

DRASTIC SOLUTIONS

#5

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INTERVIEWS WITH:

BAD RELIGION

MORAL CRUX (R.I.P.)

HOPEFUL MONSTERS



ARTICLES ON:
BIAFRA'S STEREOTYPING OF ARABS
THE MYTHS OF POVERTY
STRAIGHT EDGE FASCISM

BAD RELIGION

Stephen and I had many reservations about running this interview, which is a transcript of the one we did for *Camera-core* video fanzine #2. We felt that this would be a good opportunity to confront the band about some of their more questionable practices. After re-reading the interview, I felt that we had not pursued some of their comments far enough. For instance, we did not confront them about the high door price, nor their \$20.00+ t-shirts. We also allowed such ego-inflated comments as "we're waving the subculture's banner" to slip by unchecked. Though I enjoy Bad Religion's music immensely, it does not justify overly inflated door prices, t-shirts, stickers or egos. I also think that if a band has nothing to hide, they shouldn't feel intimidated or offended when an interviewer questions their integrity. With that in mind, please read on...

What's the name Bad Religion and where did it come from.....

Bobby: The idea was when they were 15 years old you want to piss your parents off and so they thought of the dumbest thing that they could. They came up with Bad Religion.

Brett: Bobby was only 11 at the time.

That's how the Nunfuckers did it too.

Greg: What you've got to understand, the

reason we passed it over to Bobby is because over the last 11 years we've answered that question so often, and it's been written in so many rags...not implying that this is a rag....that you could find out the answer if you really tried. We're tired of answering it, but Bobby did beautifully.

Jay: What you need to add onto that Bobby is that it was the best one of all the choices. It was better than the other ones because then what you do is they go "What were the other ones?" and you go "I don't know."

Brett: You know it's a good name because you can read a lot into it, and we can sit here and say, well it meant this and it meant that and throw you a lot of bullshit lines, but at the time it sounded good and we grew with the name. And the name grew with us and it gave us a lot of ideas for songs and things like that.

Greg: Yeah it is a thought provoking name for kids at 15 and now adults at 26 and 27 and 19.

Brett: So that's why we liked it.

What were you doing for so many years in between the release of the second EP and Suffer.....

Brett: That was only three years you realize.

Still actually compared to like when you guys came out with record after record after record, three years seems like an anomaly in comparison.

Brett: Some people accuse us of charting out music but there was a year between every release which I think is the right amount of time between records 'cause if I buy a record by an artist and I love it, I'll wear it out in a year. Not physically wear it out but I'll be ready for something new.

But within the underground scene it's somewhat... it's fairly quick.

Brett: Well maybe underground artists aren't as prolific or maybe they have... either that or maybe they have other responsibilities.

How did the MRR comp. come about with Noam Chomsky..... How did that come together.....

Greg: It was a gift. We gave them two songs, and it's because of a conversation Brett was having with them.

Brett: I'll try to make this as brief and succinct as possible. The war started and me and Greg had written those songs independently of each other. Without discussing the single we had written them for a forthcoming LP. I was having a conversation with Tim Yohannan of Maximum Rock and Roll and he said why don't you guys put out a 7"; some kind of protest 7". I said "Well you know I happen to have a song already, let me give Greg a call and see if he wants to write one." Greg said "I already have a song," so I called Tim back and I said "I'll tell you what, we've got the

songs how about if I record it and give it to Maximum Rock and Roll and you release it and let all the proceeds go to a non-profit humanitarian organization." He thought it was a great idea. I'll tell you one reason for me doing it that way. In L.A. there's a fanzine called Flipside who recently accused us of being opportunists, which we're not.

Opportunists, because of when the 7" came out.....

Brett: No, before that. Accused us of being rock stars or jacking up door prices or ticket prices. You know, whatever it is that they're upset about.

Didn't Flipside put you on a comp., the L.A. Power comp.....

Greg: Yeah. They decided many things about us, some good, some bad.

Brett: As a group gets bigger and bigger, people in the subculture tend to question their integrity. It just happens that way automatically and I didn't want people to think that Bad Religion would capitalize on a war. Well here's a way for us to get publicity, here's a way for us to make some bucks. So rather than put it out ourselves I gave it to Maximum Rock'nRoll. Nobody questions their integrity at all. They're so politically correct to a "T". I thought well, I'll donate the songs to you and you guys do it and then there won't be any accusations. It was just easier.

