

# Letter from Black Rose Books

Black Rose Books

1977

FE note: See also the letter exchange "L'affaire Black Rose Books" in this issue.

Dear Editor,

With reference to the slanderous letter from a Mr. Joe Doaks in your June 1977 issue, we would like you to publish the following reply in full.

(1) Why did the English-language edition of *Durruti* by Abel Paz not include Part 4? The history of this question is as follows. A member of our book-publishing cooperative read the French-language version some two and a half years ago. We thought about publishing an English-language version, but naturally we were overwhelmed by the complexity of the project. The one French-language edition we had was returned to the person from whom it was borrowed. Some time later we received the translation by Nancy Macdonald. We then negotiated a contractual agreement with both the author and translator. Part of the agreement included that the contents and approval of translation was a matter between the author and translator. We frankly proceeded to the publication of the book without anyone of us being aware that there was a Part 4. Last month to our embarrassment a member of our cooperative while visiting Paris was told by Paz that we had not included Part 4. This was news to us as we had insisted that the translation be cleared by the author. We have written to Nancy about this and received the following reply which we quote in part: "About the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the *Durruti* it was (Paz) who suggested to me that it be cut out of the English edition as the book would be too long. And I agreed. There was never any question again of my translating it. I sent my translation to (Paz) a long time ago for him to OK it and he never mentioned the 4<sup>th</sup> section. I have already written him to this effect a few days ago since he raised the question with me by letter..." As far as BRB was concerned it was certainly not an act of censorship in any way. If there is another edition of the book we intend to include Part 4, unless Paz thinks to the contrary.

(2) Contrary to what Mr. Doaks suggests, it is perfectly plain that the book is not an original title written for BRB as it is clearly noted that it is translated from the French by Nancy Macdonald. Also on page six the original French title is given in the Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data.

(3) Why the price of \$5.95, and why are there some typos? First, printing in Canada is generally more expensive than in the USA. Because of a thing called imperialism, and because Canada is a colony of your country, and because the paper companies here are American owned consequently printers here have to pay more for Canadian paper than printers in the USA. Second, in order to keep the working class quiet, at least in some trades, the workers are paid more where there are unions than their American counterparts are paid. Minimum hourly wage in Quebec, for example is \$3.00. Since we only use a unionized shop, and because of the high cost of paper our printing bills are huge. But third, we also pay a 10% royalty to the author, Abel Paz, who is a Spanish printer living in exile, and a [illegible in original] % royalty to Nancy Macdonald for the translation. Add to this the fact that all bookstores require their traditional 40% discount (we give 50% discount to anarchist bookstores), adding up to 85% of the list price, which leaves BRB \$1.49 of the \$5.95. With this \$1.49 we have to pay a huge [sic] printers bill in 60 days. The price of the book would have been higher had not the real cost of the book not been subsidized by donations and

by the income from other books. Finally, over and above printing costs that have to be covered from the \$1.49 and the donations we must cover overhead expenses—rent, heat, taxes, light and so on. We also give countless books away free to political prisoners around the world and to anarchist groups and bookshops in non-English-speaking countries that cannot afford to display books from other countries otherwise.

Our books are generally standardized in price. \$4.95 for small books and \$5.95 for large books no matter what the actual production costs. These prices have only increased since the first book we published seven years ago at \$1.95 because of the very large increase in production costs. Hence some of our books subsidize others so that a person buying a large book is helped by a person buying a smaller book. For example, while the latest edition of Voline's *Unknown Revolution* is being sold by the American publisher at \$7.50, BRB sells our edition of this 717 page book at \$5.95.

In conclusion on this matter any person buying books directly from BRB gets the same discounts as a bookstore. If a person buys one \$5.95 book it is offered at \$4.76 (a 20% discount) and if a person buys six books from BRB a \$5.95 book is offered at \$3.57 ( a 40% discount). If a person cannot afford the postage, or does not include it, we forget about it, even though postage is expensive here. So in fact you can get all our books cheaper from BRB direct than from Ammunition Books in Detroit. All this is clearly explained in our catalogue. Many comrades however prefer to pay the full rate for the books as a way of supporting our work.

