

ROD BEAL, from page 12

catching- whether a family or ambition. He was always waiting for the other boot to drop. He didn't trust it when things were going well. So he drank to make sure things would always go awry. The ever-constant saboteur.

We came to the edge of Brookings. It wasn't raining now, and there were two motels and a convenience store. Rod Beal said this would be fine. I drove into a gravelly yard next to one motel which had only one car parked in it — not much in the way of bumming change or finding cans I thought. I handed him 45 bucks, which kind of caught him off guard, but maybe he'd have enough left later on the get a cheap room, get a shower. But I doubt by the end of the day, he'd have much left. And giving him money like that may have been a bad idea. It was as likely as not, if memory serves, that he would wind up in jail having done god-knows-what in a blackout. And by the time he was released, if he were to be released, spring may have wandered into summer with sunlight, along with the lure to get out on the road and make it all the way to Santa Monica. To start things all over again. Come what may. Better to give when I got it, for all that was given to me when I was "out there."

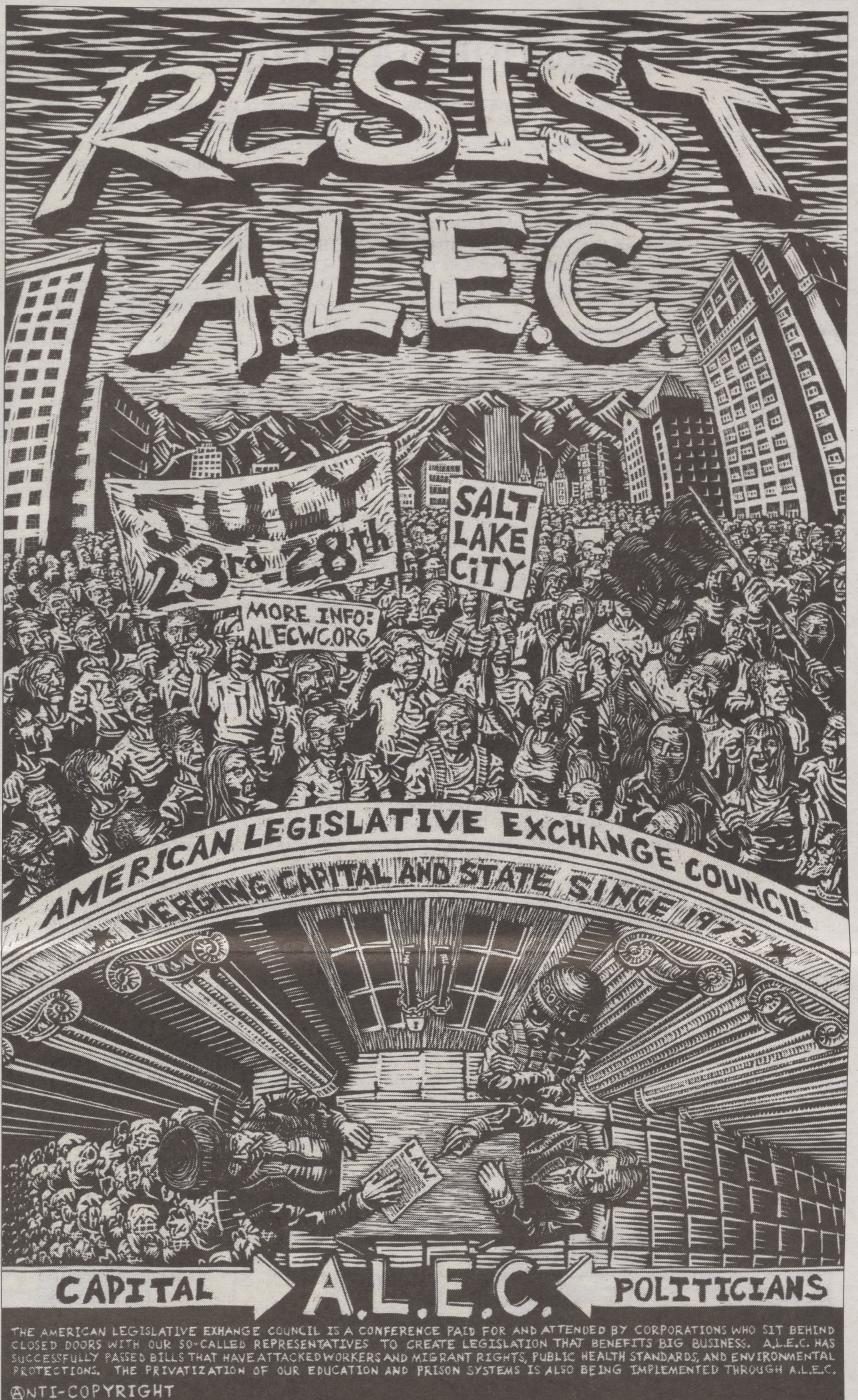
Listening to Rod Beal I noted that he never mentioned his birth father — doubt that he had any idea who or where he was. In other words, his mother never informed him. He mentioned his wife once, somewhat lovingly; somewhat exasperated with what she'd done that got him put away for a year and a day. His family was a source of pain, and strained love. His constant metastatic life, moving around, said a lot to me. We are all fragile, regardless of the face we show. Rod Beal's mask was his well-rehearsed story. It was as though he had coached himself into this character or picture he thought strangers — and who wasn't a stranger — would buy into. What would make him acceptable to people who were always a foreign land to him.

And the fact that he had this approach-avoidance attitude toward Santa Monica, where he'd spent so much bad, wasted time, and where he had an outstanding warrant for absconding — at least one — and the judge would surely make him pay for all those times he'd absconded. Failed to pay his debt to society, not completed the court-mandated treatment.

He never completed anything that would give him real release. Call it freedom. He was resigned, probably had been since early childhood, that his abandonment, his subjugation to powers much bigger than himself, was a done deal. There was no remedy. No future bliss or hope or aspiration. There was nothing. He was a loser and any wishful thinking to the contrary- and how else would he pass his time waiting for a ride but dreaming of a fantasy existence where he was the center of his universe, (the hero?) was foolish. Just taunting himself, making things worse every time he went into that dream state which rode with him nonetheless. Rode with him everywhere like the booze.

When I dropped him off on that apron of gravel by the cheapo motel, there was no one around that I could see. Who would he hit up for change? What had he planned before I gave him the 45 bucks? Maybe he just wanted out because he couldn't handle being in company. He'd finished his rehearsal, so he was ready to bail. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts. To pretend that it wasn't all pointless. And as he headed toward a hole in the wall of trees, he'd already pulled out his bottle of Blue Label."

Like I say, like all the rest of us, his fragility and abandonment hid in a corner. Reality was, Rod Beal's story was always the main character.



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