

SUPPRESSION OF FREE SPEECH AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MATHEMATICAL EDUCATION 2024

Brian Greer

brian1060ne@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Many readers will know that at the 15th International Congress on Mathematical Education (ICME-15) in Sydney in July 2024 a participant was expelled, escorted out by security guards, on the grounds that some other participants, unidentified, complained that she was inappropriately aggressive in responding to a presentation.

That participant was Dr. Jayasree Subramanian, a mathematician and mathematics educator with a deep commitment to social justice, a leader in the field in her native India and internationally. Jayasree is a long-term close friend and colleague and I have seen her many times arguing a coherent case with passion. In my opinion, to characterize that as “inappropriate behaviour” is absurd.

Nobody I know is aware of any precedent for such an action. A great many have expressed their outrage about the blatant injustice committed, compounded by subsequent lack of communication from the Local Organizing Committee, and its failure to acknowledge the trauma suffered by Jayasree. There is great concern about the implications for relations between the parent body International Commission on Mathematical Instruction (ICMI) and ICME conferences, in terms of addressing the organizational issues raised and considering what provisions to put in force to prevent any repetition of what happened.

Beyond these widely shared reactions, I argue in this paper that the circumstances strongly suggest a degree of political interference in the conference. If that is the case, it cannot be tolerated, against the background of a global trend whereby avowedly democratic yet authoritarian regimes are engaged, to an even greater and explicit extent, in subjugating education to political ends.

WHAT HAPPENED

In putting together this account, I have drawn on partial information from many sources, so it is fallible, and naturally I apologize for any errors or misrepresentations. It is highly problematic that no written account detailing the events and explaining their actions has been released by the Local Organizing Committee (LOC).

The events occurred during a workshop titled “Reviving Ancient Wisdom: Vedic Mathematics for Modern Learning” by Professor Ashish Arora, on July 12. When the session was opened up for questions, Jayasree raised several, in particular in relation to caste-based discrimination in education, which is something about which she feels very deeply. The caste system is still pervasive in India (Teltumbde, 2010) – and beyond (Luthria, 2023). “Caste discrimination and social exclusion in Australia”, a report issued last year, with many redactions, is available at:

www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/PDFs/multicultural-framework-review-public-anonymous-submissions/anonymous-submissions/154-name-withheld-2-of-2.PDF

It reports, for example, that nearly 25000 children in over 80 public schools in Greater Sydney are covered by “Hindu Dharma” classes as part of the

state-authorized Special Religious Education program. Within these classes, the caste system is characterized as contributing to the benefit of society.

To return to the workshop, Jayasree made her points by reading from prepared notes and spoke forcefully but, she asserts, by no means abusively. An invaluable independent account of the session supporting this assertion is discussed later.

Six hours later, as Jayasree was about to enter a session of the Topic Study Group on “Social and Political Dimensions of Mathematics Education”, Will Morony (LOC Co-Chair) approached and told her that, on account of complaints from other attendees at the workshop, the decision had been made to expel her from the conference. (Her total interaction with the other Co-Chair, Kim Beswick, was limited to an e-mail referenced below). This was the first time that Jayasree became aware that she was subject to such complaints. The complainants were not identified, the nature of the complaints was vague, and no statement in writing was provided. Jayasree is preparing her own account for imminent publication.

With effectively no chance to present her case, Jayasree was immediately escorted out by security personnel. She had informed Mr. Morony that she was scheduled to appear the next day on a Plenary Panel to discuss the topic “Mathematics education effectively responds to humanity’s problems”. He said he would inform the organizers of her exclusion. In response to a plea from its organizers, she was granted strictly temporary readmission to the conference, and again escorted out by security personnel immediately it ended. As noted by the organizers of “JusticeForJayasree” (Bill Atweh, Theodore Chao, Arindam Bose, and Anthony Fernandez) an e-mail from Prof. Beswick detailing the conditions under which Jayasree was permitted to take part in the Plenary included the following: “Under no

circumstances are you to speak to anyone (staff or delegates) about the events or issues that have led to this situation – either before, during, or after the panel session”. That authoritarian injunction further fuels my suspicion that the LOC (more specifically, its two leaders) were acting under duress.

