

Afterword To The Feh! Press Edition

Bob Black

Never a chart-buster, this book, to my amazement, just won't go away. I brought out the "first edition," if I may so dignify 100 Velo-bound photocopies, in early 1985 as the conflict it recounted continued. By then I was living — as secretly as I could — in an unheated room in Berkeley. I soon made a few additions and corrections for what I called the "1-1/2th edition"; a dissident office worker ran off 30 copies for me at work. I sold some of these 130 copies but sent most to local media or to leftist or anti-authoritarian publications nationwide (and several abroad) which usually ignored them. I'd done all I could, I felt, to settle the record by the time I moved to Boston with ex-PW Donna Kossy (and my familiar, The Anarcats) in fall 1985.

Unexpectedly, there was a small but persistent interest in the book. Rev. David Crowbar of *Popular Reality* (1984–1987), one of the few publications to cover the Processed World scandal, for several years made photocopies of the book available. Those who owned copies often loaned them out to others — especially to the kind of political neophytes the PW's specialize in flimflaming. I would not infrequently hear from these readers and welcomed their queries. Cynically, I always urged them to question PW too, well aware that they'd get snubbed and placed on an enemies list. I've heard from second-hand B/B readers from as far away as England, where no more than two or three copies could have penetrated.

Between the writing of B/B and the Hegira to Boston, I passed 4-1/2 months in Los Angeles working for the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, at work/study wages, doing legal research and writing in support of some of their victimless-crime litigation. For the first time in almost a year I felt safe. I was also in love. Although PW had pronounced me monomaniacal and obsessive, what I did next, ignoring those who'd exiled me, was produce some of my best-known and (in my opinion) best texts, such as "The Abolition of Work," "The Best Book Catalog in the World," and "Elementary Watsonianism." (Writing well is the best revenge.) The first two provoked Loompanics Unlimited to propose to publish the collection which came out a year later as *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*. The second I sold to one left-yuppie throwaway after another, beginning with the *LA Reader*; it remains my all-time moneymaker.

"The Abolition of Work" has assumed the dimensions of a minor classic (I daresay). Thousands read it in the *Semiotext(e)* "USA" issue (for which I opened my files to provide a lot of other bumf too) and other thousands in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*. It's been translated into French, German, Dutch, Slovene and Italian (a Spanish translation is in the works). In trying to suppress

or marginalize me, Processed World has, at best, failed miserably, and at worst, given my project a boost.

Readers of my first book (or my second, Friendly Fire [Autonomedia 1992]) have come across fresh whacks st PW, but not because there is anything fresh about PW, which Gary Brown well and long ago characterized as “the magazine with a bad smell.” B/B exudes an anxiety, not unreasonable when (and under the circumstances in which) it was written, that the PW drive for local hegemony might prevail. In the event, PW never got out of the leftist ghetto or greatly increased its market share. The myth of the hip, happy-go-lucky dissident office workers still sometimes slithers into print, but it’s clear by now that the formula is no more than a maintenance dose. Not even the publication of a greatest-hits coffee-table book, Bad Attitude — which, characteristically, includes (without explanation or apology) the productions of defectors — pulled the PW’s out of their stagnant isolation. They are all that they’ll ever be, and they aren’t much.

If so, of what interest is a book like this? The danger of which it warns (and, in hindsight, exaggerated) is long past. About a year after this book appeared, one of its purchasers, Lawrence — a sometime volunteer at Bound Together Books — came out as the Slasher. Wisely, the PW’s left him severely alone. By then Bay Area anti-authoritarians were so polarized that I was not getting any intelligence about the PW’s because nobody on either side of the conflict was on speaking terms with anybody on the other. In 1985, Processed World announced it was preparing a rebuttal to this book. Alert to the lesson of the Tar Baby, it never issued one.

If this book is of any lasting interest (except to my biographers) it is as a case study in political pathology. Professing an anti-authoritarian (if unnamed) ideology, college-educated, long-standing residents of as cosmopolitan a metropolis as any in the world, the PW control group nonetheless constructed as introverted and self-referential a cult as Jim Jones did. If the leadership consciously deceived the followers — as this book proves beyond a reasonable doubt — at a higher level it was self-delusive too. Even the victims and critics, myself included, came to share (even as we despised and denounced) the cult’s sense of self-importance. Unwittingly we played into their hands, which is why, locally, the PW’s triumphed. Even I, who took them so seriously, never took them as seriously as they took themselves.

