

THE EAGLE & THE SLUG

DRAWING BY ROGER HAYES



"To be a pariah is to be left alone to see things your own way, as truthfully as you can. Not because you're brighter than anyone else—or your own truth so valuable. But because, like a painter or a writer or an artist, all you have to contribute is the purification of your own vision, and add that to the sum total of other visions. To be regarded as nonrespectable, to be a pariah, to be an outsider, this is really the way to do it. To sit in your tub and not want anything. As soon as you want something, they've got you."

-I. F. STONE

The Eagle and the Slug are brethren. So says Peter B. Smith, editor of the *Bay City Slug*. He has written an article profiling four alternative newspapers on the Oregon Coast in his latest issue of "The Paper That Hates Progress."

He wrote in his article "Of Zines & Newspapers: Monopoly Capitalism & The NW Alternative Press" that "Like colorful weeds, small feisty 'alternative' newspapers are popping up across the country. I know of four on the Oregon coast. There must be as many published in Washington and California. There are undoubtedly dozens I don't know about. It's a phenomenon that started in the late 1960s and flourished until the end of the Vietnam War. Then just about when everybody had forgotten about alternative newspapers, they began appearing in the late 1980s. Along with these new newspapers, one might want to include 'zine publishers. 'Zines, for those of you who don't know, are small publications produced on home computers. Though 'zines are not really newspapers, I feel they need to be included as part of the current alternative press movement."

The Times Eagle is one of the four alternative rags Smith notices on the Oregon coast. His belief that the four papers he mentions (which includes his own) began in the late '80s is correct except for the NCTE, which was originally published in Wheeler by Robert Stanley Need in May 1971 and folded five years later. I revived the dead bird in Cannon Beach in the summer of 1979, though it barely resembled its earlier incarnation. Smith realizes that but misses his error (his only, and a very small one indeed) when he quotes from the *Born Again Bird's* 15th anniversary issue in the following profile:

The first (of the four Oregon Coast alternative newspapers) is the North Coast Times Eagle, presently edited and published by Michael Paul McCusker in Astoria. In July 1994, on the occasion of its 15th birthday, the editor wrote, "The Born Again Bird was revived 'because First Amendment newspapers have become as rare as the nation's symbol, the Bald Eagle. The independent press has virtually disappeared into the huge corporations that control the country and probably the world'..." A few paragraphs later he continued, quoting the ten year anniversary editorial identifying The Eagle as being "...a member of the Poverty Press. It is one of a few small presses obsessed with a vision unaffected by commerce. It is descended from radical newspapers that blossomed briefly (and) its lineage threads back to the prickly press that fostered the First Amendment, which denies government or anyone else the right to interfere with freedom of speech."

Liberalized with drawings by local artists, the 15th anniversary issue included articles on social diseases, including AIDS, deadly herbicides used to control undergrowth following forest clearcutting, spotted owl and the Clinton Forest Plan, logging and the destruction of salmon spawning beds, The Great Pacific Maritime Strike of 1934 in San Francisco, known as Bloody Thursday, plus one page of poetry and several pages of excellent nature photographs. As with most issues of the North Coast Times Eagle, this one was written and designed to annoy corporate America and bring to view some little known labor history.

Smith justly praises the *Anderson Valley Advertiser* published in Boone County, California (articles from which have been reprinted in the NCTE) for taking "journalism back to its roots." He writes that the AVA is "an abrasive and decidedly left-of-center, honest-to-God, old time hell-raising country newspaper," and that "its existence proves that people will pay money to hear ideas critical of the establishment. The paper sets the standard for a lot of other hell-raising small papers in the S. F. Bay Area and across the country." (The AVA's editor, Bruce Anderson, has had his life threatened, his vehicle sabotaged and has been sued several times for writing about "local corruption and bureaucratic stupidity.") Smith writes of the four Oregon coast "alternative" newspapers that they also "could at times be called -- when at their best -- genuine hell-raisers, and at their worst mildly annoying."

Of his own *Bay City Slug*, Smith writes of himself in the third person: "It's editor, Peter B. Smith, is an opinionated, angry little man with a warped sense of humor. *Slug* editorials usually revolve around uncontrolled development, rants against fast food chains and the widening gulf between the rich and poor, the drug war, the growing national security state being built to protect the Earth-ravaging international corporate swine from the wrath of the unemployed and occasional jabs at the mainstream media."

The other two newspapers Smith mentions are *The Upper Left Edge* out of Cannon Beach and *Bummers & Gummars* published near Lorane, Oregon. Of *The Edge*, he wrote that it is an "opinionated left-of-center publication with its deepest roots still deriving sustenance from '60s antiwar politics, the environmental movement and struggles of indigenous peoples." Of *The Edge's* editor, "The Reverend" Billy Hultz, Smith writes that he is "a pretty mellow guy these days. But his face reveals the hard living it took to get to that place. *The Edge* is a good reflection of its editor. It is deceptively mellow, and unwary readers often trip on hot coals that are pushed up from just below the surface of its pages." *The Edge*, Smith writes, "began as a single broadsheet against the Gulf War, and somehow over time evolved into a newspaper."

