

ProPagandhi

We're all sitting at Kingdom of Vegetarians Chinese restaurant in lovely downtown Philadelphia before the show, talking easily about the fact that at some point tonight, we should break out the tape recorder and do some sort of proper interview. The tour's going well, it's almost spring in Philadelphia, and there's loads to talk about...interview by Mike McSchlitzed and Jen-i-fur. photos by Jon Schledewitz and courtesy the Fatwrecks folx.

MRR (McMike): The beginning is always a good place to start. So, who are you all, and what do you do?

Jord: I'm Jord and I play drums.

Todd: Todd, bass.

Chris: Chris, axe.

MRR (McMike): And what do you all do for money when you're not playing and touring as Propagandhi? What sort of work do you do?

Chris: Right. Jord and I work at G7 Records in Winnipeg: it's a collectively organized record label whose mandate is to promote resistance culture through mostly audio recordings, but also literature and any other medium we come across in the future. That's what most of our time outside of Propagandhi is filled by.

Todd: And I teach exercises to women there at the community center.

MRR (McMike): I know that Michael Albert and Robin Hanel's participatory economic vision (PARECON) and their book, *Looking Forwards*, was an influence in how you all set up the foundations for how G7 was going to try and run. Could you talk a bit about all that?

Chris: I think by coming across *Z Magazine* many years ago and picking up on the fact that one of the editorial collective and Robin Hanel were trying to put together some sort of economic vision for how a workplace, and ultimately a society, may structure itself with values that are radically in opposition to capitalist values. The four principles it's based on are equity, participatory self-management, diversity and solidarity. Basically, for G7, we've taken those values and try to apply them to creating a workplace that's consistent with the kind of things we talk about. Like, we're in favor of democracy, and we think that should really be reflected in a workplace structure. And instead of us starting a label and being the bosses (which is what the workplace structure of most other labels is like), it just made sense. ...we also, at this point, think it's important that aspects of a label can show that a workplace like that can also be as efficient, if not more, as a traditional workplace and by far more empowering to everyone who works there.

Jord: Yeah, and trying to keep those principles intact after being socialized into more conventional, hierarchically structured workplaces. It can be a difficult thing. But with those sort of principles in mind, there's a building in Winnipeg, 91 Albert Street, that's home to a radical bookstore and a vegan cafe called the Mondragon that operate on certain PARECON principles. Also Arbieter Publishing is in the same building, and so the idea is to try and

build from the ground up and sustain some sort of infrastructure now, almost as this kind of experiment. And realizing that this is pretty small, one building in all of Winnipeg, but maybe for it to stand as this one example, representation of something outside of the norm that other people can look at and see what's been successful and what's failed inside of these operating principles, just for future reflection I guess. It's kind of interesting— at the cafe they sell all of the Arbieter books, everyone eats at the cafe, they sell all the G7 stuff, we promote Mondragon through our website and all that kind of stuff which leaves it as a good cooperative situation which is really interesting. And with a lot of other stuff that the building is involved with (like a meeting place for all sorts of activist groups), I really believe that Winnipeg, in an activist sense, has changed in the last five years or so— I really think it's a lot more organized and a more politically conscious city that way. It's an interesting thing to be involved with.

MRR (Jenifur): Yeah, its totally inspiring! Do you all work with Arbieter Ring too?

Chris: No, all three are actually separate, but there's this kinda cross pollination through, like he was saying— we sell Arbieter books, Mondragon sells our records, we eat their food! (laughs) There's talk for one day trying to have a cross-work-place PARECON that involves more than one job complex, but I think everyone has got to work out their own shit first, before we move on to that.

