

This chapter from Kenneth Westhues, *The Remedy and Prevention of Mobbing in Higher Education* (Edwin Mellen, 2006) is part of the website on workplace mobbing in academe. It was first published on the website of the New York AAUP in 2002, then in *New York Academe* (Vol. 30:1, Winter 2003, pp. 8-10). All rights reserved.

Chapter Two

The Initial Paper, October 2002: The Mobbings at Medaille College

Since mid-2001, an uncommon but severe organizational pathology has infected Medaille College, an institution serving 2,000 students in Buffalo, New York. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of individuals at the college have been harmed. Two tenured senior professors, Therese Warden and Uhuru Watson, have all but lost their professional lives.

The harm is needless, serving no purpose but to weaken the college and jeopardize its future. The purpose of this paper is to identify, analyze, and explain, on the basis of publicly available documentation, the precise social ill that has laid the college low. Section 1 summarizes organizational research conducted and disseminated in Europe over the past two decades, but as yet little known in North America. Sections 2-4 apply the research to the Medaille evidence.

The trustees, alumni, administrators, faculty, staff, and students of Medaille are educated men and women with the best interests of the college at heart. Section 5 of this paper invites them all to apply this analysis critically and constructively toward restoring the college to organizational health, lest the lives of two professors be wrongly ruined, and lest a cloud of disgrace hang over the college's future for as long as it may survive. The workplace ill of which Medaille is a textbook case is not beyond remedy. The college may emerge from

this episode with renewed vitality, proving true what Nietzsche said, that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. So favorable an outcome is unlikely without reasoned, well-informed discussion in all of the college's constituencies.

Finally, Section 6 shows the larger significance of Medaille's troubles, by recounting the extraordinary circumstance in which I learned of them and undertook the investigation reported here.

1. Workplace Mobbing: the Concept

In the early 1980s, the late Swedish psychologist, Heinz Leymann, precisely identified and labeled the distinct workplace ill that occurred at Medaille College in 2001-02. He described it with an English word, *mobbing*, by which he meant "ganging up on someone," "psychic terror,"

hostile and unethical communication, which is directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly towards one individual who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenceless position, being held there by means of continuing mobbing activities.... (1996, p. 168; see also 1990)

Leymann took the word *mobbing* from earlier research by ethologist Konrad Lorenz, who had documented "ganging up" among birds. This phenomenon is routine, for instance, in broods of chickens, where a "pecking order" is readily observable. The bird at the bottom commonly dies from the cumulative effect of being shunned, kept from food and water, and physically pecked by the rest.

A similar phenomenon among human adolescents, usually called *swarming* or *collective bullying*, is regularly in the news. Sometimes gradually over many months, sometimes suddenly, teenagers coalesce into a mob that torments, tortures, humiliates, sometimes even murders, one of their number.

Leymann's contribution was to document and study the same phenomenon among adults, even in highly professionalized, rule-bound, ostensibly civilized workplaces. The tactics differ. Workplace mobbing is normally carried out politely and nonviolently. The participants are so convinced of the rightness of their exclusionary campaign that they usually leave ample written records, proudly signing their names to extreme deprecations and defamations, without

noticing how thin or nonexistent is the supporting evidence. The object of the process is the same as among chickens or teenagers: crushing the target's identity and eliminating him or her totally from respectable company.

By most researchers' estimates, between two and five percent of adults are mobbed sometime during their working lives. A Swedish study found that about twelve percent of people who commit suicide have recently been mobbed at work (Leymann 1987).

While original in its precision and elaboration, Leymann's discovery echoed time-honored insights into human nature. Asked to comment on the anticommunist witch hunts of the McCarthy era, Harry Truman said:

You read your history and you'll see that from time to time people in every country have seemed to lose their good sense, got hysterical, and got off the beam. I don't know what gets into people. (in Miller 1973, p. 447)

A century earlier, in *The House of Seven Gables*, Nathaniel Hawthorne drew this lesson from the execution by hanging of a man innocent of crime:

that the influential classes, and those who take upon themselves to be leaders of the people, are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob. (1851, ch. 12)

Awareness that fair-minded, reasonable adults sometimes "lose their heads" and wrongly mob a fellow human is older still. René Girard of Stanford University has devoted much of his life to studying the impulse to scapegoat in ancient myths. He calls it the "persecutory unconscious." Girard argues that the Judaeo-Christian myths were unique in calling the urge to scapegoat wrong and in asserting individual dignity in the face of collective persecution, thereby laying the legal and cultural foundation for human rights in Western civilization (see 1986, 2001).

