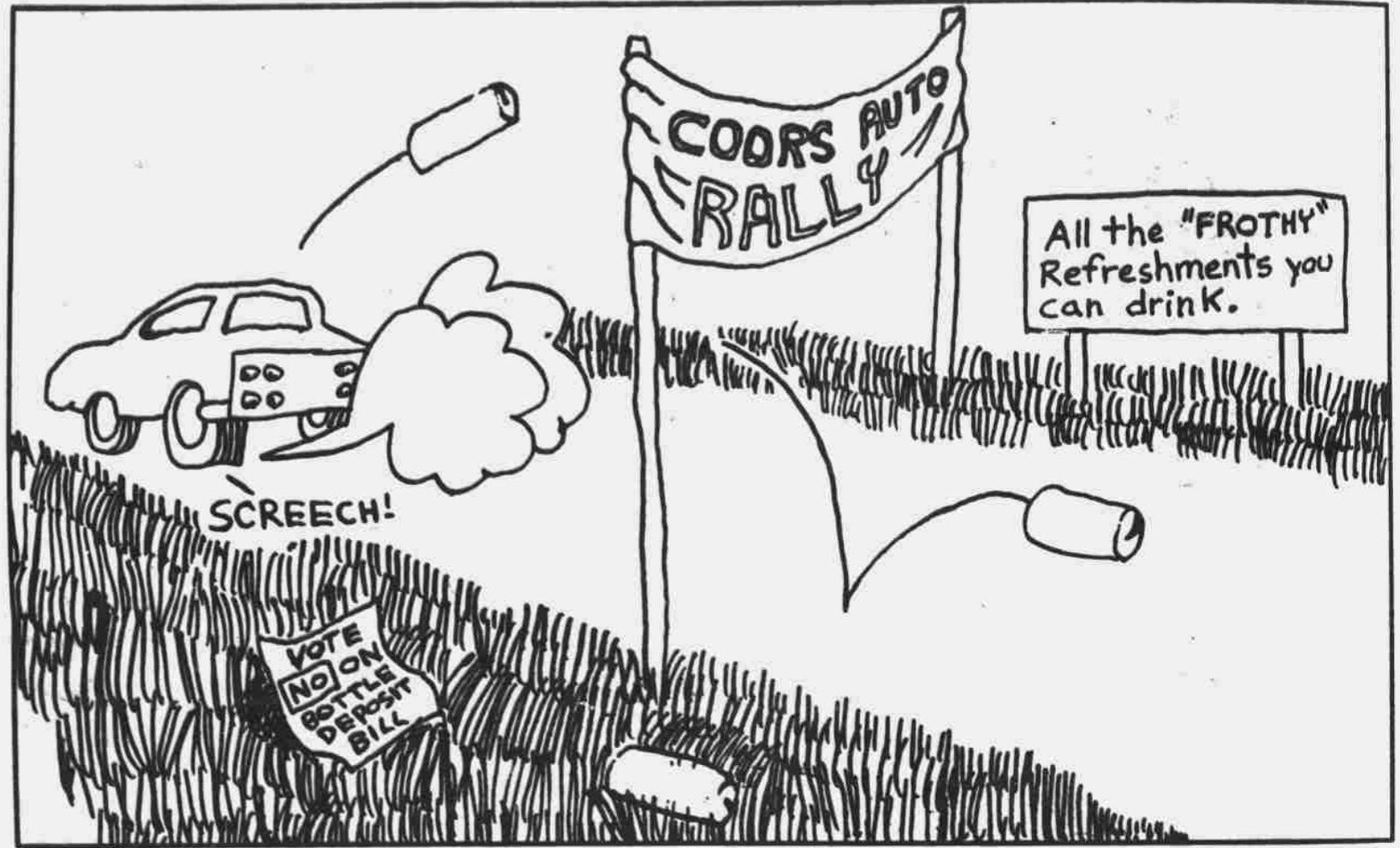
SALT treaty

I must agree with Randy Essex (editorial, Sept. 25) that the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty before the Senate has become a political football. The presence or absence of a combat brigade would seem at the present to have little bearing on the SALT treaty. It does, perhaps, make one uneasy that the same intelligence agencies charged with verification were apparently caught by surprise in the appearance of Soviet combat troops only a short distance from all those military facilities in southern Florida that undoubtedly monitor Cuba. Still, the removal of the troops in question will not make the treaty better or worse. The treaty should be rejected or approved on its merits.