As one attendee of the panel session subsequently noted, it was extremely odd that during the session nobody on the panel made any mention of what had happened to one of its members. It was only with persistent prompting that they produced a collective statement for inclusion in this paper:

The panel members collectively campaigned for Jayasree’s return to the conference. They decided to proceed with the event together or not at all. In spite of the restrictions placed on Jayasree, they decided it was important to have at the conference her powerful perspective on the role of mathematics education’s shortcomings in addressing humanity’s problems. This was also Jayasree’s preference. The panel felt constrained to abide by the same restrictions that were placed on Jayasree. However, Jayasree’s first words in her presentation were a subtle but strong statement of who she is and what she stands for, opposing what she was being accused of: "I am Jayasree from India, the country of M. K. Gandhi who taught non-violence to the world, of B. R. Ambedkar and Periyar who fought non-violently for social justice and annihilation of caste, Savithribai Phule and Fatima Shaik who worked steadfastly for the education of women, dalit and other most marginalized people undeterred by opposition they faced. It is the legacy of their courage and conviction that gives me the strength to stand in front of you and make this presentation and I feel honoured to

do so." (See <https://youtu.be/lS34RL53d4E?feature=shared>, timeline 12:49)

Nevertheless, this delayed response I find disappointing. I do not believe that either morally or legally they were bound to maintain their silence after the conference. What is the point in writing and speaking about politics and mathematics education if you cannot engage with a political problem right under your nose, the suppression of free speech not just for Jayasree, but for every member of the panel?

In a message from Hyman Bass, (president of ICMI 2000-2006), he commented:

In the excellent Saturday morning plenary panel, we had the opportunity to hear Jayasree's strongly held views about equity and social justice. Moreover, we witnessed her forceful style and voice, and compellingly argued position... This was a model of what ICME can do best; insightful and passionate debate about deep intellectual/moral issues. (e-mail message, July 21, to Prof. Frederick Leung, president of ICMI)

The irony is blindingly obvious in the contrast between "what ICME can do best" and the suppression of free speech about intellectual/moral issues.

It was only later that Prof. Bass and others, heard, with shock, of Jayasree's expulsion. According to his account, he and others contacted her by phone and a group that also included Prof. Chao (who has provided a clear written eye-witness testimony of what happened in the workshop that gave rise to complaints – see below) arranged to meet her outside the Convention Centre. They found her in a bewildered and traumatized, but resilient, state.

One of the most puzzling aspects of the affair is the lack of communication between the ICME Local Organizing Committee and the Executive Committee of ICMI. An initial statement by the Executive Committee, which can be read here:

[www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/ICMI/ICMINewsletter/2024/September/Statement%20on%20Jayasree%20\(final\)-1.pdf](http://www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/ICMI/ICMINewsletter/2024/September/Statement%20on%20Jayasree%20(final)-1.pdf)

includes the startling information that the EC were not aware of the issue until after the expulsion and then only given a minimal account of what happened – and that conveyed verbally. The statement reports that the EC were informed that “at least five” delegates had reported that Jayasree’s behaviour at the workshop was “unprofessional and inappropriate in an academic conference”, that the presenter was distressed by her comments, and that several delegates were also distressed by what they witnessed. As far as I know, there is no written form of any of these statements, on the basis of which the decision was made that Jayasree “needed to be required to leave”. As an accusation “I felt distressed” (elsewhere the term “threatened” has been used) has the great advantage of being essentially irrefutable, even if Jayasree had been given the chance. If this had been playing out in a court of law, Jayasree could have asked, for example: “Did these accusers make their complaints independently or as a group?” and “Were any of these accusers proponents of ‘Vedic Mathematics’?”.

Ever since, the LOC has remained silent, despite requests from the EC and from groups advocating on Jayasree’s behalf. Dr. Chao and Dr. Anthony Fernandez (University of North Carolina at Charlotte) circulated a petition (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSecxtQtTzbgAdX4ddWg8FDic_sh_J0-sGQ7zp5RAHXP4VWMJg/viewform) which garnered well over a thousand signatures and later, with two others, formed *JusticeForJayasree*

(see above). The *Mathematics Education and Society* community (www.mescommunity.info) has likewise been vociferous in her support. Jayasree has been very active in that group for many years and organized its conference in Hyderabad in 2019. There have also been many, many letters from individuals, including some cited later in this paper.