My own research over the past decade (see 1998, 2001; see also Davenport *et al.* 1999, Mathias 2000) has applied Leymann's concept of *workplace mobbing* to academe. I have analyzed by now about a hundred cases in North America, Europe, and Australia, of this hugely destructive snowballing contagion among administrators and professors in colleges and universities. The process runs its course in much the same way as Leymann found in nonacademic settings: first

informal ostracization and petty harassment, then some real or imagined incident that is seized upon to justify stigmatization and formal sanctions, leading to termination of the target's academic life, sometimes through formal dismissal (as in the Medaille cases), sometimes through forced retirement, suicide, mental breakdown, or stress-induced cardiovascular disease.

For grasping the mind-boggling character, so bizarre as to be almost comical, of mobbing in the academic workplace, I recommend not only the scholarly literature cited above but also three recent novels. In *The Human Stain* (2000), Philip Roth spins the compelling story of a college ex-dean run out of his job on trumped-up charges of racism. In *Blue Angel* (2000), Francine Prose describes with marvelous humor a spirited campaign to oust an English professor for sexual harassment. In *Never Fade Away* (2002), William Hart recounts how and why an ESL instructor who cared too much for his students gets the boot. Also recommended is *The First Stone* (1997), novelist Helen Garner's nonfiction account of the forced departure of a college master at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

2. Workplace Mobbing at Medaille

On February 8, 2002, John Donohue, acting president of Medaille College, formally dismissed from the faculty Therese Warden, professor of human services, on grounds of turpitude, a term whose meaning (to quote my dictionary) is "shameful character; baseness; wickedness."

On April 26, 2002, on almost identical grounds, Donohue dismissed Uhuru Watson, associate professor of social sciences.

From a narrowly legal viewpoint, the key fact in both cases was termination of employment. From the viewpoint of mobbing research, the key fact was not just termination but the stated grounds for it: corrupt personal identity. Warden and Watson were not just dropped from the payroll. They were officially designated as shameful, wicked human beings. Dangerous ones, too, since earlier they had both been suspended with pay and forbidden to come on campus, a penalty allowed by the Medaille College *Faculty Handbook* only if the professor's "continuance directly constitutes an immediate physical or psychological danger...."

A hallmark of workplace mobbing is the personal degradation of the target, the placing upon his or her deepest self the stigma of despicability. This rarely occurs in cases of firing for demonstrated cause. A president has no need to wound personally a professor who has embezzled college funds or failed for weeks to show up for class. The offense is clear. So is the penalty. Invective and disparagement are clues that a clear offense may not be in evidence.

In Warden's and Watson's cases, formal vilification did not stop with Donohue's letters. In the interval between suspension and termination, both professors sought redress in accordance with the *Faculty Handbook*, by appealing to the college's five-member Grievance Committee.

Its decision in Warden's case came on May 21, 2002, three months after she had been dismissed. The committee brushed aside her distress at being accused of turpitude:

While the committee would like to delve into the definition of turpitude, unfortunately, it is not within the purview of the Grievance Committee since it is limited to matters of procedure by *The Handbook*.

The committee agreed with Warden that she should not have been suspended, and went on to justify the terminal penalty that had replaced the suspension with pay:

Additionally, the options available to the administration in cases of turpitude are to either ignore the violation or to terminate the faculty member.

Recommendation: While we find in favor of Dr. Warden regarding this issue, the fact that the College has dismissed her renders a recommendation moot.

