



[Home](#) > [Altri enti di categoria \(Inpgi, Casagit, Sindacato...\)](#)

MOBBING INSIDE THE NEWSROOMS di Paola Pastacaldi (Board member of the Lombardy Journalism Board)

Mer, 10/05/2006 - 19:00 da odg

Quality journalism crisis and mobbing.

Mobbing has become a weapon in the editors hands to turn journalists harmless. As we know it, quality journalism is under heavy attack from the marketing and advertisement industry. *Journalists have been alloyed and transformed in "metal workers"*, writes Mr. Franco Abruzzo - President of the Board of Journalists of Lombardy - in his foreword to the volume of comments of theContract. It is a strong metaphor. But it is the truth.

Journalists, today, flip through papers, rework articles from other newspapers, steal news from Internet; neither go over into facts nor check sources. And, even worse, they mingle news with advertising citations. Therefore they are not at the service of reality, but are subdued to an interested side of the reality. All that is due to a distorted mechanism, imposed also by the invasion of television.

The professional difficulty runs deep. Journalists are suffering from a profound physical and mental ailment which is expressed through all sorts of sick leaves, absenteeism, anxieties, depressions, and panic attacks denounced in the hospital emergency rooms.

The lack of a professional identity has brought to these professional category an increase of psychic and physical illnesses, which should be more thoroughly analyzed and studied from two stand points: professional and health wise.

Many of the latest newspapers that fill the news-stands are "editorial products". All articles must enclose ads or citations of ads. This is the new diktat of the Italian editorial ship. Readers are only viewed as targets for marketing purposes or just as simple consumers. The Italian information system, highly sustained by an even worse national television, carries within itself a commercial cancer. It does not value the reader-writer trust agreement. Any longer the information is the nervous configuration of society, but is a manipulated content.

The English journalist Tobias Jones in his book: "The dark heart of Italy" (Rizzoli, Milano, 2003), was asked by the Financial Times to monitor for a few months the Italian television, since the FT wished to understand how was that the most creative, funny and intelligent population could have the most vulgar television of all Europe. He thus said: "....Italian television is trying to sell me something all the time. Even the news within the newscasts are transformed into gossip or celebrities punch lines". Which is something we all watch on our own every night.

We know that his comments on our media have resulted in receiving private letters of approval from a segment of the Italian journalist world, even if expressed in a reserved manner, for obvious security reasons, being afraid to suffer professional retaliations.

To disable the largest number of journalists, editors have used a type of marginalization: to gradually reduce the work of some journalists, without any reason or justification. This with the intent to force them into copying articles from other publications, or to invent the news, until the time when the psychologically frustrated men would accept to write articles containing not only news but also citations of adds or products. A morally and physically exhausted journalist, after months or even years of this type of treatment is amenable to accept anything which will free him from that anguishing and groundless segregation. In fact, one thing is to clash with your editor for opposing point of views, be it political, trade-union or

just only for trivial aversion; an other matter is to not be aware why you are under fire or marginalized. That's mobbing!

To make newspapers as add containers – the problem concerns also the dailies – it is necessary to thin the consciences. These, which will weaken under subtle attacks, depress the moral and the body especially of middle-aged journalists with a strong deontological practice. The editor's aim is to isolate these consciences.

May be with this aim in mind, editors grant to many journalists some fringe benefits such as a paid car, a cell phone including all personal calls, and some early retirements include a golden handshake, despite new economies. It is a development of a change of course which aims to gain the favors of those journalists that could become uncomfortable witnesses. If editors will keep up with this trend, the press will not deal any longer with news, but will only pretend to do it, and instead of news, only brainwashing marketing messages will be printed.

Many of the disciplinary warnings delivered to The Lombardy Board of Journalists concern the heavy attacks on the professionalism of journalist, and the consequent medically diagnosed stress, panic attacks, long lasting nervous breakdowns that force the subjects to request long medical leaves. The crisis of Italian journalism is substantiated by a physical crisis of the whole journalists force. The illness, or the press state of health should be examined in depth to understand its causes.