The last of the four Smith writes about, *Bummers & Gummars*, he says was started in December 1993 "as an 8 page back-to-the-land zine (but) quickly evolved into a 32 page newspaper with 2,000 subscribers around the country. It is published by a group of idealists and other misfits who live on a piece of logged-over land near Lorane, Oregon known as Coyote Creek Farm. Its theme is rural and a lot of the ink spilt on its pages concerns animal husbandry, sustainable gardening, creek restoration, maintenance for peasants who own cars, tractor repair and restoration of logged-over land. The winter 1995 issue had a fascinating piece entitled 'Field Trip: An Exploration of the Forest, Farms and People of Cuba'.... The tone of *Bummers & Gummars* is humorous while being defiantly anti-corporate. Its editor Loki and the rest of the folks who create it don't waste time being negative. Instead *Bummers & Gummars* is the most positive member of the Oregon 'alternative' press that I have read."

Newspapers reflect the corporate view, Smith writes, and most television, radio and print media are in the hands of the multinational corporations. "News unfavorable to corporate activities at home or abroad

(are) filtered or not reported at all," he wrote. "Newspapers increasingly devote their pages to sensational murders, mad bombers, celebrity trials and exciting natural disasters."

Deploring "the deplorable state of the American newspaper industry" whose pages he says "were once a place of public debate (but) are now nothing more than a propaganda machine for corporate America and its growing national security state," Smith ends his article with urgent alarm:

Though the number of alternative papers seems to be on the rise, there are dark clouds appearing on the horizon. Following the bombing in Oklahoma, anti-terrorist legislation has been fast-tracked through Congress and the Senate. This draconian piece of legislation will have a destructive effect on the First Amendment rights of publishers throughout the country.

It is also disturbing to learn as this legislation goes forward, the National Security Agency has increased the number of people who do nothing but cull the pages of 'zines and 'alternative' newspapers, looking for dangerous writers and potential terrorists to be rounded up at some future date.

Unsuccessful attempts have been made in this country to register presses in private possession, as is commonly done in foreign countries. Provisions in the anti-terrorist bill will make it possible for the government to demand that the owners of printing presses register their machines with a yet-to-be-named federal agency. If this happens the statement "Freedom of the press belongs to the person who owns one" (A.J. Leibling) will be a thing of the past.

In spite of the legislation about to be enacted in Washington, D.C., and the action of a few thousand paranoid national security spooks, I believe the nation's alternative press will continue to grow. There are just too many information-hungry readers in this country who want to know what the hell is really going on for it to be otherwise.

The day the first press is confiscated or the first publisher of an alternative publication is branded a terrorist and jailed for national security reasons, the mainstream media will have to wake up. Though corporate owners of the print media might try and ignore the event, I'm certain reporters and journalists who work for these monstrosities of misinformation will sound the alarm. Should they fail in their sacred duty the alternative press will become the underground press, and we will have returned to the black days before the American Revolution.

In spite of these ominous tidings, let me end this piece with an encouraging thought. As long as the mainstream press doesn't do its job, the alternative press will, come what may. Considering the present state of the mainstream press, the alternative press will continue to grow and be with you -- in one form or another -- well into the next century.

To finish, and please excuse me for this, but I feel it is appropriate to conclude Brother Smith's thesis with the final paragraph of an ode to the NCTE's 10th anniversary (July 1989):

"Printing an unprofitable newspaper of limited interest and circulation at the beginning of a post-literate era can be frustrating and perhaps only slightly justified because it comes from the heart. The NCTE has yet to break even on a single issue, a (now 16) year record which surely must be worthy a category in Guinness. But enough of money. It is the *Eagle's* (and *The Slugs*, *The Upper Left Edge's*, *Bummers & Gummars*, and of course AVA's) blood, not its heart. Profit and loss are mechanical processes, like digestion. What matters is if the *Born Again Bird* (*et al*) is not simply wasting paper. As (its) first editorial suggested...it seems quaint to produce a small impoverished publication at a time when vast political/military/corporate systems imprint their oppressive agendas upon billions. Moses Asche, who founded Folkway Records on a shoestring and seldom made a dime in forty years, realized (half a century) ago that the very small can grow and relatively prosper in between the cracks and shadows of the megabig, like ferns on a forest floor. Mouses must roar, after all, and bite at the ankles of ponderous tyrannies if we are to keep our heads and humor. Micromedia, flamboyant, irreverent, raffish and patched, is on the march into the 21st century."

-MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

THE EAGLE & THE TIMES

To light a match in a darkening wind,
that's all he wanted to do,
(16) years ago. That,
and let the community
have its voice,
keep the condos at bay,
and let real democracy
have a chance.
Did he do it?
Is he doing it?
Read the papers.
Article after article,
year after year
lighting the match,
keeping the mind open and
the fist raised
against
prejudice, ignorance,
intolerance,
cruelty, and just plain
existential pain.
Is the wind still dark?
Did one more decommissioned sub
carry poison up the river? Did one more
black suffer one more wrong? Are
women still pushed around? Did one
more child get beat up? Did one more
tree fall under the saw?
Then one more month has sleepless nights,
And one more Times Eagle hits the press.

-CAROLYN DUNN