The committee not only dismissed Warden's claim of unprofessional treatment, but rubbed in the stigma already imposed by the acting president:

As her colleagues, the Grievance Committee is extremely dissatisfied with the behavior of Dr. Therese Warden in regard to the events from which these grievances are derived as well as her actions since the time of her dismissal which we believe have brought discredit to us all.

Finally, after some paragraphs of praise for tenure, shared governance, due process, professionalism, democracy, freedom, the pursuit of truth, and other high ideals, the committee recommended

rituals of groveling and humiliation as a possible alternative to dismissal:

The Acting President can reinstate Dr. Therese Warden, but only upon the mutual agreement of the parties that the following conditions precedent be met:

The parties agree to a written letter of censure by the Grievance Committee to be placed in Dr. Warden's personnel file.

Dr. Warden is prohibited from serving on any confidential committees for five years.

The Promotion and Tenure Committee conduct an annual review for three years of Dr. Warden, which include the area of collegiality especially as it relates to new faculty.

Finally, that Dr. Warden write a letter of apology to the Medaille College community that will be read at a faculty meeting.

More starkly even than Donohue's letters, the Grievance Committee's decision attests the stupendous social force that had been unleashed at Medaille: fanatic resolve to break a professor's professional back, to crush her under collective weight. Coerced public confession has long been outlawed in Western jurisprudence, yet the Committee would coerce from Warden a public apology, a statement of confession plus remorse, if Donohue should deign to receive it.

The Grievance Committee's decision in Warden's case deserves to be read in its entirety. Except for those caught up in Medaille's pathology, readers cannot help but be aghast at the contradiction of which the committee seemed oblivious, between the high ideals espoused and the low conclusions reached.

The same goes for the committee's shorter, three-page report one month earlier, on April 22, 2002, in Watson's case. Watson was at that point only suspended, not yet terminated. The committee judged that suspension was contrary to the *Faculty Handbook*: "The options available to the administration in cases like this are to either ignore the violation or to terminate the faculty member."

In its conclusion, the committee recommended that "the Acting President shall pursue one of the two options described in the Handbook (and as noted above) for cases of this nature," but then immediately contradicted itself by recommending a different

alternative to termination: not to ignore the violation but to enforce rituals of humiliation:

Dr. Watson will:

Acknowledge as true, in a manner to be determined in consultation with the Acting President, the facts of the investigation conducted by the Acting Academic Dean;

Authorize the full disclosure of the Grievance Committee's facts and findings regarding the unauthorized distribution of confidential minutes of the Promotion and Tenure Committee at a full faculty meeting.

Apologize in private to the Acting Academic Dean and the Acting President for his conduct during the investigation.

Withdraw any present lawsuits and do not initiate future lawsuits with regard to these matters.

The first of these items, that Watson should be required to "acknowledge as true" ideas with which he obviously disagreed, is especially extreme in a workplace founded upon intellectual freedom. It is an explicit effort at mind control, recalling the voice of tyranny in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

You are here because you have failed in humility, in self-discipline. You would not make the act of submission which is the price of sanity. You preferred to be a lunatic, a minority of one. Only the disciplined mind can see reality.... (1990, p. 261; first published 1949)

The Grievance Committee's reports in Warden's and Watson's cases highlight a key defining attribute of workplace mobbing, one that distinguishes this pathology from the related and better known pathology of bullying (see Namie & Namie 2000). In the latter, the target is up against a single domineering workmate or manager. In the Medaille cases, although Donohue was the dominant figure, Warden and Watson faced a united front of Donohue and his subordinates: Joseph Savarese, the acting dean who had recommended the dismissals to Donohue in a memorandum of December 10, 2001, the five-member Grievance Committee that joined the eliminative campaign a few months later, plus all those other administrators, professors, trustees, students, and secretaries who gossiped behind the scenes and stood idly by as the campaign progressed. The technical term for the latter is *bystanders*. The peculiarly devastating quality of workplace mobbing consists in the appearance of unanimity, that

“everybody who counts knows you are rotten and wants you out of here.” As the Grievance Committee declared in the final sentence of its decision on Watson: “These recommendations are offered with the unanimous approval of the Grievance Committee members.”