THE LEGAL FIREWALL

From a technical legal standpoint, I suspect the actions taken can be justified. The key document is the *Event Code of Conduct* which was brought to the attention of attendees in the conference registration in the following terms:

The Organiser[s] of ICME-15 (the “Event”) reserve the right to remove from the venue/event at any time any attendee deemed to be causing, or potentially causing, a disturbance or exhibiting disruptive or inappropriate behaviour. Such removal does not constitute a right to refund of any fees paid. Please view the [Code of Conduct here](#) which all attendees are expected to comply with.

The code of conduct was provided by the Sydney-based company, Arinex, as part of their services in helping with the conference. It can be found here: [**www.ictg2024.com.au/cms/cms/wp-content/uploads/Arinex-event-code-of-conduct.pdf**](http://www.ictg2024.com.au/cms/cms/wp-content/uploads/Arinex-event-code-of-conduct.pdf)

(also see incon-pco.com/incon-news-archive/news-2023-09-09-arinex-icme). It is dated 2023 – specially prepared for ICME-15. Note that the Arinex Code of Conduct for its own employees details clear procedures for appealing against sanctions, including the requirement of a written statement. More importantly, if a code of conduct was considered necessary,

why did not ICME and/or ICMI formulate it themselves? Chronis Kyginos, the representative for Greece in the conference, wrote that:

Personally, I actually feel insulted ... that anyone took it upon themselves to think that professional researchers in mathematics education need a “code of conduct” articulated, shared and acted upon (e-mail to Jayasree and the MES community)

In any case, it provided legal cover for what was done. Remarkably, Kim Beswick, the Convenor, in a welcome to delegates (see: icme15.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ICME-15-Pre-Arrival-letter-2024-11.pdf), added a directive to “refrain from displaying political opinions in any form” which is not in the Code of Conduct. How do you discuss “Social and Political Dimensions within Mathematics Education”, the Topic Study Group of which Jayasree was a member, while adhering to this restriction?

In terms of natural justice, when an accusation is made against someone, the accused has the right of self-defence and the arbiter has the obligation to weigh the evidence. As stated above, the “evidence” offered against Jayasree was vague. There is no indication that the motivations of the aggrieved were investigated. Several people have commented that factors in the conflicting interpretations of the events might have been cultural differences, racism, and misogyny, but there is no indication that such possibilities were considered.

In stark contrast to these verbally processed statements, made under cover of anonymity, there is one written statement (apart from those of Jayasree herself) prepared by Prof. Theodore Chao, an attendee at the workshop. When, the next day, he heard what happened to Jayasree, he forwent attendance at several sessions in order to write an account of what he had witnessed while it remained fresh in his memory. It can be found

here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BK3Lm-NObMJ-aP-4QOgpMcMN-80OjIs5fRK4mI_0wYM/edit

Dr. Chao relates that the speaker left only fifteen minutes (out of ninety) for questions and discussion. He states that he considered Jayasree's contribution a great way to start a conversation and that she:

... spoke loudly so that the whole room could hear her. And she spoke with passion. Her comments seemed respectful and in line with opening up academic discourse.

He sums up by writing: "Without her comments, this would have been an inappropriate mathematics lecture that had no connection to ICME". And he reports only one other member of the audience contributing, who said that "perhaps ... critical conversation was not appropriate at this session" – whatever that means!

So, to review. When registering for the conference, delegates were informed of the Code of Conduct, which explicitly stated that, on the basis of anonymous complaints, and at the sole discretion of the LOC and "the hosts" (I'm not sure what that means), a delegate could be summarily ejected with no right to any redress. The "evidence" used to justify the action consisted solely of the statements of "at least five" attendees at the workshop, given anonymously, and without any written statements. This information was later communicated verbally to the EC. Dr. Leung, current president of ICMI, also communicated the views of another attendee at the workshop whom he characterized as "neutral" on the issue of "Vedic Mathematics" (which I take to mean uninformed):

This person reported that Jayasree was "aggressive" and "confrontational" ... and that she should have been stopped by the chair of the workshop. He said that Jayasree was "wrong", but he didn't think

that the wrongdoing is to such an extent that Jayasree should be asked to leave the Congress.