Along those lines though shouldn't the subculture continually question a band's integrity? Do you feel threatened by having your motives questioned.....

Brett: Yes. Why?

Brett: Because we're waving the subculture's banner. We come from that. That's what we are. We haven't changed one thing. We're still doing it ourselves. We

still do everything ourselves.

Greg: The main motivation for the subculture questioning is the fact that popularity...

Brett: ...because we're more popular.

Greg: In other words, we want people to like



our music and when I started getting interested in this kind of music and this kind of subculture I thought it was a great thing. I didn't look at it as only a select few people who could be in it. I wish that the whole world was more open minded and enjoyed it and so if that crowd grows it's all the better as far as I'm concerned.

Brett: ...but the word subculture becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when bands become rejected only by the virtue of the fact that they're gaining popularity.

Do you think it's necessarily that they're rejected by virtue of the fact that they're getting popular or that getting popular goes hand in hand with

major label record deals...

Brett: but we're not on a major label. I'm just saying that that's an example of that.

Brett: That's a pattern.

....and any movement that loses the ability to question itself collapses.

Brett: Absolutely, and that is the pattern, but see, on the flipside of that, us and Fugazi are perhaps the only bands in history that have achieved the success in terms of...

Greg: numbers of people.

Brett: Yeah numbers of people who know about us. We're perhaps the two bands in history that have achieved that level without being on a major label, without working for a major corporation.

Greg: ...or without compromising our integrity.

Brett: I think that we should be lauded for that, not chastised for that.

Ok, along those lines then, do you know that tonight's show is sponsored by MCA...

Jay: Yeah.

Brett: I didn't know that.

Is it not a compromise...

Greg: What's MCA?

MCA is a major label record company which was one of the major contributors and sponsors of Ronald Reagan's campaign.....

Greg: Well I don't think Ronald Reagan would be too happy that they're doing that either.

Well that's not really the point.

Greg: I don't know, it is the point. It shows you that the major corporations can do a lot of things and get their fingers in a lot of places without any of the main players knowing what's going on.



"...we're waving the subculture's banner. We come from that. That's what we are. We haven't changed one thing. We're still doing it ourselves. We still do everything ourselves."

Mr. Brett

How can you not know about it....

Brett: We're involved in almost every aspect. We write our music, we record our music, we manufacture it, we sell it. We're not booking agents, it's the one aspect that we haven't done. Doing the things that we do right now is virtually a full time job. I don't have time to do anything else and so we have a booking agent book shows for us.

Ok, but isn't that sort of giving up a little bit of the D.I.Y. ethic then because you're not doing it yourself anymore... once again this is going hand in hand with this popularity thing. Once you get to a certain level of success you've got to give up a certain amount of the do it yourself ethic. You've got to give up control....

Greg: I think you're right about that but what it comes down to is we're artists and as long as the art isn't compromised and the integrity of the art still stands that's the least you can do. The most you can do is do everything yourself and you'd drive yourself crazy and you'd compromise the art. The art would start to sink too.

Brett: Perhaps, that might be true.

I don't think that's necessarily so.

Greg: Well it's true with me, I mean every artist is different and that's definitely true with me.

Brett: Unfortunately it's not a black and white world and so what we've had to do is settle for the lesser of two evils.

I realize there's going to have to be compromise and obviously you can't know everything, but everything is a matter of degree right? And so can you still say if you're singing against capitalism or against corporations, can you still do that and essentially play for MCA, that's my only question....

Brett: No, if we had a song against capitalism we probably couldn't but we don't. "The Land of Competition". Is that just about L.A. or is it about...

Brett: That's not about an economic system that's much more socio-political. I'm not in favour of American-style capitalism, however, I don't have any song that I think would keep us from playing here tonight.

Greg: The other interesting thing I find is what does MCA have to gain from sponsoring a show like this. I mean here... 'cause really you're saying we're playing for MCA. I mean that's pretty strong words and pretty strong accusation because if MCA knew anything about Bad Religion they would probably wash their hands of it completely.

Not if there was a buck involved... but

it's an MCA sponsored event and I think what they have to gain is that they can control the area of art as well by getting involved with...

