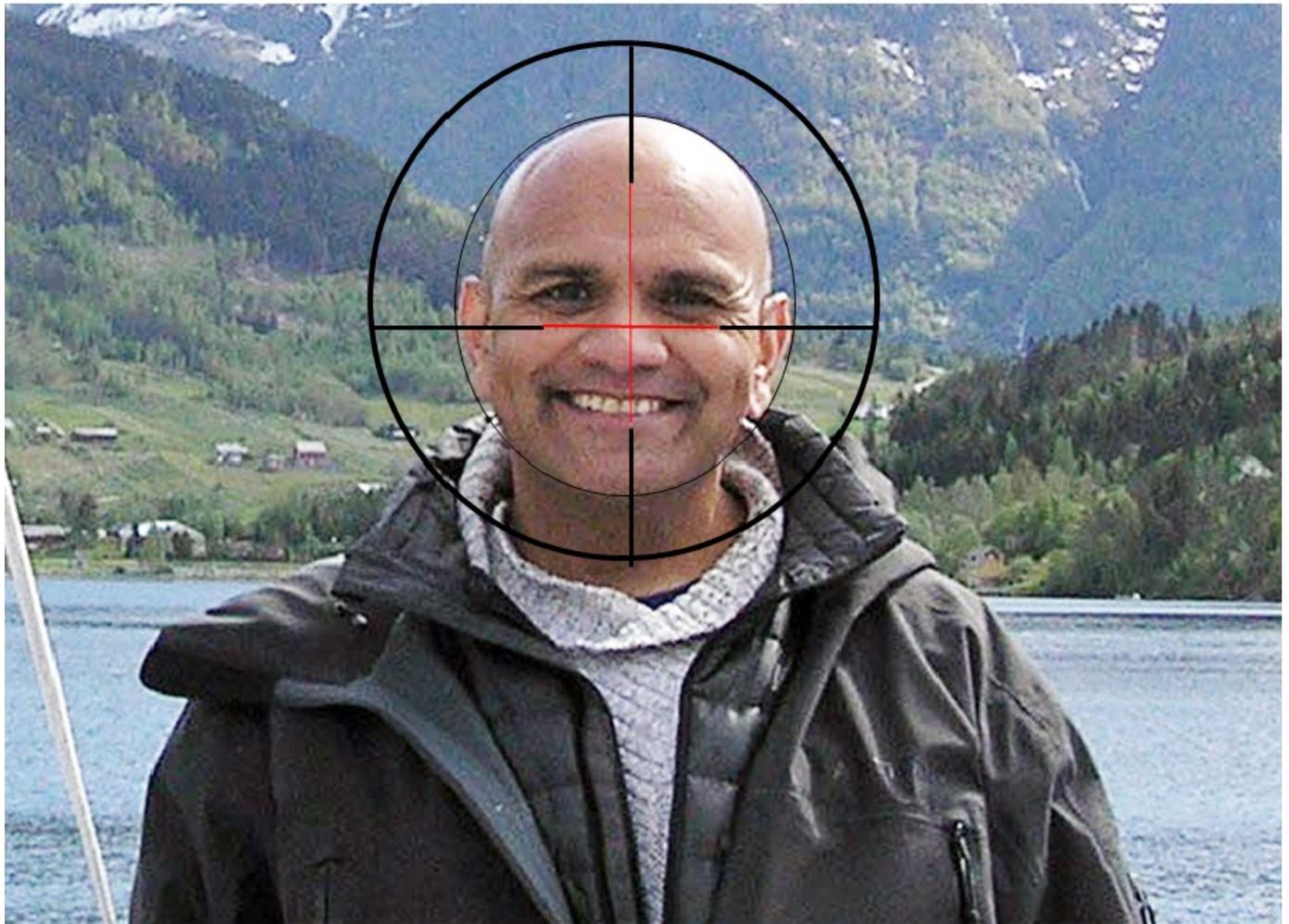


How a Social Justice Mob Fired a Tenured Professor



- By Peter Wood
- September 11, 2018

<https://www.mindingthecampus.org/2018/09/11/how-a-social-justice-mob-fired-a-tenured-professor/>

The fall semester is off to a fiery start. We have Brown University's decision to distance itself from [Professor Lisa Littman's](#) research paper; the decision by the *New York Journal of Mathematics* journal to un-publish [Professor Theodore Hill's](#) study; the University of

Chicago's refusal to defend [Professor Rachel Fulton Brown](#) from scurrilous attack led by a Brandeis professor; and the rush to give NYU [Professor Avital Ronell](#) a free pass for having harassed and sexually assaulted a gay graduate student.

