

UW Gazette, September 20, 1995

An open letter submitted to the Gazette, and distributed to a number of electronic correspondents, by Dr. Vasek Chvatal of Rutgers University in New Jersey:

I was fortunate to have been, in 1969-1971, first a graduate student and then a postdoctoral fellow in the Combinatorics and Optimization Department of University of Waterloo. Mathematics was fun with friends rather than competition against adversaries; the continuous sessions in the coffee lounge blurred distinctions between work and play; the synergy of the group was palpable. To me, the night when Adrian Bondy, Rama Murty, Crispin Nash-Williams, my wife Jarmila, and I drove together to see “Hair” in Toronto symbolizes that era: the whole department seemed like an extended family. We liked each other.

Around the age of fifty, people tend to evaluate their past and ask themselves what to do with their future. “Mid-life crisis” is the expression commonly used to refer to this turning point. For Adrian Bondy, a Professor in the C&O Department, the turn became a spin when, in quick succession, he first met his future wife, then lost his father, and a year later fathered his first child. With his family in Paris and his job at Waterloo, he had hard decisions to make.

He tried to look before leaping. After the University rejected his request for a sabbatical leave, he reluctantly agreed to take a cut in salary in Winter 1994 and Fall 1994 in exchange for being allowed to spend these non-teaching terms off campus. His duties during this partial leave were to be “involved with research”. The expressed purpose of the leave was to give him the time to reflect on his changing circumstances and the opportunity to explore other career possibilities.

As for this opportunity, the option of taking a visiting position at a French university and having it later converted into a permanent position simply does not exist. Permanent positions are awarded through a centralised and very formal procedure: all of them are advertised in a single issue of a bulletin called the Journal Officiel and, in order to apply for any of them, one must already be on a list of candidates approved by anonymous referees. In March 1994, Adrian applied for a number of the advertised jobs; in September, he took up a post earmarked for his area and offered to him by the Universite Claude Bernard in Lyon.

His rank and salary in Lyon were much lower than at Waterloo; he was

commuting a long distance each week from Paris, where his wife and son live and his wife teaches; all he wanted was the opportunity to try it out for several months before making a decision as to whether to stay or to return to Waterloo. In December, he requested a parental leave for the Winter term. In response, he was asked by Chair Colbourn and Dean Kalbfleisch to return a signed agreement to a list of seven points concerning his relationship with the University. Only then would they process the forms necessary to approve the leave. Point no.1 sought to impose uncommon conditions on Adrian's teaching schedule; he found it unacceptable and in clear violation of the parental leave provisions of the Employment Standards Act of the Province of Ontario. He did not sign.

Point no.6 read as follows: "We would also like to ensure that you are aware of Policy 49, Paragraph II.2.d: Regular appointments to the university must be construed as constituting a full-time occupation. Given this understanding, any extra-university occupation that involves more than one work day a week should be examined and judged very carefully. It is the responsibility of the individual faculty member to inform the Department Chair and Dean concerning any activities where expenditure of time is substantial."

Two weeks later, five days after the deadline given to Adrian for signing the agreement, Dean Kalbfleisch sent him a new letter. Now he changed the salutation from "Dear Adrian" to "Dear Professor Bondy". Now he explained why point no.6 had been included in the earlier list: "Policy 49 was quoted since we had heard rumours that you had a paid appointment at another university. We have, since then, made some enquiries at the Universite Paul Bernard Lyon 1. Personnel there informs us that you have held a full time appointment at that university since September 1, 1994." Why did not he and Chair Colbourn simply ask Adrian two weeks earlier whether there was any truth to these "rumours"? Why this attempt to play a cat-and-mouse game? Would the scenario have unfolded differently had Adrian signed his agreement to the seven points?

Then dismissal procedures against Adrian were initiated and he contested the dismissal. In June, the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors appointed President Downey to decide the case. In June and July, I and a number of others sent letters to President Downey, appealing to him to put a stop to the dismissal procedures. His reply to me, dated August 10, seems to be identical with his reply to others: a form letter that addresses none of the points made in my letter and that ends with "At this University, such unethical behaviour is judged to constitute adequate grounds for dismissal."

On August 24, I resigned from my position of Adjunct Professor in the Department of Combinatorics and Optimization.

Adrian Bondy has devoted twenty-five years of his life to the University of Waterloo. As a brilliant researcher. As a dynamic teacher. As a wise administrator. As a caring advisor with the highest ethical standards. It was he who, as its Managing Editor, led the Journal of Combinatorial Theory (Series B), one of the more impressive feathers in the department's cap, out of a serious crisis in the late seventies. It was he who led the department out of a serious crisis as its chairman in 1979-1982. Do any of these facts count in his favour? And the grievance proceedings he lodged in 1994 against Chair Colbourn and Dean Kalbfleisch for an unjust refusal of a sabbatical leave and an unfairly low merit rating, do they count against him?

Adrian Bondy's requests for a leave without pay had been repeatedly rejected. His enquiry as to the possibility of a half-time position, teaching one term per year, was flatly turned down. What were his remaining options at this turning point in his life, caught between the inflexibility of the French bureaucracy and the insensitivity of the Waterloo bureaucrats? He has breached University regulations. Suggestions that he had contrived to defraud the University of Waterloo are preposterous. Combinatorists are a tightly knit international group; in this global village equipped with the Internet, news spreads quickly; when it comes to who has a position where, the information is called facts not rumours. If a mathematician of Adrian Bondy's talents decided to embark on a covert operation, surely he would design a cover that could not be blown with a simple phone call.

Never mind sympathy and understanding. The age of Aquarius is gone. I would have settled for absence of malice. But the University administration has not satisfied even this minimum requirement. The nasty treatment Adrian Bondy was subjected to could have been inflicted by malevolent children. In my mind, such unethical behaviour is judged to constitute adequate grounds for my resignation.