World wide crisis of the press. Through a short digression I would like to include something else about mobbing and the change of course in the press. The crisis of quality press is a world-wide fact. It is exemplifying the case of the 'New York Times' and one of its journalists who for four consecutive years has literally invented level 'A' stories, faking to have checked the news on the spot, while he never left his home. The 'New York Times' decided to report the case on it's front page thus provoking an investigation, and openly denouncing all of the journalist's lies, one by one, analyzing each. It decided to fight bad journalism by doing good journalism with transparency. It goes without saying that the editor in chief has been fired along with the journalist, as the world wide credibility and the paper's reputation were priced as a professional wealth, with an economic value. Few months earlier, in Europe, a well esteemed paper as 'Le Monde', has been under sever attack by other French journalists who in a book entitled "The hidden face of Le Monde" (Pierre Péan and Philippe Cohen, Document Mille et une Nuits) denounced the journalists and the editor in chief political and personal interests. Le Monde faced the problem, though less dramatic than the NYT's case, realizing a dossier on eighty worldwide newspapers and talking about the arising of bad press, and the ongoing deontological discussions in several editorial rooms, including its own.

In short The Italian mobbing is a painless way - for editors -to get rid of those journalists who have not bent to marketing pressures and bad journalism, probably because they still believe in the ethics of information.

Mobbing an arm against professionalism. The publicity industry is suffering from a crisis due to an excess of products, and the consumer is overexposed and bombarded by an exceeding amount of adds. Companies and its advertising buyers try to find new, penetrating ways to promote products: an article which contains also adds is more popular for its effects on the consumer. This stands in complete contrast with the deontological agreement binding the journalist work. We will see what this means in relation to the advertising citation.

As a matter of fact, one of the most harsh sides of mobbing, lies in the fact that it is unrecognizable, and before a journalist becomes aware of being its victim it could take months, or even years. Particularly so, when the company's editor in chief or other executives do not officially (openly) express criticisms against the person, nor clearly provide reasons for a breach of a working agreement. Basically there is no confrontation with the employee and the editors will behave as if everything is normal. It is on.

Mobbing within the editorial rooms is strictly concealed, therefore must be considered as an integral part of the caused damage, namely the non visibility and the unawareness of the victim. This unconsciousness is the most complex aspect since it prevents the victims to defend themselves. Moreover we must also underline that the afflicted is not just passive, but it is the unawareness of the

mobbing action turning them into passive victims against their will.

Let us take the case of a journalist who is marginalized from its job, i.e. he will not be given enough work if any at all, or he will be used to labor in fields far from his expertise. This may sound like an old union's issue. It may be so, but it contains new implications which enlarge the area worthy to be considered. In view of the crisis of quality journalism, one of the means used by editors, more or less consciously, is to marginalize the professional through mobbing actions, as harassing his personality with the intent to weaken his moral, and finally to fire him with minimum expenses.

To destroy a professional, undermining his/her image and credibility, is the most deceitful and easiest way for an editor, who decides to carry on a negative journalism, - as far as genuine information is concerned -without any respect for (regardless of) the gentlemen agreement which should bind readers and journalists. Instead we face a journalism, which is economically healthy thanks to the advertisements proceeds. To (bring home the bread) achieve such goal, editors must transform their articles into ads, thanks to citations, listing brands, products, companies and sometime even people: all within the article itself.

Let's take a look at the mobbing that aims at the journalist marginalization. The victim usually tends to minimize the attack, and tries to find his own solution, considering it normal to have casuals and temporary working mess-ups or that these are due to a transitory lack of good organization. Only after many attacks he realizes that he is the victim of vicious intentions. More honest is the journalist's mind, the later he will understand the real situation he is in, while having lost good working years and well being.

To keep a journalist idle is one of the favourite systems used to disqualify and have disappear the figure of the special envoy, the professional who is the primary facts witness. Editors believe that the envoy is awkward, and inconvenient, mainly because he does not allow to manipulate the information in an aggressive marketing way.