Jay: ..but can they, can they control what key I'm going to play in...

They can sort of sponsor it for a while and then pull out their money or something....

Jay: Yeah, but I mean you have to understand that in L.A. that happens every year. Every year someone comes along, they build up a club, everybody gets to play there, everybody thinks it's great. A little culture evolves around this one club... Boom it's gone. All of a sudden everybody's Friday night place to go and see their favourite band is gone and it's gone for a long time, and another one starts up again.

Brett: There are no absolutes. You probably pay your taxes don't you?

Jay: They have different taxation up here.

Brett: Well whatever, but you pay your taxes right?

Sure.

Brett: Well why do you do that, doesn't the government do horrible things with the money that you don't agree with?

Well that's a bit of a different situation you know. You have to pay your taxes essentially if you don't want to go to jail but you don't have to play for MCA...

Greg: No you don't have to pay your taxes...

I'm saying change things that you can, that you have possible control over. I'm just upset about this corporate intrusion into our music so that it's a situation where they get to dictate the clubs, the shows, everything so that my little band doesn't have a place to play and could never play the Opera House, basically.

Jay: Why not? I got the bands on the bill tonight. Not MAD. I didn't know who MAD was and I talked to all my friends here and they said "We've never heard of them." I said "Alright who's the band that you think should bill?" and everyone said, "Drunken Anger." I said "Fine." I called up the guy at the club and I said "This is the band that I want on the bill, Drunken Anger," and it was that simple. They're not telling me like this is what's going to happen, you guys be here at this time, this is the band you're playing with. We tell them what we want. Don't ever misconstrue the idea that these guys are calling us

saying, you're going to be here at 7:30 and you're going to be playing for 45 minutes and you're not going to play that fucking "Damned To Be Free" song and you're not going to do any encores. They don't do that, they can't do that.

Well we don't think it's ... I mean we're not saying anything like that....

Jay: And so I mean I called him and told him what bands were going to be on the bill, and I had no idea who these guys were, and it doesn't matter. To me it's like he (Greg) said before, you compromise. You say look... right now we've got 13 people a day calling us saying please come and play our city. Ok, well why should I come and play your city versus another guy's city. I don't want to get anybody against anybody so we said look lets just have somebody do this for us because we don't have the time to do this. Maybe as things slow down a bit we can get back into it and maybe say,

look you're our friend, you do it, instead of us hiring a guy that's someone else's friend we hire somebody that we know and go OK we only play with these people and we only play in this city. I mean you can't make everybody happy all the time.

Brett: You know the point I was trying to make is, about paying my taxes. I pay my taxes 'cause I don't want to go to jail, but I'm totally against it. But like I said, I could do more good by paying my taxes within my community, trying to do some local good in my community, than I would from being in jail. Now I know this is like a real extreme analogy but what I'm getting at is that sometimes to change the system you have to work within the system.

I disagree.

Greg: Well we could have a discussion and disagree.

So then you wouldn't have a problem with going onto a major label because conceivably you'd have an even wider audience....

Jay: That's totally different...

But that's totally along the line of what you're saying.

Brett: It's along the lines but we draw the line somewhere, you know what I'm saying?

So where are you drawing the line....

Jay: He says that to change the system sometimes you can change it from working within the system. We are Epitaph records. We do the distribution and all that stuff. We're changing that from within. You know, we're telling these people we don't want to do long-boxes anymore, we want everything in jewel-boxes. Buy everything from us in jewel-boxes or at least 50%. If that's not changing something. We're telling them what we would like them to buy.

Brett: Basically the company Epitaph Records pays federal and state business tax and they use that money to build this fuckin' stealth bombers, you know what I'm say-

"...What it comes down to is we're artists and as long as the art isn't compromised and the integrity of the art still stands that's the least you can do. The most you can do is do everything yourself and you'd drive yourself crazy and you'd compromise the art."

Greg

ing?

But at the same time you're not a subsidiary of a larger corporation.

Brett: No and we won't be. But if we play a show here tonight and if I'd known MCA was sponsoring it I would have tried to get a different show together. Most of the places we're playing aren't like this. We played a rehearsal studio in Buffalo four days ago. We came in here and we go whoa, look at this place. It was shocking. However we're not going to say now that I know about this we're not going to play because what will happen, we have to choose the lesser of two evils.

