

# Don lost the chance to field her arguments in marketplace of ideas

IN THE wake of Professor Thio Li-ann's decision not to teach at New York University (NYU), much as been made of a lack of tolerance of diverse views in that university. Both Prof Thio and Mr Eugene Tan from Singapore Management University have cited the sequence of events as a display of intolerance.

With respect to both the learned professors, I feel this is a mischaracterisation of what transpired at NYU. A right to express one's views freely comes with the right of others to disagree with those views, and one must take courage to defend what one believes in.

The NYU position throughout this unfortunate sequence of events has been that while the faculty may disagree with Prof Thio's position, it believes that academic freedom should be respected. Even when alumni threatened to boycott future fund-raising events unless Prof Thio was refused access, the university

was steadfast in its position that it would not force Prof Thio to withdraw.

It is disingenuous to paint the disagreement as a suppression of alternative views. Surely one cannot be naive to the fact that the attitude in the United States towards homosexuals is significantly different from that in Singapore. Just as Prof Thio was entitled to her view that homosexual acts should be criminalised, so were the NYU faculty and students entitled to their view that such discrimination is abhorrent.

In many ways, what happened at NYU has been disappointing. By cancelling her courses, Prof Thio has lost the chance to field her arguments in an open marketplace of ideas. The NYU students too have lost the opportunity to be taught by someone who, all views aside, is an extremely intelligent academic with a great presence in the classroom.

**Leon Michael Ryan**