For understanding workplace mobbing, a talmudic principle often quoted by the late French philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas, is apt: “If everyone is in agreement to condemn someone accused, release him for he must be innocent” (quoted in Girard 2001, p. 118).

3. The Course of Events

That so many capable scholars could have been caught up in an irrational movement for inflicting permanent harm on two innocent professors is a hard idea to contemplate, so great is our respect for institutions of higher learning as temples of reason and sobriety. Surely Warden and Watson must have done *something* wrong.

In these as in most mobbing cases, elimination was officially rationalized by reference to a critical incident, an alleged instance of grave misconduct ordinarily involving violation of written policies and procedures. To the outside observer of the Medaille conflict, however, the clearest violation was committed not by Warden, Watson, or any other of the punished professors, but earlier, by acting dean Savarese and acting president Donohue.

On June 8, 2001, these two senior administrators convened the college’s Promotion and Tenure Committee for the purpose of securing its support for ousting Michael Lillis from his position as chair of business. Savarese presided at the meeting. Attending as a guest, Donohue sought and obtained the committee’s support for his determination that Lillis should be replaced.

This meeting violated college procedure and academic custom, since the issue it dealt with was not promotion of anyone to higher rank nor the award of tenure to anyone. Lillis’s position as a tenured associate professor was not at issue. The issue was whether he should hold, in addition to his faculty position, the administrative position of department chair. This issue fell outside the committee’s mandate. Procedures for appointment of department chairs, as set down in the *Faculty Handbook*, assigned no role whatsoever to the Promotion and Tenure Committee.

As one of the five members of this committee, Uhuru Watson noticed the violation of procedure. He was concerned in particular that Lillis had been the subject of negative comments at the meeting without having opportunity to respond – a standard requirement of the rules of natural justice. In the weeks that followed, Watson registered his concerns with Savarese, other committee members, and the Medaille College Faculty Council.

Thereby Watson acted in a way that is probably the statistically most common root of workplace mobbing: he exposed the wrongness of a decision made by his administrative superiors. He showed them up, implicitly put them to shame (see Wyatt and Hare 1997). They retaliated in kind by shaming Watson, accusing him of having violated the confidentiality of the disputed meeting, and judging this offense to warrant his being humiliated and fired. In colloquial terms, they “went after” him.

In October, 2001, a copy of the minutes of the disputed committee meeting of the previous June 8, appeared in the mailbox of Therese Warden, co-president of the Medaille chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), well-known on the campus as a high achiever and nonpartisan advocate of due process. The documentation does not indicate who placed the minutes there. Savarese later claimed it was Watson, and on this basis recommended his dismissal, though Watson did not admit to the charge.

Puzzled by the document and its mysterious arrival in her mailbox, Warden reported the matter to Savarese, who advised her to contact Donohue about it, which she did. She also gave copies of the document to Randy Brown, her co-president of the Medaille AAUP, and to mathematics/science professor Elizabeth Lucyszyn, a member of the Faculty Council. Savarese soon asked all three professors – Warden, Brown, and Lucyszyn – to return their copies of the minutes to him, which they did.

Then, however, Savarese and Donohue “went after” Warden, Brown, and Lucyszyn for the “egregious unethical behavior” of briefly possessing a document that, although not labeled confidential, could be considered so. Savarese recommended, and Donohue concurred, that Warden should be dismissed altogether for passing the document to Brown and Lucyszyn, that Brown (a junior, untenured professor) should be censured and his contract not be renewed, and

that Lucyszyn should be censured and removed from her position as chair of the mathematics/science department.

If there were more evidence than that just described of misconduct on the part of Watson, Warden, and the others who were punished, it would be my scholarly duty to report it, but I have found none. The plain fact is that the administrators had no case. In civil proceedings, it could be called a *nonsuit*, or in criminal proceedings, *false arrest*. On the other hand, the evidence seems clear that Savarese and Donohue convened the Promotion and Tenure Committee for a purpose outside its jurisdiction, and that Watson and Warden sought to rectify this policy violation through appropriate channels of college governance. Savarese and Donohue displayed poor administrative skills in convening the Promotion and Tenure Committee meeting of June 8, but nobody involved in the conflict over it committed any grave ethical offense or deserved any kind of punishment.