But I take issue with Mr. Essex about his statement "Ground troops are obsolete in terms of relations between the superpowers." Surely if the superpowers are in restraining nuclear saber rattling and relegating the nuclear arsenals to the background, then the conventional components of military power will increase in importance. Since military power is the one sphere that the Soviets can effectively compete with the West, that is where they will do so.

As for mutual distrust, I submit that the United States at least, had good reason to distrust the Soviet Union. When President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger negotiated SALT I, it was to be a cornerstone of the detente process: relaxing tensions, lowering barriers between the superpowers, and most of all, beginning the first steps to capping the arms race. By hindsight we see Cuban troops backed by Soviet arms in Angola and Ethiopia, refusal of the Soviet Union to abide by the Helsinki Agreements, and the development and deployment of a new generation of ICBMs.

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Contraception proponent remembered

Boston—The Margaret Sanger Centennial year has begun rather quietly, especially for as catalytic an agent of change as the woman who invented the term, Birth Control. As H.G. Wells once wrote, "When the history of our civilization is written, it will be a biological history, and Margaret Sanger will be its heroine."

ellen goodman

It was her intense commitment and energy which almost single-handedly promoted contraception in this country—something which wasn't fully legalized until 1972.

Sanger was born one of 11 children to an Irish immigrant freethinker who sculpted gravestone angels. She began her career as a public health nurse on Manhattan's lower east side, where she became convinced that the solution to poverty was birth control.

In 1914, when Sanger was on the lam in London—she had broken the pornography laws by distributing birth-control information—she became an admirer of Havelock Ellis. Ellis was one of the more prominent eugenicists of the period who applied (or misapplied) Darwinian notions to a creepy philosophy of selective breeding.

UNDER HIS INFLUENCE, Sanger penned one of her early and least attractive slogans, "Birth control—to create a race of thoroughbreds." Shades of the Third Reich. In fairness, Sanger didn't advocate birth control out of a desire to breed a super race, but made an alliance with eugenics out of a desire to push birth control. It was her one and only cause.

She came to believe contraception was a panacea. It would not only control poverty, end child labor and improve health but also give women "the key to the temple of liberty."

Despite her own support of what she saw as women's liberty, Sanger was hardly a favorite with the feminists of her era. Most of them looked at her rather ecstatic views on sex—a "psychic and spiritual avenue of expression"—with a jaundiced eye.

STILL OTHERS, including many of the progressives, were sure that Sanger had the whole thing backwards. She thought the large families were responsible for the evils of the system and that a wife could control the entire organization of society with a diaphragm. But the progressives thought the birth-control issue came in second at best to the issue of social reform.

By 1920s and 1930s, birth control was overwhelmingly adopted by the middle class, not the poor. It was not accepted as a solution to economic injustice, but as part of the "sexual revolution" of the post-World War I period.

At that time the ideal of middle-class womanhood switched to the vision of a wife primarily as a companion and sexual partner, not mother.

But the most profound effect of the availability of birth control has been on the ability to separate sex from reproduction. This simple and revolutionary fact has been accepted by most of us with relief or joy or unease. The way we feel about the separation often underlies the attitudes we have toward the second sexual revolution—from extra-marital sex to "The Joy of Sex" to the availability of abortion.

In that sense, this most fanatic and controversial woman was prophetic when she said that birth control demands "the frankest and most unflinching re-examination of sex in relation to human nature and the bases of human society."

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