In a further statement

(www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/ICMI/ICMINewsletter/2024/September/Further%20statement%20on%20Jayasree%20with%20EC%20letterhead.pdf) the EC stated:

In relation to the matter affecting Prof Jayasree Subramanian, we believe that the ICME-15 Organisers were acting with the goal of maintaining a safe and respectful environment according to the Code of Conduct which had been made known to all participants. We acknowledge that an academic conference should welcome robust debate and challenging ideas, even if there is disagreement on these ideas. In this context, we respect the dignity and high academic standing of Prof Subramanian and express our gratitude for her contribution to ICME-15, especially in the plenary panel of which she was a member. We are saddened by her removal from the Congress and the distress and insult that she has experienced, and since ICMEs are organised under the auspices of ICMI, the ICMI EC would like to offer our apology to Prof Subramanian.

The LOC, as far as I am aware, has not issued any statement clarifying the reasons for their actions beyond referencing their legal firewall. I have been able to establish that Jayasree was one of only two people confronted with complaints during the conference – the other one apologized profusely and was excused, while Jayasree insisted that she had not done anything wrong. The LOC have not apologized to Jayasree, or even acknowledged the emotional distress caused to her, or the outrage so widely shared in the global mathematics education community. As unequivocally stated by Dr.

Bass, either “ICMI must offer a publicly transparent, detailed, evidence-based justification for its expulsion of Dr. Subramanian” or “ICMI should acknowledge that its judgment, and the action taken thereon, were ill founded. And ICMI should follow this by a public apology to Dr. Subramanian”.

THE WORKSHOP

The problematic nature of the workshop, I submit, must be taken into account. Its title was “Reviving Ancient Wisdom: Vedic Mathematics for Modern Learning” and the abstract explicitly states that the content originated in the Vedas (ancient Hindu scriptures written in Sanskrit in the period 1500-1200 BCE, roughly). From the viewpoint of History of Mathematics as a scholarly discipline it can be said quite simply that the term “Vedic Mathematics”, insofar as it implies a body of advanced mathematics contained within, or derivable from, the Vedas is not accepted.

In 1995, I attended a lecture on the subject and published a related article by the speaker in a local journal for teachers in Northern Ireland. It began as follows:

An Indian sage and scholar by the name of Shankaracharya Krishna Tirtha Bharati Saraswati studied the Vedas (scriptures) from 1910 to 1918 with a view to rediscovering forgotten aspects of mathematics. Some of these Vedic scriptures relate to engineering and architecture. He decoded their messages into sixteen cryptic mathematical formations, which he claimed would cover all areas of mathematics, from simple arithmetic to calculus or transcendental equations.

The source of these claims is the sage’s book “Vedic Mathematics” (Tirthaji, 1965). From multiple sources, it is clear that it contains mathematical

material developed by the author himself, not derived from the Vedas. Rather than argue this at length, I refer the interested reader to the Wikipedia entry on “Vedic Mathematics” which has an abundance of key references and which is aligned with several other sources I consulted. For example, there is the straightforward summary from Amartya Sen:

...despite the richness of the Vedas in many other respects, there is no sophisticated mathematics in them, nor anything that can be called rigorous science” (Sen, 2005, p. 66)

I surmise that Sen (e.g. in his use of the word “sophisticated”) wrote from a contemporary point of view. There is substantial mathematics in the Vedas, but it is inextricably linked with ritual and theology. A good account can be found in Chapter 2 of Plofker (2009). She discusses what she characterizes as the mystery of fascination with very large integers, expressed in a verbal precursor of the decimal system, as exemplified in this quotation (Plofker, 2009, p. 14):

Hail to a hundred, hail to a thousand hail to *ayuta* [ten thousand], hail to *niyuta* [hundred thousand], hail to prayuta [million] [...] hail to *parardha* [trillion], hail to the dawn, hail to the daybreak ... hail to the world, hail to all. [Yajur-veda 7.2.20]

I am no expert, but this combination of mathematical structuring and religious expression strikes me as similar to writings of the Pythagoreans (Greer, 2024). Plofker also refers (p.16) to mathematical ideas in relation to phonetics, grammar, etymology, metrics, astronomy and calendars, and ritual practice. In particular, there is considerable elaboration of plane geometry connected to the construction of fire altars.