The conclusion that the two seasoned administrators, Savarese and Donohue, in Truman's words, "lost their good sense" on this occasion, is reinforced by a glance at Watson's and Warden's decade-long records of successful work at Medaille. Watson enjoyed such high collegial regard as to have been elected not just to the Promotion and Tenure Committee but to the presidential search committee then underway.

For her part, Warden co-founded the AAUP chapter at Medaille in 1993. As chair of her department since 1995, she had developed successful new certificate programs. On her return from a sabbatical leave during the fall of 2000, Medaille had celebrated her innovative work in community mental health with a lengthy faculty profile and photo in its newspaper, *Horizon* (spring 2001).

4. Origin of the Medaille Pathology

Because the documentation reviewed for this analysis begins only in 2001, I lack data on the mobbings' informal stages that probably began years earlier. Watson has spoken publicly of an institutional culture of intimidation. If his and Warden's cases follow the pattern of others in my research, a study of social relations at the college in the 1990s would reveal professional jealousies, factional rivalries, and nefarious coalitions that led to the purge of 2002.

One cardinal fact stands out, however, as weakening the college's immunity to severe pathology: the death in February of 2001, of Kevin Sullivan, Medaille's president for the previous fourteen years, and chair of its board of trustees for seven years before that. In no period of an organization's history is good order more likely to break down than in the interval between sudden loss of a longstanding leader and appointment of a new one. That was precisely the period Medaille found itself in when Watson and Warden were mobbed.

A week after Sullivan's death, Medaille's board appointed Donohue, an accomplished anthropologist then serving as Medaille's vice-president and dean, as acting president, and began a national search for Sullivan's successor. Donohue in turn appointed Savarese, the chair of veterinary technology, as acting dean.

Donohue wanted the Medaille presidency for the longer term. The search committee welcomed his candidacy and included him among the twelve semifinalists selected in December of 2001, then among the three finalists announced in February of 2002.

Donohue must have known his success in the competition depended utterly on his managing the campus well as interim president. He needed to "keep the lid on," keep things under control, not let the college's affairs "go up for grabs" – these being the baseline expectations of any college board.

One can also plausibly assume that when Watson challenged his way of dealing with Lillis's administrative appointment, Donohue felt a greater need than he might otherwise have felt to "come down hard" and "show who is boss." His own vulnerability, one suspects, led to rash, unwarranted incursions on professors' jobs.

Such an explanation of how the college caught the mobbing bug is admittedly speculative, and could only be confirmed by personal interviews with those involved, but such, at least, is the direction in which the documentary evidence points.

On February 19, 2002, as Donohue was preparing for his formal interview for the presidency, a reporter from the *Buffalo News* phoned him for his side of the story of Warden's dismissal, Watson's suspension, and Brown's and Lucyszyn's penalties. Mobbing targets often go public and appeal for outside help; it is their only recourse against the circled wagons of their own institution.

Predictably, Donohue was not pleased. Workplace mobbing is more likely to succeed under cover of secrecy and confidentiality. In

a memo to the college community that same day, he said he told the reporter

the matter in question is an internal personnel issue that is, by nature, confidential. I am not at liberty to discuss it. I noted that Medaille College prides itself on its equitable and appropriate treatment of all its employees.

Donohue wrote in conclusion:

It's unfortunate that some individuals felt the need to publicize an internal disagreement of this type before letting the processes we have established for review take place. While I am sure that there are people who feel very strongly on either side of the issue, I am equally sure that the procedures and processes in place at the College apply to us all.

Finally, at a time when so many positive things are happening at the College, it's a shame that a few individuals have generated this type of publicity. In their zeal to act, they have hurt us all.

The story in *Buffalo News* appeared on February 20, 2002, and a longer report in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* came out on March 7. Neither article editorialized. Both were factual and clear. Thereby they exposed to the college's two main social environments, its home city and the national academic community, how far out of hand things had gotten in the year since Sullivan's death.