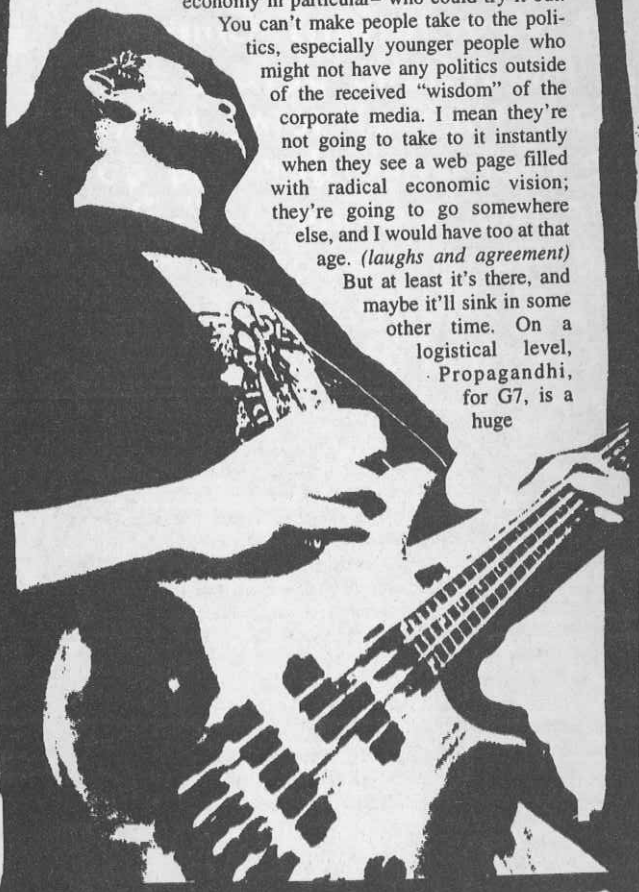
MRR (McMike): Seeing how all those projects are all so seemingly connected to each other and working together, how do you see Propagandhi connect into that on a broader level?

Todd: Well, the shows bring in the people that might not be interested otherwise.

Chris: ...Or people who might otherwise be denied access to any kind of different thinking— like even about the economy in particular— who could try it out.

You can't make people take to the politics, especially younger people who might not have any politics outside of the received "wisdom" of the corporate media. I mean they're not going to take to it instantly when they see a web page filled with radical economic vision; they're going to go somewhere else, and I would have too at that age. (laughs and agreement)

But at least it's there, and maybe it'll sink in some other time. On a logistical level, Propagandhi, for G7, is a huge



asset, and it sounds business-like, but it sells a lot of records, which helps G7. And that brings people in to Mondragon to buy the records too. So people who might have never have come to the bookstore, walk in to grab a record and are like, "cool!"

Jord: And in the past, we haven't toured in a while, but we're in a privileged position, for what ever reasons— the popularization of punk rock through the corporate media and all that kind of stuff— the crowd we have access to is a lot larger now. And whereas, in the past we'd play smaller club shows or basement shows and all that, which were really cool and organized on a really cool level. We decided to try and do something on a little bit of a larger scale this time, by going with Avail, J-Church, and Fabulous Disasters. ...to just access people who may not otherwise come to these kinds of ideas and to represent those ideas, through the songs for one thing, and supplementing that with the AK Press book table that's coming out to every show (we've requested that a lot of books be present at the table), and through speakers— like tonight someone from MOVE is going to speaking before we play. ...just trying to make it all more comprehensive.

MRR (Jenifur): And there's also some of the local activist scene in Philadelphia present tonight too. There's the Wooden Shoe collective bookstore table, and the Anarchist Black Cross has a table here tonight too.

Jord: Yeah, that's one thing we wanted to see happen. And getting back to the whole 91 Albert Street and all that— there's a photographer who's come along who's shooting a lot of the cultural aspects of what's happening on the tour, who has a dark-room on the third floor where our office is on. He's coming along for the whole tour. And there's an alternative film maker who's also coming along.

MRR (McMike): Do you approach shows like tonight, which is at a large venue, with any expectations for the cross section of people who are going to be in the audience? Both with all the information that you're attempting to put out there and the messages in your songs?

Chris: I think the only expectation these days is to make sure that people feel like they've been utterly rocked by the show because if that's the impression that people leave with, they're more likely to dip their toes into the ideological stuff we put out as well.

Jord: Yeah, we want to leave people with a positive impression of the stuff. Maybe those ideas will resonate a little better, and we've even got to the point that we're bringing out a couple of the old songs that we otherwise wouldn't play to help accommodate that a little bit.

Chris: ...and I think in the past, that our live presentation was different. Sometimes we did more harm than good, in terms of if the goal is to increase your circle of allies. Then I think sometimes we failed and increased our circle of enemies by hammering people with what appeared to be some sort of moralistic rhetoric, but we're just not necessarily the right people to verbally represent. Like we make songs that we think get our ideas across and contextualize the things that we see are wrong, but we're not public speakers. So I think we kind of defer a lot to the music and the lyrics these days and the live presentation. And again, we hope that's the impression that people who like NOFX or Lag Wagon have— "they blew away NOFX!" Then they may be more sensitive to some of the things we talk about.