Black Rose Books is a non-profit cooperative and once the total expenses of a book are covered, surplus goes to the author or with his/her agreement the surplus goes to subsidize another book.

As to the typos, all we can say is we try very hard. The *Durruti* book for instance was proof-read by four persons plus the translator. One of our problems however is that being in Quebec, a French-speaking nation, our printer who is very good in every other way does not finally check corrections before printing as the people at the plant do not know the English-language. This final check is a service professional printers offer their customers.

(4) Why are the books we import from the USA priced higher, and does BRB put its covers on the books published by other publishers? There is still a border between the two countries in question. This border is patrolled by State functionaries called Customs. Shipment of books printed in the USA that are processed by Canadian Customs for trade sales are subject to a charge of 10% duty on the American list price. We have to Pay for this. This is one reason why all American books are higher priced in this colony. If we use a Customs Broker which we do more often now we have to pay for this service also. Many shipments come into Canada undetected by Customs, although after this letter that may no longer be the case for us. In one case the surplus help [sic] pay for the case where we have to pay duty taxes. The reason we distribute books not published by us is to (a) get them into commercial bookstores in Canada, we deal with over 100 of them, and (b) to cover the high costs of our own production programme. We have always encouraged radical bookstores outside of Canada to order books we distribute directly from the other publishers. We are also very successful in getting these books into numerous libraries.

The whole rationale of BRB is to get these books a large circulation. Something which we are very good at. Given our small size we probably have one of the largest minimum print-runs for our books. We concentrate heavily on distribution and promotion. We do not believe, as some others do that simply libertarians or anarchists should read these kinds of books. Our promotional work is wide-ranging and expensive. It includes advertising widely, promotional mailings, catalogues, display tables across this country, etc. All of which costs a tremendous amount of money and energy, which is covered by the money generated from the sale of books.

Mr. Doaks is lying when he says *Lucy Parsons* book and the *History of the Makhnovist Movement* book have BRB covers on them, and sold as such. Books that we distribute have a BRB sticker on them so that a bookstores [sic] knows where the book in question can be quickly re-ordered from, and where an individuals [sic] can write for further information. As a result we have a considerable correspondence with people interested in a whole range of things. We also believe in close co-operation with other libertarian publishers. And so we have co-published several books with them thus insuring lower production costs, and better distribution. We think this kind of cooperation should be greatly increased among similarly minded groups and projects.

(5) We have never prevented any comrades from reproducing what we have published if they have no other choice and as long as there is some appreciation of what we are trying to do with extremely limited means. Sure we have copyright (and the statement we publish in each book is common currency among Canadian publishers and

so not original to us)but against the hungry bourgeois publishers who are ready to exploit us and the author if they can. This is not to suggest that certain left-wingers, for reasons of their own, have not exploited us also.

Before Mr. Doaks goes off to reproduce his \$2.00 gem, is he willing to solicit the agreement of Abel Paz whose enormous labour he will be using (for the profit of whom?), or is he willing to solicit the agreement of Nancy Macdonald whose hard work he will also be using (for the profit of whom?), or the agreement of the people who worked on the BRB edition, and is he prepared to exploit his own labour alone during the physical production of the book? Or is Mr. Doaks going to produce a \$2.00 book because he will be standing on other people? If Mr. Doaks has so much energy we, as well as others can suggest countless other books that can be translated into English and published.

Our reading of Durruti's personality teaches us that he was a modest and honest man. Unlike the pretentious and arrogant Mr. Doaks he would have sought out the facts before passing judgment from on high.

With best wishes,

Jean Nataf

P.S. We have insisted with the editors of *Fifth Estate* that they must publish this letter in full or not at all.

# fifth Estate

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