Soon thereafter, the Board of Trustees announced the appointment of Joseph Bascuas, a vice-president of the Argosy Education Group, as Medaille's next president. He took office in July, 2002. Donohue was named vice-president for special programs, but his name no longer appears on the college website.

5. What Will Happen Next

Responding to a series of pleas from Jonathan Knight, Associate Secretary of AAUP, Bascuas said in early August that he was reviewing Warden's and Watson's dismissals. That review is apparently ongoing as of October 2002, since no results have been announced.

According to research on how mobbings in general play out, the statistically most probable action Bascuas will take is none at all. He

may remain silent or issue a do-nothing statement about moving ahead and letting bygones be bygones.

Leymann reported “that we have never found a single case where the employer, as the other party, could find himself at fault and give the employee some redress for wrongs suffered” (1990, p. 124). Similarly, John Polya wrote as follows about academic mobbings in Australia:

One of the most frightening observations in several cases is how new staff and new administrators, not involved in the original witch hunt, join to defend the old errors and injustices. The only explanation for such behavior is that the pressures on certain academics, or perhaps their basic psychodynamics, demand a release of tensions on a convenient scapegoat; it may also be that, by showing a willingness to victimise a scapegoat, they ingratiate themselves with local power elites. (1986, pp. 48f)

When a college or university has officially imprinted on a professor the stigma of turpitude and drummed the person out, it commonly displays extreme reluctance to reverse itself and admit a mistake – even, as Polya pointed out, after leadership has passed to newcomers. It is often as if a new leader contracts on arrival the strain of mobbing virus that has infected the campus, and transmits it further instead of healing it.

Donohue may be gone from the Medaille campus, but those who joined with him in mobbing Warden, Watson, and the others are still there. Subtly or explicitly, most of them can be expected to urge Bascuas not to “reopen old wounds” but to turn his attention to new projects.

In fact, the wounds are fresh, raw, and festering. If Bascuas digs in his heels behind wrong decisions made before he arrived, he will then have to mount an expensive defense against Warden’s and Watson’s legal claims. Court proceedings may drag on for five or more years. By American labor law, no court is likely to order Warden’s or Watson’s reinstatement to the faculty, but an award of financial compensation could put a large dent in the college’s resources.

Meanwhile, AAUP is likely to shame the institution, publishing Medaille’s name worldwide on the list of colleges and universities under formal censure. Public-affairs journalists may shame the college further with exposés on TV and in the press. Medaille’s

position as a private college in a harshly competitive institutional environment will probably become more precarious than it is now.

In the meanwhile, the fight to regain their positions and good names will consume the time, energy, money, and possibly the health, of Warden and Watson. They will feel intense stress, not just from bearing institutional stigma but from knowing how much the prospects of getting it legally lifted depend on lawyers' procedural maneuvers and on other vagaries of the justice system. If they win monetary damages in the end, they will not likely see much actual money, on account of their own legal expenses. In any case, as many mobbing targets before them have observed, money cannot compensate for the loss of years of productive life.

In this internecine but statistically probable scenario, nobody wins, no matter what verdict is ultimately handed down or what out-of-court settlement is eventually reached.. All parties, even the lawyers, will in the end feel sick over the waste of resources that could otherwise have gone toward producing knowledge and educating youth – by Warden, Watson, Bascuas, and the college itself.

Even if probable, so destructive a scenario is not inevitable. Several cases reported in my book (1998, pp. 165-170) illustrate the more constructive outcome that may occur also at Medaille, if the leaders of its various constituencies act promptly toward correcting past mistakes and toward making the college whole again.

Neither Leymann nor I have done research on workplace mobbing as a mere academic exercise, but instead with confidence that once managers and workers are informed of it, once we all face up to and understand how wrongly we sometimes behave at work, we thereby become able to prevent and remedy the resultant harm. The present paper provides the information and understanding for the mobbing cases at Medaille College. It can thus be an instrument for restoring the college to health.