Well obviously... that's not realistic. It's just that when we heard that MCA was sponsoring your show we all said "Wow!" We were taken aback as well.

Brett: We weren't responsible for that. That's something that happened. You know, we played the Rivoli last time. We came up here, we thought, well we're playing in a bigger place this time 'cause we thought the Rivoli was too small. We didn't know it was sponsored by some major conglomerate.

Well we're sort of flogging this to death I guess. How did the Buffalo show come together, I heard that it was a studio that you guys record at but what's the deal.

Greg: The rumour worked.

Jay: What was the rumour?

Greg: Don't you remember? It was one of the first things that I said when we got on stage that night. I said "Welcome to our rehearsal studio," sort of thing.

Jay: I remember now. So it was an actual rehearsal studio... basically the promoter paid \$200 for us to go in there and play a show.

Was it a recording studio or was it a jam space....

Jay: It was a rehearsal studio.

Brett: It wasn't like it was a place where they do shows it was a rehearsal room where everyone all ages could come in.

Greg: They pretended like they knew what they were doing, like they were running the show. They were trying to make it legitimate but it was just a...

Bobby: It was fun.

Brett: It was a good show.

Something I've wondered is how do you write the songs, what's the formula or whatever, or is there such a thing....

Greg: No there is no such thing. Everybody in the band who writes a song writes the lyrics and the music.

Brett: I have a technique for writing songs, though.

Yeah that's what I'm asking. You (Greg) were saying you don't live in California....

Greg: No, upstate New York.

It must make practicing difficult...

Jay: We don't practice.

You don't practice??!

Jay: The band practices every now and then.

Greg: We've been together for 11 years man, we have a sound and we know what everybody plays.

Brett: I find that if you rehearse a lot it just gets stale you know. Good stuff happens when you don't practice and you go on and you play and it's just like really fresh.

So what you mail tapes of the music back and forth....

Jay: It's how we did the single. We recorded it like that on 24 track. Sent the 24 tracks to him (Greg) and he recorded his vocals and on the other one he recorded the vocals and basic beat tracks and sent it

back and we did the music around it. **And so you do any preparation before you go on tour, like get together and practice for a couple of weeks.....**

Jay: As a band without him yeah we do. Since our drummer left we did actually get some rehearsing in.

Greg: We have one or two shows usually that are a week or so before our tour. For

"I'm not in favour of American-style capitalism, however I don't have any song that I think would keep us from playing here tonight."

Mr. Brett

those one or two shows we will maybe have one or two rehearsals.

Brett: We do a long sound-check or something.

Greg: ...and then we're fresh for our show playing. We just kick off the tour.

Brett: You have to understand that we have about 70 songs and we've been playing them for about 11 years, if we start rehearsing all the time we're just going to hate those fuckin' songs and not want to play them. But when we don't play them and we get together and play it's exhilarating, it's exciting. I can't imagine rehearsing something over and over it would be like taking piano lessons it's like a chore. I like playing the songs and I don't need to rehearse them. If I make a little mistake who cares. I usually won't and maybe I'll do something improvisational whereas if I rehearse something the same way every time it might be perfect but it probably won't rock as hard.

Greg: You might as well play in an opera house.

The lyrics to Operation Rescue seem somewhat ambiguous, at least to me.

Greg: Probably because you aren't familiar with Operation Rescue.

Well I know that they're the pro-life movement that goes and blockades abortion clinics and blows them up occasionally.

Greg: And it still seems pretty vague?

Yeah so we've been having this discussion back and forth trying to figure out the words and we assume it's an attack against Operation Rescue, a critique of some sort.

Brett: Good assumption.

But the words are sort of misleading.

Greg: What part specifically?

"The ones we've needed all these years to stop the heinous wrongdoings and verify our moral benevolence as a people.

Greg: It's facetious. That's what you call going overboard to make a point of the opposite. It's like poetic licence. In other words isn't it ludicrous, that's what's ab-

surd to think that these are the people that we've needed.

Brett:that these militant right-wingers we need to jus-

tify our benevolence as a people. These war mongering murderers who have no feeling for humanity at all.

Just looking for clarification. I figured that much, but you never know.

Jay: Well you'd be hard stretched to find any right-wing sentiment in our music.

How do you keep up the distribution as an independent at such high volume....