Despite recent conflicts have seen reappear the role of the envoy as an interesting one, if we do analyze in depth the characteristics, we discover that the war envoy is like a state employee following. A cover up figure, a face on TV, a word of mouth put together by others where the source is generally not checkable.

The war envoy lives behind the army or inside a hotel room, where his own source is the TV. The journalists who are envoys are usually considered privileged targets to promote wars, or political messages from other countries. So paradoxically as "Reporters sans Frontiers" has said, journalists are victims of free killings as happened to Daniel Pearl. But this is an other issue.

When a journalist within the editorial room does not get assignments, this is what usually happens: nobody has lamented about a thing, nobody has spoken badly about his work, still few jobs are assigned and may be not even published. Proposals are turned down, and those assignments which should be his competence, are given to others without explanations. At this point ill-will, gossip, insinuations and personal criticism not just professionally start circulating. It is a vicious situation until it becomes chronic. The professional damage becomes serious, and sometimes irreversible.

In a slow space of time the emptiness from not working is configured as the worker responsibility. The chiefs will not delay to look at him badly when he enters the editing room while starting whispering critics. The journalist on his side will feel more and more out of place each time he steps in at work, while growing embarrassed pondering his workday. He will shy away from bringing proposals, thinking that his ideas will never be good enough, losing the courage to ask why his articles are not published. He will become weak and unable to manage his professional role. Ready to bend to factual truths which he prefers instead of inventing it as it happens in today editorial rooms ruled by adds. These conditionings are not limited to this field, on the contrary, from the traditional beauty column, to travels, cars all the way to the most important sections like economy and health.

Downgrading is a fact

Sometimes the journalist asks civilly why he is not given work, but nobody will answer. The journalist will write to the director, to

the head of human resources. But as we know no one takes anymore the responsibility to manage the human resources. Nobody will say whose fault it is and nobody will throw the first stone against him, allowing him to defend himself. The editorial ship with the human resources silence, are already a mobbing act since they push the worker in a weakened position: nobody will say a word, and nobody will admit doing anything.

The worker/journalist will not be able to defend himself. This is the passivity aspect found in the definition of mobbing But I would say that more than passivity is a non consciousness artificially maintained by the mobbing actors.

At this point the situation becomes as spiral who swirls on itself. Everybody thinks without saying it, that the worker does not want to work, and may be is the self same human resources department which spreads the word, whispering it or letting others do it.

He is no longer a journalist forced into isolation because the company keeps a bad behaviour, but is a slacker who does not want to work, and that the company should fire. It is important to understand that the mobbing victim is not just a scapegoat, because there might be others under mobbing action. The idea that the mobbing hits only who is outside of the group is correct but when the rules change so far away from its origins, as it has happened in the last 20 years inside the newspapers, mobbing actions are used to hit more people, meaning all those who still hang on to changes or to the distortion of rules.

THE PSYCOPHISIC ILLNESS FROM MOBBING. Mobbing with its attacks creates a psycho and physical weakness in the worker who is most professional and honest. This type of prostration does provoke many problems at physical and psychic level still under study. The physical ones are particularly fitting with the ailments that journalists suffer.

We may also imagine the subject as a being who entering the office like stepping into a jungle. He doesn't know, because nobody ever told him, where he errs, and therefore does not know where the attacks may come from. Thus he will react badly to the escalation of subtractions inflicted, cutbacks of working instruments given to others, as the phone, portable pc, with many excuses. Slowly his role will diminish. He will no longer take decisions because, without a given reason, his authority, his responsibility, as provided by contract, are taken away. The result is that his muscular tension may provoke permanent pain which in time will spread to the bones. Pains that will remain even at night. Medical visits will be useless: Few doctors are able to solve and understand the strength of the pain which after the traditional visit will not bring a biological reason. We know that these ailments if felt for years in an anxious individual may be similar to those suffered by a diabetic patient.

Only physical movements that involve also the nervous system may be able to solve the problem. The bone's pain are almost invalidating. Difficulty in walking, pain under the feet, getting out of the car, sitting, the neck, the legs, blood circulation problems, pain at night. Speaking from a muscular perspective, the victim of years of mobbing can find himself pre-consciously older, always less capable in articulating the most elementary movements.

