

March 27, 2017

Dr. Mark Mercer
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)
PO Box 33056 Quinpool Centre
Halifax, NS B3L 4T6
president@safs.ca

Dear Dr. Mercer,

Thank you for your letter of March 21, 2017.

Thank you also for commending my affirmation of the fundamental tenet of academic freedom, as well as the important right of peaceful protest. On these critical issues we do not disagree. Furthermore, I certainly do not disagree with you that the shutting down of events through disruptive behaviour is unacceptable. Controversial subjects have been debated at this university for almost 130 years, largely without incident, and it is our expectation that this academic community will continue to conduct itself with civility in the future. Our codes of conduct and norms of behaviour will be enforced. Last week's event was for many reasons an aberration, and it was as I said in my open letter extremely regrettable.

As to what you call my "de facto heckler's veto," I would remind you that earlier in the sentence from which you quote I explicitly note that "appropriate sanctions can and will be applied" where behaviour is outside the norms and codes of our community; and as I have indicated above, civility and collegiality are entrenched norms at McMaster University. I do understand, however, why you express concern over my view that security interventions should be limited to "the most extreme cases." Obviously, the issue is ultimately a matter of judgement, of how "extreme" is understood, but at this institution standards for behaviour are high. The purpose of that part of my statement is merely to indicate that there is a balance to be sought in which the policing of behaviour is not so aggressive as effectively to shut down free expression on the other side of the debate.

I confirm that you are welcome to publish this letter on your website.

Yours Sincerely,


Patrick Deane