

THE NEHWON REVIEW

NO. 2

FAPA 106

(Note: Hastily composed on stencil (with the help of a few notes) by Redd Boggs in Los Angeles, 16 March 1964, and hopefully intended to accompany -- if they have not already posted it -- a publication by John and Bjo Trimble. A postmailing to FAPA, mailing #106, and sent to a few other interested parties besides. A Gafia press publication.)

§ § §

"FAPA went through a lot of agony acquiring a social consciousness during the Ed Martin affair," someone said to me recently. "It would be too bad if it loses it again in the Walter Breen blackball."

It was news to me that FAPA had gained such an attribute in the Ed Martin matter. I have seen little evidence of it. But if it has, I don't see much hope that it will keep it if the Walter Breen blackball is supposed to indicate its corruption and decay in our hearts. It can be squeezed out by the votes of ten people. Ten people. It ought to be easy to obtain ten votes to do almost anything -- even disband the organization and turn the treasury over to the John Birch society. (Presumably ten votes can't actually do that, but it ought be simple to find ten people who would vote for it.)

Ten votes. Less than one-sixth of the total membership. But it can effectively bar a person from becoming a member of FAPA, even if at least ten others and perhaps even 55 others are in favor of his becoming a member. That doesn't seem right to me.

Neither does it seem right to me that ten faceless members, acting anonymously, can bar a person for any reason, or no reason -- without stating any reason whatsoever. Their injustice (for such it is) can be righted only by the passage of a special rule (section 9.1 of the FAPA constitution). But this requires a majority vote, and the proponents of such a special rule labor under the handicap of having to work in the open and to give reasons for asking the members to vote for such a rule. The blackballers could hide behind their masks and make their groundless prejudices count without bothering to justify them to the membership at large.

An organization where such a situation exists hardly has room enough for a social consciousness.

§ § §

FAPA adopted the blackball years ago for the specific purpose of getting rid of waiting-lister George Wetzel. Wetzel had shown himself to be both obnoxious and dangerous. In one authenticated and documented case he was shown to have sicced the postal snoopers onto a perfectly innocent fapan as a result of pique over a mildly twitting article concerning Wetzel in a fanzine. Though I was then in favor of barring George Wetzel from FAPA, I was not in favor of the blackball. We rid

ourselves of Wetzel and find ourselves with the blackball. (Remember about the rabbits in Australia?) In the long run Wetzel might have proved less dangerous to FAPA than the blackball provision.

Hang a loaded pistol over the door and tell everybody it is to be used to deal with holdup men and maybe it will actually be used for that purpose once or twice. But if it stays up over the door long enough it is going to be used once or twice, also, to settle private grudges. A dangerous weapon within easy grasp is going to be used, and misused, sooner or later.

In the present blackball attempt, obviously, the only important motive is that of a private grudge. It is not a crusade, but only a personal vendetta. I take no stock at all in the allegation I have heard that Walter Breen is too "dangerous," too "explosive" to tolerate in our group because some of our members possess "clearances." Even if Walter were guilty of the misbehavior he is charged with in Boondoggle, he would hardly be a security risk of any sort. Who are these people kidding?

Walter owns a few antinomian theories -- but don't we all (including the people with "clearances")? Walter's theories are, to my mind, pretty silly and impractical; indeed, they are so impractical that they constitute no imaginable threat to the status quo. In any case, since fandom is essentially a society that tends toward bohemianism, those with sensitive jobs ought to be warned that if Breen constitutes a danger to them, so do dozens of other people in fandom with even more radical notions. They, not Walter, ought to withdraw -- and pronto -- before Authority delivers it to them, right in the labonza.

If there are people in FAPA fretting about their "clearances," I guess that must be why there were so many blackball votes cast against a recent wait-lister who is a perennial member and official of an organization on the government's list of "subversive" groups. He talks of his activities frequently in fanzines and once published some sort of anarchist journal which he sent me (unsolicited) at a time when I was working for the federal government.

Yes. All those blackball votes against this man. Ahahaha. He is now a FAPA member (and a valuable one). So far as I know, not a single blackball vote was cast against him during his term on the waiting-list. So much for this humbug about "clearances."

§ § §

Much is being made about Walter Breen's alleged intolerance of "square" society. I don't know how strongly he rants against society in private letters and semi-private publications. Probably pretty damn strongly because Walter is articulate and has positive opinions on such subjects. But all of us, in such communications, have blown off steam and there is ample reason on record in somebody's files (quite possibly even in the files of some person in authority) to hang each one of us. "Give me six lines written by the most innocent of men," said Richelieu, "and I will find an excuse in them to hang him." All fans, not just Walter Breen, have been indiscreet enough to put themselves on record too often in too many places to feel secure in any world where we can

be slurped for holding unpopular views. And anybody possessing a fair to middling fanzine and letter file can in the fulness of time set up as a flourishing blackmailer.