The lack of knowledge by the medical personnel of the mobbing modalities, turns many doctors to prescribe a year leave against depression, denying the evidence of a mobbing attack and providing a pharmaceutical dependence.

Concerning this problem, the traditional therapies, linked to different gymnastic disciplines, do not bring relief. One of the methods capable to solve at the root this muscular and bone tension is that of Moshè Feldenkrais a Jewish doctor, born in Russia in 1904 and died in Israel in 1984, with a mechanical engineering degree who cooperated with Joliot Curie on the nuclear fission. He had in this field genial intuitions on the relations between body and mind to stimulate the nervous system through unusual movements (among his disciples, Leonard Bernstein, Margareth Mead, David Ben Gurion, Moshe Dayan). It is not casual that this method is based on the fundamental idea that our movement is linked to the image we have of ourselves, as described in the book of M. Feldenkrais "La conscience du corps" (Marabout, Verviers Belgique, 1967).

A mobbed worker is inevitably forced to combat starting from his image, being forced by the events to underestimate himself or to have a low esteem with the consequence of weakening his muscular structure reaching the point to feel deep pain that mines his physical integrity and his movement autonomy. The Feldenkrais method helps the patient to

find his movement and therefore his psycho-physic health.

To conclude we could say that the most serious human damage not quantifiable is to kill the productive or creative energy in the worker. The journalistic work is creative based on artisan methods, is intellectual, highly priced, despite the degrade it suffers. To impede to share what he knows in the workplace means to kill his vital energies. To impede to look at his future positively, or "to be" in the most ample way of the meaning of work place, forcing him for a good part of the day made of eight hours in a condition of non existence, creates a reduction of defences and a rise of ailments that slowly become illnesses. A human being mortified within and we can hypothesize that the ailments will expand to the whole organism.

The disciplinary complaints that are sent to the Lombardy Board of Journalism describe this spread and unclear ailments. Panic attacks among journalists are common. How can you not feel fearful for the attacks when you don't know from where they come? This is a psychological war, without sides. From a human perspective the decadence of reciprocal respect in daily relations worsens. Bad manners are common, dialogues are filled with bad words, verbal aggressions are violent, offences, and badmouthing are kings. As if some editorial rooms had transformed themselves in low level soldiers quarters of the eighteen hundreds. Mobbing act in a wide area of intervention. It could be the constant criticism of the journalist over professional matters, the time, the way he writes, the quality of his proposal. The arrogance of an editor jealous that one of his journalists may publish books, or finally the fact to be a journalist with a deontological view is sufficient cause to be mobbed.

MARKETING IN THE EDITORIAL ROOMS. The new proprietor of newspapers. Mobbing is a way to halt people who are not worth trusting, meaning under the marketing provisions. Who refuses to write commercial articles, is untrusting and must be punished, work will not be assigned, he is going to be criticized over the stories, the time, anything. But the true reason is the lack of cooperation when tried to be corrupted. Mobbing is a precious allay. The personnel's office fakes to care about it, calls on the worker but does not take action to solve the situation. The person is alone and does not understand what is happening. Still the law is on his side, if it will have the courage to apply it. The journalistic deontological code is very clear on the matter and what editors do, is outlawed.

At the end the journalist has lost any rebellious intentions and accepts all. Changes role, disqualifying himself, fitting a lower level, accepting humiliating words. Without knowing has stepped in the marshes of mobbing. The waiting room before the end of his profession and as doctors and psychologists tell us, illnesses that from psychic become physical.

(traduzione di Melissa de Teffé)

[Altri enti di categoria \(Inpgi, Casagit, Sindacato...\)](#)

Sito web (senza periodicità) diretto da Letizia Gonzales (presidente dell'Ordine dei Giornalisti della Lombardia, ente editore-proprietario del sito).

[Note Legali](#) | [Accessibilità](#)

Copyright © 2008