These four cases have received a fair amount of attention—to the degree that I can name them without having to explain the details. For those who need a prompt to keep the cases in mind:

- Littman showed that some teenagers' claims to trans-sexuality were likely influenced by the desire to win popularity with their in-groups.
- Hill offered a mathematical model to explain why males are so much more variable than females.
- Brown believes medieval studies should focus on medieval Europe, an opinion which her critics say makes her a racist.
- Ronell is a celebrated leftist literary theorist, which her defenders say absolves her culpability in her sexual exploitation of her former graduate student.

Political correctness continues to explore new frontiers. The common theme in these four cases is the supreme confidence of the academic left. It quashes any views it dislikes without a moment's hesitation and feels little call to explain or justify its actions. Rather, it relies on the readiness of the academy at large to applaud the effort to keep thinkers-of-dangerous-thoughts in their cages.

- Littman's dangerous thought is that some self-identified trans-sexual individuals may not have been "born that way."
- Hill's dangerous thought is that male virtuosity in some intellectual realms might have a biological basis.
- Brown's dangerous thought is that Western civilization has a legitimate claim to attention in its own right.
- Ronell's accuser, Nimrod Reitman, offered the dangerous thought that a feminist icon could also be a sexual predator.

Things are bad. But they could be worse. At least we aren't living in Canada.

Freedom, Eh?

The Canadian case of the moment involves a tenured associate professor of psychology at Acadia University in Nova Scotia. Professor Rick Mehta was suddenly fired from his position on August 31. The stated reason, provided to Professor Mehta in a letter from President Peter Ricketts, was: "failure to fulfill [his] academic responsibilities, unprofessional conduct, breach of privacy, and harassment and intimidation of students and other members of the University community."

One might conclude from such language that Professor Mehta must be a walking nightmare who posed an enormous threat to the 3,500-some undergraduate students and 250-some faculty members. The truth, however, is that Professor Mehta found himself on what he calls the wrong side of a Canadian “culture war.” It’s a war that will sound pretty familiar to those who are watching the Littman, Hill, Brown, and Ronell cases in the U.S. Essentially, Mehta stood up for disinterested academic standards during a period in which Acadia University was rushing pell-mell to the “social justice” agenda.

The *Herald News* of Halifax covered the story in “[Acadia Fires Rick Mehta After Fire Storm over Comments](#).” To fire a tenured professor over his “comments” suggests that he must have uttered some pretty remarkable syllables. Granted that Canada doesn’t have First Amendment protections. What did Mehta do? Did he denounce hockey as a sport inferior to American baseball? Did he declare personal opposition to Canada’s tariff protections of its dairy industry?

Acadian Auto-da-fé

No, rather, he described multiculturalism as a “scam.” Multiculturalism might be described as the official state religion of Canada, and Canadian universities as its schools of theology. The courage to call it out as a scam testifies that Professor Mehta must be a man of rare character. Let me say at once that I have never met him or even corresponded with him, and it is possible that he holds other opinions from which I would recoil in horror. But his stand on multiculturalism all by itself commands respect.

It is a stand that goes beyond that one word “scam.” He is accused as well of “denying the wage gap between men and women and dismissing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a vehicle for ‘endless apologies and compensation.’” The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#), for readers below the 49th parallel, was a body created in 2008 by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement to make things right with the native peoples of the country. It issued its final report in 2015, which includes 95 “calls to action” on many matters, from child welfare to indigenous languages. It is, in essence, a charter for permanent grievance by Canada’s native people against the descendants of all European immigrants. Many Native Americans in the United States look upon the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as their fondest dream.