Whatever Walter's views of "square" society, the fact is that he can and does get along well in society. I have seen Walter on a number of occasions under different conditions. I have watched him at work at a coin-con or two or three, all held in moderately swank hotels. I have eaten dinner with him on several occasions in moderately respectable restaurants. I rode on a city bus with him, attended a club meeting with him, and was present at several social occasions in a private home. He was always unfailingly pleasant, polite, and courteous whenever I was with him. At Bjohn's a few weeks ago Walter and I were standing in the kitchen talking with Bjo while she bustled around whipping up a chip dip or something, and it was Walter (not me) who noticed that she needed help to open a cupboard door with her hands full and jumped to assist her. A small matter. Indeed. But indicative.

Walter Breen is welcome at my place at any time.

He looks and dresses like a reborn Walt Whitman, but his conversation, at least when I was present, has not smacked of beatnik jargon. Probably he has too much respect for the language to mangle it like the stereotyped sans-cool oddball. Perhaps Walter's chief social flaw is that he possesses a loud laugh and is often delighted enough by a bon mot in conversation or a delicious passage in a fanzine not only to bellow in laughter but to slap his thigh repeatedly, causing a meaty clunk that sways skyscrapers two and a half blocks away. But is it a crime to own a loud Laney-like laugh?

§ § §

Insofar as I personally am concerned, Walter Breen is also welcome in any club or organization I belong to.

Perhaps it is true that an organization ought to have large powers to decide who can become a member. To that end it should set up certain standards and requirements, but when a person is able to meet those requirements the organization ought to be fair enough to abide by its own rules and accept that person, and not turn him down except for due cause.

In dealing with the matter of Walter Breen, both the Pacificon society and FAPA have used or are using methods that are clearly indefensible. In both cases Walter has met all the standards and requirements demanded of members, and in both cases he seems about to be barred for being guilty of some nameless offense or other -- or at least for not being able to prove that he isn't guilty of these offenses.

I won't say much about the expulsion of Walter Breen from the Pacificon society, partly because I am not a member myself (I understand that committee members are resentful that some persons who are critical of the handling of the Breen matter are not members of the society -- though I am not sure why their status in the society matters at all), and partly because this matter is being dealt with in another publication, issued by Bjo and John Trimble. I will only remark in passing that despite the

fact that I hoped to make Pacificon II my first convention since 1949, I have now decided to stay away. Boondoggle was a low and treacherous blow. I don't much care whether Breen is guilty of misbehavior or not; he should not be subjected to such trial-by-libel.

The timing of the Pacificon ouster to coincide with the annual blackball vote in FAPA suggests that some of the same people are behind both actions. However, the timing may also have had something to do with the arrival, or imminent arrival, in the Bay area of MZB, known to be Walter's chief supporter at this time. The anti-Breen group apparently thought to deprive Breen of her support by getting in this quick rabbit punch, but of course it didn't work that way. The tactic was not only wrong from the standpoint of common decency (how could they dare?) but wrong from the standpoint of human psychology. If you want to drive a man from your ken and at the same time split him from his supporters, it is not wise to make it impossible for him to leave and also impossible for his supporters to desert him.

I don't have much hope that the Breen ouster from the Pacificon can be reversed. I don't have much hope, either, that the blackball attempt can be blocked. Fans, fapans, do not have that much of a social consciousness, if they have any at all. But at least in this case -- unlike the Ed Martin affair -- let the record show that at least one FAPA member, me, strenuously objects to the Breen blackball attempt and earnestly asks the membership to seek some redress of the injustice done Walter Breen in the event the blackball succeeds.

In the spring mailing or a postmailing thereto a petition will be circulated to override the blackball (assuming that it does succeed). I feel confident that as many members want to see Walter Breen a FAPA member as want to blackball him. As I said before, such a petition, since it requires 33 or more signatures, will be far more difficult to put over than the blackball itself, which requires only ten signatures.

This fact leads me to suggest that whatever comes in the matter of Walter Breen, the time has come to revise the whole blackball set-up. Twice in the past there have been attempts to raise the number of blackball votes needed from ten to 22 and to 15. Both failed to pass. However, such amendments failed to correct the flaw in the machinery, which is that a minority of ten can inflict its prejudices on all the rest of the group, which does not have equal opportunity to reverse the vote.

I am in favor of junking the blackball entirely. If this cannot be done, then let us adopt some procedure wherein a blackball vote of ten would be the occasion for a vote by the entire membership on the membership (or continued status on the waiting-list) of the blackballed person. If the person receives as many votes in his favor as he received against his presence in the original blackball, then he is retained on the waiting-list. What could be more fair and positive than such a procedure?

As a waiting-lister Walter Breen has published mailing comments regularly that have made him more valuable to FAPA than many members. If FAPA rejects him -- rather, if a small segment of FAPA rejects him -- we not only lose a first-rate prospect but, worse, another irreplaceable fragment of our integrity and self-respect. # # #