Brett: We work our fucking asses off, every day. At least 16 hours a day.

Greg Hetson: See look. He doesn't have an ass. Before he started working for Epitaph he had the biggest ass. Bigger than Greg's. Now he's got no ass.

Brett: See Greg's gotta start working for Epitaph. We just work really hard at it, that's how we do it. We only have three people, Me, Jay, and one other guy.

I hear you guys are going to go up to 100,000. You're expecting to sell over 100,000....

Brett: Sales yeah, well shipped we'll see if we get returns...

Jay: It depends if this MCA thing...

What do you guys have for future plans recording wise, tour wise.

Brett: We've just recorded our new album before leaving on tour. No title yet.

Greg: We have to think of one in the next few days because it's a common question.

Brett: I was thinking of calling it "The Generator."

Greg: It's too Yes. Yes had an album called "Big Generator."

Brett: Yeah but Eddie Money had an album called "No Control." What does that have to do with it?

Greg:...but Eddie Money is a lot more

punk than Yes....Anyways that is just one of our plans. The record.

Tour wise. Is this going to be a North American tour...

Greg: Tomorrow we go to Berlin.

Brett: Future plans? Well I intend to continue writing songs so I guess we'll continue to put out records and play.

What about school, is that getting in the way....

Greg: Well it has been for the last six years.

Greg Hetson: We've gotten around it pretty well.

Brett: Well as far as me I'm going to continue working for Epitaph and signing local bands.

Is anything coming out on Epitaph....

Brett: I signed a group called Coffin Break. They were on CZ and they left amicably. It was the first record on Epitaph that I didn't produce or co-produce and it's produced by Jack of Subpop note, and it's a really good record. There's a group called Pennywise coming out from Ferosa Beach.

Yeah we know Pennywise.

Brett: Really you've heard of them?

I'm not a fan but I sold him (Paul) my single.

Brett: Pennywise is coming out. Those are the two immediate releases. Oh and I don't know if you're familiar with a group called Down By Law. Their record just came out on Epitaph a few weeks ago and a friend of mine Dave Smalley is their singer. He used to be in Dag Nasty. As a result of that record and Dave living in California and doing Down By Law for Epitaph, he contacted all the original members of Dag Nasty and they all kind of wanted to record something and he asked...

Brian Baker....

Brett: Technically we can't use that person's name so I won't say that he's on the record at all. Well because Brian Baker is on Geffin records for Junkyard you know so he can't record for me. But there is a guitarist using a pseudo name on the record. They recorded a record but I don't know when we can finish it. But that Dag Nasty reunion album will be coming out on Epitaph.

As Dag Nasty....

Brett: Yes they want to call it Dag Nasty but there's some people being nasty about it so maybe we'll use a completely differ-

ent name. So there's some interesting stuff coming out.

Last year when you were in town, this is sort of just to clear the air. There were some allegations made about stolen band equipment with regards to Bad Religion.

Brett: We stole it?

Yeah, there was allegations made by the opening bands.

Brett: Really? What kind of equipment?

It was drum equipment so I don't think it really applies.

Brett: We don't steal. We've never stolen anything.

Jay: We've had a lot of shit ripped off. I go to people and go hey guy you forgot your pedal; you lost your tuner; here's your two foot patch cord. I wouldn't take anything from anybody. That's the worst karma anyways. Taking a guitar cord from some other band means that your amp will blow up in the next show.

Except it was the drummers actually who were saying it.

Greg: Let's just tell you something, as you get more and more popular it's very easy to become targets of a lot of things.

Jay: Look I remember the show at the Rivoli.

I know the guys who are making the allegations and they are not petty. They wouldn't do something stupid like that.

Greg: It's easier to say that we stole it than it is to say that some local band stole it. You know why? Because it's such an appalling thing that Bad Religion would steal from an opening band...

Plus you're not here. The whole point is that you weren't here to answer all of these charges so this is the chance that you get to respond to all of this. It's a

rumour that's been going around for a year now.

