

The academy's new ayatollahs

Linda Chavez, a former Reagan administration official, was invited to give the commencement address last spring at the University of Northern Colorado. Working for Reagan is hardly a plus at most colleges, but school officials thought that inviting a successful female Hispanic would go down well with the "cultural diversity" movement on campus. No such luck. Chavez's views on two key issues were entirely too diverse for much of the student body: She opposes affirmative action and thinks Hispanic immigrants should learn English as quickly as possible. These are politically incorrect views on campus, so after howls from students, Chavez was disinvited. As so often happens in such deviations from college ideology, the responsible deviant—in this case, the college president—had to grovel a good deal about the huge mistake of inviting a speaker with whom everyone on campus did not already agree. He apologized for appearing "grossly insensitive" and said it was "obviously wrong" to think that Chavez was a proper role model for Hispanic women.

The rejection of Chavez was clearly *politically correct*, or P.C. for short, the wry new term for the narrow orthodoxy now ascendant on American campuses large and small. Student bodies have always tended toward generational groupthink, but the new orthodoxy is unusual. Its purity is guarded by faculty who rebelled as students in the '60s. Affirmative action, busing, gay rights, women's studies, the PLO, animal rights, bilingualism, the self-segregation of blacks on campus and censorship in the pursuit of tolerance are all politically correct. The following are all non-P.C.: The SAT, doubts about abortion, Catholics, wearing fur, any emphasis on standards or excellence, and any suggestion that gender and ethnicity might not be the most overwhelmingly important issues of the modern era.

Correct and activist. P.C. controversies are currently popping up all around us. At New York University School of Law, students refused to debate a moot-court case involving a hypothetical divorced lesbian mother trying to win custody of her child, because arguing the con side would be hurtful to gays. (P.C. law cases have only one side.) At the University of Texas, a writing class was assigned to critique a collection of ideological P.C. essays, leading one professor to comment, "You cannot tell me that students will not inevitably be graded on politically correct thinking in these classes." At Duke, a famous hotbed of political correctness, the anti-P.C. National Association of Scholars established a local chapter with the leadership of the wholly admirable political scientist David Barber, a liberal Democrat and former board chairman of Amnesty International. Stanley Fish, chairman of the Duke English department, reacted in typical fashion

for a P.C. ayatollah, denouncing the NAS as "racist, sexist and homophobic" and suggesting that NAS members were too politically biased to serve on university committees dealing with promotion and tenure.

P.C.-ness now functions on campus as a militant religion, determined to sniff out heresy and ban the speech of potential heretics, liberals and conservatives alike. One primary mission of the new ayatollahs is to see that the issue of affirmative action is not debated on campus. This smoldering issue—pitting claims of racial justice against traditional standards of academic qualification—is probably the No. 1 topic in private conversation on many campuses, but it cannot be discussed openly because political correctness forbids it. Teachers who bring it up are harassed as racist, and student editors who print doubts on the issue are relieved of duties or suspended. Sometimes, when minorities complain, a

"multicultural editor" or an ombudsman (i.e., a representative of the P.C. clergy) is immediately added to the newspaper. Sometimes, the newspaper is defunded or shut down.

The logic of political correctness leads directly to silencing the unconverted. The P.C. campus speech codes, which prohibit

racially and sexually intimidating speech, produce a good deal of intimidation themselves. They help intimidate non-P.C. students and professors and punish deviations. Under the University of Michigan's speech code, since struck down by a federal court, a student was brought up on charges for reading a limerick about the supposed homosexual acts of a famous sports star. A mediator had him write an essay for the school paper, headlined "Learned My Lesson" and, like any backsliding student at the University of Beijing, he underwent some attitudinal readjustment—in this case, participation in gay rap sessions. At Harvard Law School, a yearlong flap erupted when visiting Prof. Ian MacNeil quoted Lord Byron, "And whispering, 'I will ne'er consent'—consented," which the Harvard Women's Law Association angrily denounced as a sexist insult. At Michigan, the revered demographer Reynolds Farley ran into trouble by reading a passage from Malcolm X's autobiography in which the author described himself as a pimp and a thief. He was so harassed that he dropped the course. Some teachers say P.C.-ers deliberately bait them, hoping for an irritated reply that will lead to insensitivity charges.

P.C.-ers favor the Orwellian language of freedom, tolerance and diversity. But the reality is a good deal different. "The promoters of cultural diversity tell us that theirs is an ideology of inclusion," Linda Chavez wrote after her banning. "But the politics of cultural diversity as they are practiced on campus today have very little to do with inclusion or diversity." And she's right. ■