To summarize, I suggest that the considerable mathematics in the Vedas should be valorized while bearing in mind the admonition expressed

by Cullen (2009, p. 592), writing in the context of Chinese culture, but with general relevance, against:

[...] the idea that there is *a priori* a universal ahistorical cross-cultural “natural kind” called “mathematics” that can simply be located and studied once one can penetrate the linguistic barrier to see what it is called in Chinese, and on which one can simply impose all the structures and expectations that a modern person finds in the subject called “mathematics” in twenty-first-century English.

The fundamental objection to “Vedic Mathematics” is that it has been exposed as a mythical rewriting of history motivated by the ideology of Hindu supremacy. When Prof. Arora stated that he was presenting another’s work, he was clearly referring to the book “Vedic Mathematics” (Tirthaji, 1965). A clear exposition of this objection has been provided by Jayasree (Subramanian, 2021).

It is a serious matter that the Vedic myth deflects attention from a proper study of the history of mathematics in India, which is incredibly rich (e.g., Divakaran, 2018; Plofker, 2009; Raju, 2007) and reflects the complex multicultural nature of India through the centuries. Accordingly, as Dr. Chao testified, for the good of the uninformed attendees at the workshop, it was *essential* for Jayasree to challenge the false narrative. A message to the EC from Prof. Amber Habib (Shiv Nadar Institute, Delhi) makes the same point. He states that “what is nowadays promoted as ‘Vedic Mathematics’ has nothing to do with [the rich and varied story of mathematics in ancient India. It is a 20th century creation featuring various calculation tricks in arithmetic”. He further comments on the abstract for the workshop that concludes with the fantastic claim that these speed calculation techniques have the potential of “transforming the landscape of math education in the

modern era”. He then raises what I consider another extremely important point:

ICME may have accepted this workshop proposal under the belief that it was giving voice to an indigenous tradition, but this is an error. I

believe it would be appropriate to review how the decision was reached.

I totally agree. When I searched for publications on the subject by Prof.

Arora on GoogleScholar, I found none; however, he is active online,

promoting his courses on “Vedic Mathematics”. A short interview of him

hosted by “Vedic Maths Forum India” entitled “Vedic Maths at ICME-15:

Celebrating India’s Contributions on a Global stage” can be viewed at:

[www.youtube.com/supported_browsers?next_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.](http://www.youtube.com/supported_browsers?next_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DNXOs0JTNNHg)

[youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DNXOs0JTNNHg](http://www.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DNXOs0JTNNHg) in which he comments

on Jayasree’s intervention and makes the statement that mathematical

knowledge is pure and has no connection with caste.

Dr. Habib’s message ends with the request “to consider whether it was

possible for any mathematician with integrity, and aware of the truth [about]

“Vedic Mathematics”, to refrain from pointing this out to the audience”,

which is what Jayasree did. She also talked about the issues of caste,

privilege, and power, and the dominance of Sanskrit as the language of the

available historical record. It should be recognized that the same issues,

mutatis mutandis, (note the Latin!) arise in European mathematics education.

And the political and ideological distortion of the history of mathematics is a

global phenomenon, as seen, for example, in the dominant narrative that

represents mathematics as a purely European achievement (e.g. Hoyrup,

1992). Dr. Chao stated his appreciation for Jayasree’s revelations “as it

revealed to me the ways propaganda and revisionist history are not found

only in the mathematics context of the USA, but are universal”.

A PERSONAL MESSAGE TO THE LOCAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

In an attempt to gain more information, I took it upon myself to write the following e-mail to the eight members of the Local Organizing Committee, individually:

I am writing as someone who has been actively working in mathematics education for more than 40 years.

Jayasree Subramanian is a long-term colleague and close friend. I am fully aware that she feels very strongly about issues of social justice, especially in India, and expresses them passionately. That she did anything justifying what happened to her I simply do not believe.