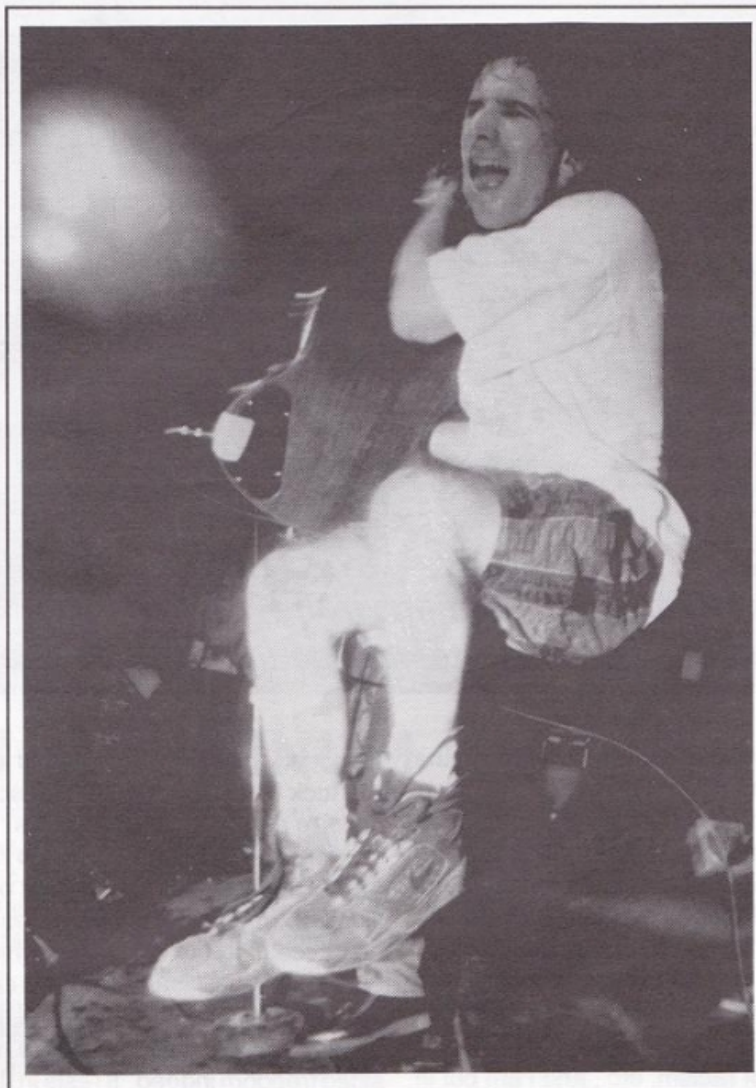
Jay: The only answer is that's not true at all.

Brett: We categorically deny it. Unequivocally deny it.

Greg: Never, never, never...

Jay: Were you at the show?

No.



Jay: Do you know the size of the Rivoli? It was packed from one end to the other and I'm not talking about just to the stage, I'm talking about all the way in the dressing room and all the way out the hall. So there were probably 40 people backstage that weren't in any band.

Brett: Exactly what got stolen, what piece of equipment?

Well from one of the bands a drum pedal got stolen and from another band it was

the cymbals.

Brett: A kick pedal and cymbals?

Jay: How could we go to Europe after that and go Pete how come you've got eight cymbals, now man that's a lot of cymbals.

Brett: What could a drummer do with two kick pedals on tour?

Well they break kind of easily.

Brett: Well they didn't break that night though.

Well we're not accusing you of that.

Brett: What band is that?

It was the opening bands from last year. I don't want to start naming names.

Brett: Why don't you, they did.

Well one of them was Kingpin and one of them was Phleg Camp.

Jay: Kingpin? Kingpin sends us demo tapes all the time.

Next time they write you, you can write 'em back and say "Oh gosh you're fuckin drunk." Well they also got rid of their drummer.

Brett: What else is there?

Allegation wise?

Greg: Yeah, let's hear the allegations.

Jay: We've been here once, let's hear what we did while we were here for the last eight hours.

Greg Hetson: You know what's good though, if you think about it logistically we're the last band to load out, if anybody was going to steal anything they'd see you walking out with it.

Jay: OK next allegation.

Well can we start another rumour tonight and we'll see how it develops by next year.....

Jay: Let's start an experiment, what will it be this year?

Brett: That Bad Religion is signing a deal with MCA. Is there anyone outside? I'll start the rumour right now. (shouts out the window) Bad Religion is signing a major record deal with MCA.

By the time you get back to California somebody is going to ask you about this.