

Mac protesters try to prevent controversial professor from speaking

About 20 rowdy protesters are under scrutiny after an event with visiting University of Toronto professor Jordan Peterson



Peterson

Toronto Star File Photo
Prof. Jordan Peterson

Hamilton Spectator
By [Andrew Dreschel](#)

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McMaster University has asked police to investigate an alleged assault and is reviewing other incidents after rowdy protesters disrupted a speech by a controversial visiting professor.

Clanging cowbells, blowing air horns and chanting obscenities, about 20 protesters tried to prevent University of Toronto Psychology professor Jordan Peterson from speaking about freedom of speech and political correctness to a packed room of students last Friday.

"We have determined at this point that one individual is likely to face (police) charges based on the incidents Friday and that person has been identified as someone who is not affiliated with the university," said McMaster spokesperson Gord Arbeau.

Arbeau says officials are also reviewing cellphone videos and security staff notes to see if there are grounds for further police or university disciplinary action.

According to Arbeau, the alleged assault was not against Peterson, who was invited to McMaster to speak by a student group named Overcome the Gap.

Peterson achieved media prominence last year for speaking against some of the prevailing political orthodoxy on gender identity, including arguing that gender is a biological not a social construct.

Peterson opposes the federal government's Bill C-16, which would make it a hate crime to discriminate on the basis of gender identity and expression. He also refuses to use gender-neutral pronouns such as zhe and zir when referring to transgender and gender nonconforming persons.

Peterson could not be reached for comment. But Hadhy Ayaz, a third-year health sciences student and principle organizer of the event, says Peterson tried to speak above the uproar for about half an hour before retreating outside where he addressed students from atop a bench.

Among the chants hurled his way was "Shame, shame on you" and "Transphobic piece of shit."

Ayaz says at one point a protester blew an air horn directly in Peterson's ear, prompting him to complain to a security officer. Another threw glitter on his face and suit.

"We obviously expected disruptions but we never expected something on this scale."

Ayaz's group invited Peterson after hearing some students don't feel comfortable expressing political, academic or religious views on campus because of a "prohibitive cultural atmosphere."

According to Ayaz, the event was originally planned as a panel discussion but three Mac profs backed out after "certain individuals" shared their contact information, inciting people opposed to the event to "pressure" them to withdraw.

Ayaz knew it would be a controversial event but thought bringing different perspectives together for a civil exchange of ideas would give everyone an opportunity to talk about free speech or challenge Peterson's ideas.

"A lot of us don't support most of what Peterson says but we felt it an important discussion."

Ayaz is heartened that up to 250 students showed up to take part while only a few came to agitate. The day after the chaos at Mac, Peterson received a standing ovation after speaking at the University of Western Ontario in London.

Nonetheless, the Mac incident highlights growing concerns over attempts to shut or shout down controversial opinions on campuses across North America. In an open letter

to the university, president Patrick Deane affirmed Mac's commitment to protecting diverse opinions and communities and warned "appropriate sanctions can and will be applied" against protest tactics that violate the law or Mac's codes of conduct.

That's good to hear. But to my mind, 21-year-old Ayaz put a lock on it.

"Obviously I'm a big defender of people's right to exercise their freedom of speech," he said. "Protests are obviously one of the important ways people can do that. But I think students need to examine why they're afraid to have certain dialogues. If you really do disagree with someone and feel strongly about a certain issue, what harm is there in having that discussion and being able to present your side of the issue?"

That, my friends, is the voice of reason. Last Friday's protest was the cowardly howling of the mob.

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