Multiple reasons for the sense of rank injustice that I feel, in common with a great many people in the field of mathematics education, have been widely shared. Following intensive consultations with others, and relevant Internet searches, I assert that these reasons include: the precipitate and coercive nature of the expulsion by members of the Local Organizing Committee, apparently without consultation; the explicit threat to enforce it using security personnel; subsequent failure to disclose information, amounting to a wall of silence, compounded by the granting of anonymity to the complainants; reliance on a formalistic legal justification of the actions in the absence of an ethical rationale; multiple breaches of natural justice; an unclear relationship between ICME and ICMI.

In over a month since the incident happened, I have thought intensively about it and formulated the following possible explanation. It is conjectural, but plausible in my judgment, with circumstantial

evidence that makes it more than just a conspiracy theory. This hypothesis follows.

Envisaging the possibility of protests during the conference, the organizers drew up contingency plans to deal with such an eventuality. This planning is likely to have involved the University of Sydney, and possibly the Australian and other governments, other political entities, and/or elements of the Sydney community. The resulting plans may well have included the possibility of expelling one or more participants if deemed to be behaving unacceptably. The Local Organizers were given full authority to execute these plans immediately, using their judgment. When complaints were made against Jayasree's behaviour, that is what happened.

The above is not based on direct information, but the following known factors lend some weight to its plausibility.

- As reported in the media, there have been pro-Palestinian protests at Sydney University as in so many universities around the world.
- Specifically, a new, contested, code of conduct for the University of Sydney was issued by its president seven days before the incident.
- ICME issued a newly framed Code of Conduct which all participants agreed, implicitly or explicitly, to abide by. I certainly don't find it ethical. Is it even legally defensible? The emphasis on the rights of the complainant(s), including anonymity, while ignoring the rights of the accused seems to me to be contrary to judicial principles and natural justice. All of this suggests the putting in place of a legal firewall to render the LOC's actions incontestable, at least legally. And does it apply to the Local Organizers themselves?
- The instant, authoritarian, and extreme nature of the actions taken.

- The ongoing code of silence, which further suggests that political interference and oversight is continuing.

I would be grateful if, as a minimum, you acknowledge receipt of this message and confirm that you have read it. If you wish to respond “No comment” that would be fine, but I am offering you an opportunity to refute my hypothesis, preferably with evidence, or at least reasoned arguments. Or to provide the actual explanation.

If there is any truth to my hypothesis, I can appreciate you are in a difficult situation. What you do about it will begin to clarify what ICMI stands for.

I initially had a response from one person, citing lack of involvement in details of conference organization such as security, and forwarding the message to Dr. Beswick and Mr. Morony. Subsequently, the former wrote simply: “You may already be aware of the attached statement from the ICMI EC”. No further response came. In the statement referred to, the EC (Executive Committee) stated that “we believe that the ICME-15 Organisers were acting with the goal of maintaining a safe and respectful environment according to the Code of Conduct which has been made known to all participants”.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

As a personal opinion, I continue to find it hard to believe that the actions taken against Jayasree were simply errors of judgment by individuals operating under the pressure of running a very large conference. I have not dwelt on Jayasree’s ethnicity and gender as possible factors (as raised by Dr. Chao), but it is hard to imagine that such an instant and irreversible action

would have been taken in similar circumstances if the delegate involved had been from, say, the USA, France, or Australia, especially if White, and of comparable standing. Whether it would have been less likely for a male scholar I leave it to the reader to judge.

Those responsible for the critical decision should have been aware that the action they were taking was unprecedented and problematic. And it is hard to believe that they could not have taken a more rational approach, for example by negotiating with Jayasree that she would undertake to refrain from similar behaviour for the rest of the conference. (However, there is an ethical flaw in that suggestion, namely Jayasree's unwavering contention that she did nothing wrong). Imagine the scenario that, instead of committing his observations to paper, Dr. Chao, with others, had instigated a complaint against Dr. Beswick and Mr. Morony for failing to treat Jayasree with respect and dignity and for discriminating in respect of ethnicity? I conjecture that they would not have expelled themselves.

The behaviour of those who expelled Jayasree is an example of an all too common human pattern whereby the excuse for a moral failure is that "I was acting in accordance with the rules". As Jayasree herself wrote "What differentiates human beings from machines is that human beings retain the right to use their judgment while following rules".

