

By Debra Sweet

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I'm not sure what was worse; sitting in an auditorium for a speech by the head of CIA clandestine operations, or having most of the audience give a standing ovation afterward. There were some low points in between, too.



Michael Sulick, Director of CIA Clandestine Operations

Thursday night I went with my friend [Ray McGovern](#), and some current and former Fordham students to a lecture at Fordham University by Michael Sulick, Director of the National Clandestine Service, the guy in charge of counter-terrorism and covert ops. Ray and Sulick are both graduates of Fordham, and both worked for the C.I.A. One difference between them is that Ray quit long ago.

Fordham, a Jesuit school, has a very active Peace and Justice program led by a tenured professor, which just the evening before had held a commemoration of the assassination 30 years ago of Archbishop Oscar Romero in San Salvador, a fellow Jesuit. It was noted that Romero was killed by graduates of the School of the Americas, with help from the CIA.

But that same university produces a lot of FBI and CIA agents. For Sulick, the student center was decorated with the kind of puffy, shiny balloon letters junior high schools use for birthday parties, with silvery "C-I-A" floating in the lobby. I felt it was going to be a strange night.

Ray was tipped off about the lecture by anti-war students. He offered himself as a “respondent” to the lecture, but the administration declined that offer. Ten or eleven professors protested the CIA lecture, and around noon Thursday the administration invited one of them to respond to it on stage. She declined, as she would have no time to prepare. The lecture was off the radar; not on Fordham’s website, and a non-event as far as the Public Relations office was concerned. They wanted no press.

The administration called the student leaders to find out if any protest was planned, with the intimidating implication that they would be held responsible for any disruption.

Ray invited me to meet with about 15 students before the speech. We learned that, for the first time in public lectures at Fordham, questions would only be taken in writing, giving no one the opportunity to speak from the floor. And you know what that means.

We discussed questions we’d like to ask:

* Director Sulick, Could you comment on the [April 17, 2009 NBC News](#) report that the CIA is paying Pakistani agents to identify targets for drone bombings in Pakistan, and that those agents were dropping electronic chips in farmhouses solely to get paid?

* Director Sulick, Could you comment on a statement by Georgetown professor Gary Solis in the [Washington Post of March 12, 2010](#) , that civilians working for the CIA in the drone program are unlawful combatants under international law?

* You resigned from the CIA in 2005 as world public opinion turned against the Bush administration’s use of “alternative interrogation methods.” What do you know about the Agency’s destruction of video tapes of waterboarding that surfaced just after you returned to the CIA in 2007?

Well, of course, none of these questions were read to Sulick by the student government leaders moderating the Q&A.

Sulick droned on (sorry) about the glories of public “service” and his distinction of being the first CIA officer to set foot in the Soviet Republics after 1991 — because he had taken Russian at Fordham. We learned that the best thing about his doctorate in literature was that he could make small talk with Russian intelligence targets about Dostoevsky. We learned that in the 1950’s the U.S. had “removed the regime and restored the Shah [of Iran] to his throne.” That would be the elected Mossadegh government, overthrown by a [CIA-led coup](#). A little truth, spun as a positive achievement.

Most of the questions asked read from the audience were insipid. “How does one join the CIA?” “There’s a website. You can apply online.” Imagine that! I found Sulick’s comments to be banally evil, obvious, shallow, and self-serving.

But one question seemed to stump him. “What’s the definition of terrorism?” From my seat in the second row, he looked like a deer in headlights. For some unfathomable reason, Sulick invited Ray to come up on stage and answer the question, as Ray “used to work in analysis with the Agency.”

Ray told a story of that morning, having breakfast with two atheists who were questioning him about the front page New York Times story on the pope hiding child abusing priests, [Memo to Pope Described Transfer of Child-Abusing Priest](#).

“Why does the church care only about the first nine months of life? And not for the living” who are being killed by the CIA drone program?

Ray was eloquent and sincere as always, and the mike was cut off at about the 60 second mark — after he was invited by the lecturer to the podium, and told by the administration that he would be welcome to ask a question!

About 20% of the audience clapped and cheered as he sat down. The blue-blazer student government officer sitting in front of him — the one who weeded out the challenging questions — turned around and said to Ray, “you’re an asshole”. Which was the only thing any of them said to him the rest of the evening. We didn’t stand for the ovation.

It was good to be with the people at Fordham last night who are trying to stand for justice. We sat til late talking with a couple of students about the silence of the Jesuits against the government, and the slickness of the school administration in co-opting students.

I can see from Fordham's history (Father Dan Berrigan, the anti-war priest was on the faculty) and ties to liberation theologians in Central America, why they would commemorate Romero. But when the same school brings a CIA director to lecture and there is *no challenge posed*, critical thinking is MIA. Faculty, alumni, and students applauded an operative responsible for civilian deaths by drone bombing, and for the torture of detainees, and probably more that we don't know about yet. I felt battered by spending two hours with them.

However, it was good to work with the anti-war students, and spend time with Ray McGovern, who left the CIA many years ago, and devotes his life to exposing and stopping much of what they do now. Ray is not just an adviser to [War Criminals Watch](#), he's a genuine resister. See [Ray in action confronting Donald Rumsfeld](#) May 5, 2006.

We need more of this response to war criminals!