As one might expect given Professor Mehta’s temperament, he has not remained silent during this ordeal. Rather, he has provided a full statement on his dismissal. It has been circulating among some of us who pay close attention to issues of academic freedom, including the [blog of Andrew Lawton](#), a fellow of the True North Initiative.

Mehta’s statement stands on its own and is worth reading, especially for Americans who erroneously suppose that political correctness has gone about as far as is imaginable. No,

it can go further. Acadia University is showing the way: the arbitrary firing of tenured faculty members who voice doubts about the sacred doctrines of the left.

Jordan is a Hard Road to Travel

Mehta taught at Acadia for fifteen years; his teaching included large-enrollment introductory courses; he won teaching awards twice; served on numerous committees; remained professionally active in his discipline at the national level, and served local community groups. He was by traditional standards, an exemplary professor.

Mehta's troubles began, he says, between 2015 and 2017, when he came under the influence of fellow psychologist Jordan Peterson and started to take notice of "protests and cancellations of talks at universities." In early 2017, his concerns came to a head when he wrote to the search committee that was engaged in looking for Acadia's next president. He voiced his worry that then-candidate Dr. Ricketts had little to say about "critical thinking or listening to a diverse range of perspectives" and that Ricketts "planned to commit Acadia to social justice." Mehta went beyond his letter to organize a panel discussion of these matters. He then gave a "comprehensive talk" on free speech, September 29, 2017, in which he called on his university to adopt the University of Chicago's Principles of Free Expression. He posted a [video](#) of the talk.

The talk was well received, but not by everyone at Acadia. A math professor, Eva Curry, declared the event, "in many ways the worst violation of academic integrity that I have seen at Acadia." The reader can gauge the awfulness of Mehta's offense by watching the 144-minute video. I've watched it. Perhaps Professor Curry is referring to something that was said before or after Professor Mehta spoke, but it is extremely hard to see an offense against "academic integrity" in Mehta's recorded words.

Whose Freedom?

But one can see the flashes of lightning in the approaching bank of dark clouds. Professor Mehta had offended the feminist establishment at Acadia by arguing for objective academic standards and against privileges for self-proclaimed victim groups. The wrath of those groups was about to descend. It did so in the form of the "MacKay Report," which performed the familiar magic show in which a grievance is turned into an accusation and an accusation into a verdict in the blink of an eye. Mehta had set himself in opposition to Acadia's "decolonization initiatives." He was soon walking the path to dismissal, beginning with the loss of his prized course on research design and analysis, and then his exile from a student group he had worked with.

His path to becoming a non-person was paved with the proper bureaucratic cobbles. Mehta was excoriated, with deep irony, as a threat to academic freedom, for having exercised his own. A vice president informed him:

“The University has a legal responsibility to provide an environment free from discrimination, sexual harassment, and personal harassment. The nature and frequency of these complaints and significance of the allegations is concerning for the University, and we have determined the necessity of proceeding to a formal investigation”.

And the coordinator for the Women and Gender Studies Program expressed that program’s “solidarity” with those who speak out “in an increasingly chilly climate where boundaries of academic freedom are marked at the intersection of so-called ‘freedom of speech.’”

That sentence deserves some prize in triple-speak obfuscation. We can take the point that Mehta’s free speech violates the “academic freedom” of people who disagree with him.

Coming, Coming

At this point, I will desist from summarizing Mehta’s fall into clutches of the social justice mob. His own account spares no detail. What we Americans need to take from it is that Canada is providing us with a glimpse of what is to come next for us.

What we academics must take from Mehta’s fight is that independent thought throughout the Western world is at grave risk. What is actually happening in higher education on either side of the border is coercive multiculturalism: a doctrine that obviates all individual rights that get in the way of the sacred mission of group grievance. Where coercive multiculturalism reigns, scholars such as Littman, Hill, and Brown are cut down. Students such as Ronnell’s accuser, Nimrod Reitman, are brushed aside. And eventually, tenured faculty members such as Rick Mehta are summarily dismissed.

We should take warning from what Acadia University has done. It will, very soon, happen here too.