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Jon Bekken & Bob Black

An Unbridgeable Chasm

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This is the second part of a letter which appeared in Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed in 2009.¹ The first part of the letter dealt with another fired professor, David Graeber.² Graeber accused me of, among other things, “egopornography.” I settled his hash. It then occurred to me that there was a bona fide egopornographer, Jon Bekken, who was still at large, in a small way.

For an example of real egopornography, there’s the letter by ex-Professor Jon Bekken, the disgraced former General Secretary of the Industrial [sic] Workers [sic] of the World [sic]. Bekken, the offspring of wealthy San Diego lawyers, in the late 1970s was a college student and what is now called a lifestyle anarchist. He was the only member of the “Groucho Marxist Caucus” at the University of California (San Diego) [Not

¹ Bob Black, “Horny Handed Sons of Porn” (letter), *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 67 (26)(2) (Spring-Summer 2009), 76-77.

² Bob Black, “Bob Black & David Graeber: An Unbridgeable Chasm,” www.theanarchylibrary.org.

true, I ran that organization with him – Jonathan Osborn]. His well-meaning if puerile efforts to satirize Marxism ironically inspired me to write “Theses on Groucho Marxism,” a much better use of the gimmick, as Bekken acknowledged at the time. He called it “truly a masterwork!”

Since the “Theses” were included in my book *Friendly Fire*, I much later included his acclaim among the book’s back cover blurbs. Bekken’s fan letter to me, and all of our correspondence, is in my archives at the Labadie Collection of the University of Michigan where all are welcome to read them.

Bekken went on to graduate school in Communications (which is just journalism, a contemptible profession, not a discipline with intellectual or scholarly content) – as Ward Churchill did – receiving a Ph.D, as Churchill did not. Bekken was hired by the State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland, a cow college. As a state employee, this anarcho-purist signed (as did Ward Churchill) a loyalty oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States.

By then, Bekken had been, after a formal trial (!) by an IWW tribunal, convicted of “slandering a fellow worker,” and expelled from the Boston local. So, in Cortland, he founded his own one-man IWW local. Most IWW locals, I suspect, are one-man locals.

Whether this make-believe unionism had anything to do with his getting fired after his first year, I don’t know, but it’s unlikely. What I do know is that, contrary to Bekken’s recent ravings, I had nothing to do with it. It should be noted that until now, a dozen years later [2009], Bekken has never publicized this accusation, not even in his own *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* where he regularly libels me and suppresses my rejoinders.

I never communicated with the SUNY administration or faculty. This is a recent fabrication. I considered, but never got

³ I resided then, as I do now, in Albany, New York, also in upstate New York but not close to Cortland.

around to, visiting Cortland³ to leaflet Bekken's classes with his own Groucho Marxist juvenilia. Later, over the summer, I phoned the Communications department secretary to ascertain Bekken's fall teaching schedule, only to be told he would not be returning. I expressed regrets (okay, insincerely), and asked, will Professor Bekken be teaching at some other university? *She laughed*. Bekken, by being himself, had fucked up so badly as forever to disqualify himself from academic appointment.

Bekken moved on to manage the Lucy Parsons bookstore in Boston, where he got my books banned. When Lydia Eccles asked him why my books were not carried, he screamed, "Bob Black is a fascist!" Having worn out his welcome once again, he is now manager (not a "fellow worker") at Philadelphia's Wooden Shoe Books, whose shelves he again keeps cleansed of my books.

But, let's go back to when Bekken threatened to use the state against Autonomedia for its temerity in quoting Bekken on the back cover of *Friendly Fire*. Bekken is so egopornographic as to denounce my resort to the state to deal with a madman who nearly murdered me,⁴ while he defends using legal threats to avenge a prank.

His legal pretext was a New York statute allowing a civil action for "misappropriation," but also (what Bekken falsely denies), in his threats sent to Autonomedia, he also claimed libel. That was legally absurd, since the quotation was by him, not me, and it was about me, not him. Don't take my word for it; it's all in the Labadie Collection. Lawrence Jarach quoted [in *AJODA*] just one of Bekken's extortion letters to Autonomedia by which the goof thought he could make some money off

⁴ See Bob Black, "My Date with Jim Hogshire," available online in several places.

an imaginary illegality by the threat of state violence that he thought his name on the book would double its sales.⁵

Bekken, like [David Graeber], somehow received a Ph.D without ever having learned what counts as an argument. If, for instance, I accurately refer to an historian's argument that many Italian Syndicalists became Fascists,⁶ Bekken thinks he has refuted that thesis by calling me a police snitch. Our only difference in using the state against our enemies is that I succeeded and he always fails.

I issue this challenge: Let Bekken publicly swear that he will never call the police on me no matter what crimes I may commit against him. Indeed, he should renounce the police option against everyone in all cases. If he is too cowardly or hypocritical to do that, he should forever shut up about my use of the police in a life-threatening situation. Don't judge me till you've stood in my wooden shoes.

(Bekken never responded to my challenge.)

⁵ At one point, Bekken promised to be merciful if Autonomedia put little stickers on every copy of the book covering up my wicked words. He's so dumb that it didn't occur to him that the first thing anybody does, who finds such a sticker on a book, is peel it off to see what the big-deal secret is. The attention of every buyer would be focused on Bekken's words, whereas without a sticker, nobody would have paid much attention. My suggestion to Autonomedia was that it invite him down to Brooklyn where he could affix the stickers himself.

⁶ David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).