What is needed at Medaille now is open, free, blunt, honest, well-informed discussion among all those who care about the school and share an interest in its survival and success: administrators, trustees, faculty, alumni, staff, students, as well as AAUP officials and colleagues in neighboring institutions. Warden and Watson should be invited back on campus to join in the discussion, out of which a solution will emerge that is fair to all sides and serves the college well. The forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope that have been

achieved elsewhere are possible at Medaille College, if only people risk exchanging reasoned views.

The initiative should not be left to Bascuas alone. As an administratively skilled outsider, new to the office of president, his role is above all to listen to the varied voices raised, then to draw the discussion to a constructive conclusion. No friend of the college should deprive Bascuas of honest input, lest his presidency be doomed to failure at the start.

The outcome of the mobbings at Medaille will be a test of Bascuas's administrative skills, as it will also be a test of Leymann's and my confidence that an understanding of mobbing enables its prevention and remedy.

6. Origin of this Analysis

The outcome will be a test of yet something else: whether the National Association of Scholars (NAS) stands for the classic goals of liberal education or merely for a right-wing agenda just as oppressive as the leftist orthodoxies NAS was founded to oppose. This is the larger significance of the Medaille conflict, as the story of how and why I got involved makes clear.

The analysis set down in this paper began with a question asked by a member of the audience on Friday evening, September 20, 2002, at the opening session of a conference at Medaille College on "Academic Freedom and Intellectual Pluralism: U.S. and Canadian Perspectives." I was in the audience, too. It was my first time on the Medaille campus. I was there to present a paper the next day in memory of Richard Henshel, a sociology professor at the University of Western Ontario who died in 1997.

Henshel had left most of his estate to NAS. I, along with the others to whom Henshel had entrusted execution of his will, had proposed to Stephen Balch, founder and president of NAS, that part of the bequest be spent on an academic conference in Henshel's memory. Balch had graciously agreed, and arranged for the conference to be held at Medaille, where he holds a seat on the Board of Trustees. Now at last, the conference was underway.

The program for the event was remarkable for having brought together the leaders of four major campaigns against political correctness and postmodern fanaticism in higher education. Alan C.

Kors, co-author of *The Shadow University* and co-president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), had just given the opening address, “The Betrayal of Liberty and Dignity on America’s Campuses.” Balch had introduced him.

In the audience was Clive Seligman, president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), the Canadian counterpart to NAS, who would speak the next day on “The Diversity Debate at Canadian Universities.” Other prominent opponents of political correctness were also present: conservative philosopher Barry Smith of SUNY Buffalo (the conference organizer), SUNY trustee Candace de Russy, libertarian economist Walter Block of Loyola, New Orleans, and Stanley Rothman of Smith College, chair of NAS’s board of advisors.

The most famous of the conference speakers had not yet arrived: neocon provocateur David Horowitz, president of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture (CSPC), who caused a stir in 2001 with paid ads against slavery reparations in the few campus newspapers willing to accept the ads. Horowitz’s panel presentation the next day was entitled, “Universities as a Political Base for the Anti-American Left.”

It was when the floor was opened for discussion after Kors’s talk that John Schedel, a communications professor at Medaille, asked the question to which this paper is in some respects a response. I could tell Schedel was angry but also scared, in the way that one about to ask an embarrassing question often is.

In light of what Kors had just said about liberty and free speech, Schedel asked, what was Kors’s opinion about the purge of tenured faculty last spring at this very college? Murmurs of “no” and “be quiet” traveled the assembly as Schedel spoke, but calmly and respectfully, he made his point.

“I don’t know about these cases,” Kors replied from the podium.

Balch rose quickly to his feet. He said he could not speak officially for the Board of Trustees, but that he knew these cases were not about academic freedom, instead the professors’ violation of confidentiality.

Schedel sat down, and discussion turned to generalities.

Weeks earlier, I had seen the article about Medaille in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: “Actions Against 4 Professors at Medaille College Raise Concern Over Academic Freedom.” That was all I knew. Later that balmy night, on the steps of the administration

building, Schedel began to fill me in. He described himself as a conservative, a scholar 180 degrees opposite to Warden and Watson on many issues, but nonetheless convinced that they in no way deserved the loss of their jobs and good names.

