

Nutsy profs are good; Nazi profs are bad

Let us consider politics in terms of the two types of beer. It would be perfectly logical to proclaim that all beer is bad. But it would be idiotic to proclaim, for example, that lager is evil while ale is morally sound. It would be similarly illogical to proclaim ale evil and lager good.

Let us now apply that logic to the two systems of totalitarian government jointly responsible for killing 100 million or so innocent people in the 20th century. It is perfectly logical to argue that all totalitarianism is evil. But it's silly to argue that Nazism is good and Marxism evil — or vice versa.



**PAUL
MULSHINE**

Yet that is precisely the sort of distinction that is being made on college campuses all over this great state these days. Last week I wrote about Grover Furr, a literature professor at Montclair State University who cast blame on the United States for the 9/11 attacks and who has on his Web site (<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/>) a lively defense of Joseph Stalin.

Most readers agreed with me that Furr is a little nutty. But I got a sizable number of e-mails from academic types who told me I failed to grasp the concept of academic freedom. On campus today, they said, professors can espouse whatever political views they wish with no fear of being disciplined by their fellow academics.

So how then do we explain the case of Jacques Pluss? Pluss is a 51-year-old academic from Bergen County who has a couple of hobbies. One is raising horses and the other is participating in the National Socialist Movement, neo-Nazi group for which he did an Internet radio broadcast in March. A few days after the broadcast, he got a call from his department chairman.

"He said I would be relieved of classroom duties as of the following morning at 8 o' clock," the 51-year-old Pluss told me in a phone conversation. "He said, 'The only thing I can tell you is it is for the convenience of the university.'"

FDU was soon minus Pluss. University officials said the technical reason for the firing was some absences. But John Snyder, dean of FDU's university college, made it plain that political views would keep Pluss, who was nontenured, from ever again setting foot on campus.

"It's not politics; it's hate mongering," Snyder told the Bergen Record. "It's just hatred directed at the very students he taught. His position would be untenable on the basis of student welfare. It's our job to see to it that students are treated with respect and security."

Yet by Snyder's own account, Pluss did just that. Snyder told The Star-Ledger that "his political beliefs did not slip into his teaching." A survey of students showed that Pluss managed to teach a class in the history of Western civilization without giving the students any indication on which side his sympathies lay. One student even assumed he was a liberal Democrat.

"A Jewish student said, 'I'm a Jew and he gave me an A,'" Pluss said. "Well, why shouldn't I give him an A? He did good work."

Contrast this with Furr. Even his supporters acknowledge that he injects his politics into his teaching. On the national "Rate My Professor" Web site, one observed that he "gives you a look at how and why history repeats itself through sugarcoating past atrocities yielding a generation of geocentric ignorant tools."

Fine, but Furr doesn't teach history. He teaches literature. If Pluss can keep his Nazi beliefs out of a history class, Furr should be expected to keep his Marxist beliefs out of an English class.

As for Pluss, he has no chance of getting hired at a college again. Despite his nutty politics, he has the very best of credentials, a Ph.D. in medieval history from the prestigious University of Chicago.

"If I were a Marxist or a Stalinist, I believe I would be given every opportunity to join a faculty at a respectable institution on either a part-time or a full-time basis," he told me.

If academics truly believed in academic freedom, a Nazi would be just as welcome on campus as a Stalinist. Both have nutty political views, but all professors should be expected not to promote their political views in the classroom.

That's not the case at our state colleges today if an e-mail I got from Tom Baldino is any indication. Baldino, a 1977 Rutgers grad, recently returned to school to pick up a few credits. He found himself "appalled at how politicized the college environment has become."

"One math class, one writing class, one language class, and one liberal arts class consisting of bashing Bush and Republicans," Baldino wrote. "Bush/Republican bashing supplants addressing subject matter."

It's enough to drive you to drink. I'll take an ale. Or a lager. Unlike Marxism and Nazism, both are good.

Paul Mulshine is a Star-Ledger columnist. He may be reached at pmulshine@starledger.com.