The unbroken silence from the LOC lends further credence to my hypothesis of political interference. It is consistent with them being instructed to take cover behind the purely legal protections, to insist that they acted in line with the Code of Conduct, to refrain from making any admission of errors of judgment in decision-making or of shortcomings in the procedures followed. As I expressed in my e-mail to them, if there is anything in my hypothesis they are indeed caught in a terrible situation.

Having spent a lot of time thinking about it since we first heard the news, I find the pattern of events throughout consistent with there being some form of external pressure, political in an explicit or implicit sense. Some of the grounds for forming this hypothesis are stated in the e-mail I sent to each member of the LOC. The intention was to offer them the opportunity to refute my hypothesis or to give some sort of explanation; as I reported, the response was absolutely minimal. As many individuals and groups have demanded, I do think that the LOC should be required to provide a written statement presenting their side of the issue. As of now, as far as I am aware, the only written account is that of Dr. Chao (as mentioned above, Jayasree is likely to publish her account soon).

It is clear that the sequence of events necessitates a careful reanalysis of the relationship between ICMI and ICME, including: thorough rethinking of anything like a “code of conduct”; channels of communication; more care in the delegation of authority. In carrying out this important task, I think it is important to realize how unprecedented are the times we live in. In its modern form, education has always been politics, as Paolo Freire pointed out, but the extent to which political regimes, including several generally characterized as democratic, are now prepared to directly coerce educational policy and neutralize any form of dissent, is unprecedented.

I find it ironic that the discussion to which Jayasree made a valuable contribution was on the topic of how mathematics education should respond to the confluence of existential crises facing our species. I assert that mathematicians and mathematics educators, overall, have not concerned themselves effectively with political issues. In the extreme case, the position is taken that they should remain “neutral” whatever that might mean. Recall

Dr. Beswick's bizarre injunction, in her welcoming message, that delegates should "refrain from displaying political opinions in any form".

Within mathematics education there have, for decades, been those who stress its political nature; typically, they have been more or less marginalized by the mainstream, though that may be starting, gradually, to change. In particular, those who self-identify as "critical mathematics educators" have, for decades, been critiquing the notion of mathematics as "the A subject" – ahistorical, acultural, apolitical and neutral in regard to ethics (and the editor of this journal has been one of our leaders). Well, in the case of what was done to Jayasree we have an ethical issue on our own turf.

The end of innocence cannot be avoided. A chasm exists between the vaunted rationality of mathematics and science and the catastrophic irrationality underlying the dire circumstances in which we find ourselves. The tragedy has been well expressed by Latour (2018, p. 63):

How could we deem "realistic" a project of modernization that has "forgotten" for two centuries to anticipate the reactions of the terraqueous globe to human actions?

How could we accept as "objective" economic theories that are incapable of integrating into their calculations the scarcity of resources whose exhaustion it had been their mission to predict?

How could we speak of "effectiveness" with respect to technological systems that have not managed to integrate into their design a way to last more than a few decades?

How could we call "rationalist" an ideal of civilization guilty of a forecasting error so massive that it prevents parents from leaving an inhabited world to their children?

It is against this background that ICMI needs to re-examine its ethical and humanitarian foundations. A clear statement to this effect has been made by Dr. Bass, who speaks as a former ICMI President (2000-2006) with a deep commitment to the organization:

Some scholars may feel uncomfortable with the political character of these events. Other scholars, with whom I sympathize, argue that education is inherently political, not just history and social studies, but math and science as well. The greatest tribute to the power of education is that politicians are now seeking to control it. For them, even scientific “truth” is now a politically laden idea. And politically motivated assaults on even our most esteemed academic institutions are now seen worldwide. Some have speculated that the Jayasree expulsion may have been so influenced. That is something worth understanding. Like it or not, ICMI lives in a politically volatile world, and it will need to take some bold/courageous agency to define, and defend, an identity that its community embraces.

Acknowledgments

I had extensive discussions with Jayasree, a continuation of those we have had over many years, also with Marta Civil, a member of the ICMI Executive Committee.

Hy Bass has shown great leadership throughout this affair, and I have benefitted greatly from his advice and encouragement.

I have drawn extensively on the statements of other advocates for Jayasree, in particular Dr. Chao.

And thanks to Paul Ernest, for agreeing to publish this paper.

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