The more details Schedel gave me, and the more documents I read in subsequent weeks, the more troubled I became about the conference and my part in it. Why was a celebration of academic freedom being held at a college whose administration had just a few months earlier breached academic freedom so flagrantly? Why, when Schedel asked precisely the question that most needed to be asked, did Balch so quickly leap to defend the dismissals? Might the practical effect of our conference be to legitimate the recent mobbings? Might it be an instance of Newspeak, wherein freedom means slavery and ignorance means strength (Orwell 1990, p. 29)?

Two discoveries as I proceeded with research heightened my concerns. One was that ours was actually the second Medaille conference on academic freedom held in 2002. The first one, which I have watched on videotape, was sponsored by the AAUP on February 22. That conference had held the dismissals up to reasoned, critical scrutiny, in light of the standard values of academic and civilized life. Warden and Watson were on hand and allowed to speak. The practical thrust was toward constructive resolution of the conflict. That first conference was originally scheduled to be held in the Alumni Room of the Main Building of Medaille College, but was then apparently forced to move off campus, to nearby Daemen College.

The second worrisome discovery was Balch's column in the *NAS Update* of Winter, 2001-02. It was entitled "Let's Roll" – the famous phrase of the heroic passengers on United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, who mobbed terrorist hijackers in a circumstance where mobbing was fully justified. Balch seemed in that column to call for similar aggressive action on American campuses. "If the intellectual climate of the more politicized domains of scholarship is ever to change," he wrote, "the sorts of people inhabiting them must change as well." Might the Medaille administrators have taken their cue from Balch's rhetoric? Might the panic that followed the September 11 attacks help explain how these administrators mistook two decent professors for wicked, dangerous undesirables who should be sacked?

I have no firm answers to these questions. NAS, FIRE, SAFS, and CSPC have earned my admiration and respect as needed counterweights to the forces of political correctness on American and Canadian campuses. Many if not most of the academic mobbings I have studied in recent years have been rooted in well-intentioned but fanatic and misguided campaigns to purify campuses absolutely of leftist bugbears like sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia.

The Medaille conference, however, left me wondering what the reformist organizations actually stand for. Is it academic freedom or conservative orthodoxy? Is it the curtailment of mobbing or merely a shift from left to right in the direction from which it comes?

Buffalo's magnificent Albright-Knox Art Gallery was the setting for the closing event of our conference on Saturday evening, September 21. After dinner, David Horowitz gave a rousing speech about his battles with the left. I asked him afterwards whether, by his rhetoric and name-calling, he is not as extremist and divisive as the people he opposes. I cited the research Stanley Rothman had presented earlier that day, and Clive Seligman's studies of the social psychology of value-systems, suggesting that humans are not easily divided into polar political opposites, that unless overcome by panic, people's actual behavior tends to be issue- and context-specific.

Horowitz answered politely and thoughtfully. He said my attitude was civilized, but that it was just this attitude that had permitted American campuses to be taken over by the anti-American left.

Horowitz has a point. Yet it is also true that unless his organization (CSPC) and similar ones like NAS, FIRE, and SAFS promote a genuine pluralism in our institutions, reciprocal tolerance of diverse viewpoints and reasoned debate among them, they are as bad as fanatic movements on the left and do not deserve support. What part, if any, the speakers at September's conference at Medaille College play in resolving the college's troubles will be one test, one indication of what the agendas of their respective organizations really are.

Finally, to end on a personal note, this paper springs from my commitment to be true to the late Richard Henshel's will. He would have understood and respected John Schedel's question on the opening night of the Medaille conference. Henshel often asked the same kind of question. Part of what being a professor meant to him was rising in a room full of like-minded people and asking a question

that rattled their cage. It was to ensure that academic life continues to have room for such behavior that he left his money to NAS. What lies behind this paper is the sentiment Robert Service wrote in “The Cremation of Sam McGee”:

A pal’s last need is a thing to heed
And I swore that I would not fail.

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