This book, even as updated in early 1985, does not finish the story of my on-the-scene conflict with PW. I was, as mentioned, in hiding. When I finally finished this book I wondered what to do next. I remembered Boni Thoreson’s would-be yogurt hit from which Donna Kossy saved me and then made a poster out of. I took the subway across the Bay to return the favor, to the downtown streetcorner where the PW’s hawked their wares. Chris Carlsson sported the cardboard TV-set head-piece Greg Dunnington, long since expelled, had made for them. I flung the contents of a container of, by then, rather rancid yogurt (but not the container itself) in the TV-framed face of Chris Carlsson (his last words, pre-impact: “Uh-Oh”). Unfortunately, after a two-block chase, Carlsson tackled me punched me out, spit in my face and, in the course of liberating my ID for the police, pocketed over \$100 in cash out of my wallet. He got me busted for battery and, anti-statist that he was, he pressed charges.. In 1990, the charges were dismissed, probably because the statute of limitations had run.

My Los Angeles gig was previously arranged with no thought I’d need a refuge. I had a legal internship with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California. It was work/study wages (not much more than minimum wage) but I welcomed the change of scene and rather enjoyed the legal research and writing I did in support of ACLU victimless-crimes litigation. I am very good at that sort of thing.

The day before I left for Los Angeles I had a chance encounter with a curious sequel. I was placing my stuff in storage but encountered unexpected difficulty in verifying my identity — my passport was packed away somewhere and my nondriver ID had been stolen by Carlsson and turned over to the police. Another customer, overhearing my name, introduced himself. He was Steve Stallone, managing editor of *It's About Times*, and he was there for the same reason I was: he'd been driven from his apartment for political error by PW's — in his case by roommate Marcy Darnovsky. I was dismayed that someone in the milieu knew I was moving (and the whereabouts of my property, which I later returned to remove to another place). If the PW's got wind of what I was doing they might strike immediately while whatever intelligence they had on me was still accurate. Much later I heard that they did know where I then lived.

My departure the next morning was uneventful, but a few days later a panic-stricken Donna Kossy told me that the PW's had accused me of trying to set fire to their office on my last night in the Bay Area. As usual, I “was seen” pouring gasoline on the door (I am pretty sure that would not have worked); as usual, no such witness was ever identified. PW had, it was said, told the story to the FBI (which is puzzling, since arson is a state, not a Federal crime) and, for good measure, accused me of having torched the office of music magnate Bill Graham several months before. No charges were ever filed, and so far as I could tell, there was no investigation. Through its anarchist stooge Chaz Bufe, PW gave the tale wide circulation in the pamphlet *Listen, Anarchist!*

For a fugitive felon, I was unusually conspicuous that summer. There was a story about me and the other summer intern in the local ACLU newspaper. Within a few weeks the LA Reader published my Loompanics Catalog review. I got a mail-drop and, using this local address, posted extensively. I signed off on a brief submitted to the California Court of Appeal. I obtained medical service from the county clinic. I traveled to San Diego to the annual meeting of the Law & Society Association and presented a paper. I revisited the Bay Area several times and received several visitors from there. But did I try to torch the PW office? In the words of one of my law professors, “All I'm saying is that I'm not saying anything.”

In 1985–1986 I sold a lot of reviews to the yuppie weeklies and *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* came out. I had not, after all, been erased. New texts and old circulated more widely than ever, usually with, but not uncommonly even without my help. My personal life did receive a staggering blow when Donna “Bride of Bobzilla” Kossy left me in 1987. I'm still not entirely recovered. But I have endured. Most of the materials in my books *Friendly Fire* and *Beneath the Underground* date from recent years. The graduate education aborted by PW terrorism I have resumed elsewhere. I'm still poor, but no poorer than usual. I've had the satisfaction of meeting many creative people who were only names to me, if even that, in the Bay Area. They make me feel, more than ever before, a part of something.

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<http://spunk.org/texts/writers/black/sp001649.html>

A postscript to my "first and worst book," *The Baby and the Bathwater, or, Post-Partum Repression: The Unspeakable Truth About "Processed World*, reprinted by Feh! Press several years ago and now again available from Rodney E. Griffith/Inspiracy in Cleveland.

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