MRR (McMike): Todd, how does that translate coming from having played in I-Spy? Where I-Spy and Propagandhi came from similar backgrounds, to playing and touring now?

Todd: Well to playing bigger shows?

MRR (McMike): Yeah.

Todd: Well, it's good because it's more organized, there are more people, better equipment to play through. Like honestly, in I-Spy I had great times and that, but it's hard. ...my amp was like two cubic centimeters you know? And there's all these

bands that come on after you, and you're just like, "well, we could've fucking rocked but we just don't have the same stuff as the other people; my strings suck, my guitar sucks, no one can hear the vocals." -It does get depressing. If you're thinking more, like if you're not just a punk who wants to have attitude, but you love music and want to hear it played good. Like I grew up listening to metal, and I love the music. It's not just an attitude. So to hear it proper is important. Like I don't want people to hear a song without vocals.

Chris: Production value, especially for our audience, increases the impact of our songs. I think it's good that we're playing through good P.A.'s. To me that's the most important thing when we show up to play- if the P.A. rocks.

Todd: Like I can't help but think that even I-Spy records just lack lots of what they could've been because of how they were recorded and our equipment. And you can sort of pretend to see through it all and all that, see the heart of it, and you can. But the fact is that it doesn't rock as hard as if it had been done right. I don't mean like spending thousands and thousands. I'm talking about keeping it reasonable.

Chris: Those aren't necessarily popular ideas in the punk or D.I.Y. scene, but we think they are. Production quality is critical if you want to open ears.

Todd: I just want to have people have their ears' asses kicked. *(everyone laughs)*

Jord: Yeah again, in relation to our history as a band, and how we ended up on Fat Records, and how the whole punk rock thing has gone, and just where we seem to sort of fit into all that, it just sort of seems to make sense.

MRR (McMike): Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense.

Todd: And to actually have time to put together a good performance into a record, instead of having to do it in two days, and just get stuck with being frustrated with notes that are way off. I don't want to be off- I mean DIO wasn't off! So why do I want to be off? Like my favorite records don't have off key singing, so I don't want mine to be off. And it takes us a while not to be off!

MRR (McMike): When was the last time you all toured the states?

Jord: 1996. It was sort of a smaller version of this tour. We had the traveling book tables, as well. it was partially booked through the same woman who booked this tour, and this one is just sort of a more successful version of the last one.

MRR (McMike): Have there been any differences that you've noticed to how you're being received in the States this time round compared to the last tour?

Jord: Everything has been really good so far, and I was kind of originally anticipating some really really macho dancing violence, but we really haven't seen that yet.

Chris: ...there's been very very little hostility towards even the messages at all.

Jord: Yeah, it's been overwhelmingly positive thus far, but we're only a quarter of the way through so...

MRR (McMike): I was wondering if you could talk a bit specifically about some of the messages and stories in your songs, and particularly maybe start with the first one on the new album - "Mate Ka Moris Ukun Rasik An."

Chris: Well, we were really impacted by the story behind the song, and hoped that, if we did it right, other people would also be impacted like we were because it's truly a hopeful story in a world of shit. The title of the song, "Mate Ka Moris Ukun Rasik An," is an East Timorese protest slogan that's been illegal in East Timor for 25 years under Indonesian occupation. It means "life or death, independence!" and the woman Bella Gahlos, who our song is about, is a true story about her life in East Timor at a young age when the occupation first occurred. Part of her story is that when she was young, a school girl, the Indonesian army came in and basically made attempts to systematically sterilize all the women. The end goal being the end of the East Timorese- an actual geno-

cide through attrition. And in her teens, Bella joined the underground resistance movement, and overtly joined the Indonesian government through some schooling to make sure she was free of resistance thought and was basically playing possum and still working for the resistance movement. She got to a point where she had convinced the Indonesian authorities that she was going to be part of the propaganda machine, and they were going to send her overseas to North America to tell North Americans how great the Indonesian occupation was for the people of East Timor. The first thing she did after getting to Canada was she mailed her uniform to the Indonesian embassy and then started speaking tours, saying exactly the opposite of what she had been instructed to do about the Indonesian occupation. Which risked not only her life, but risked her family's life. Leaving her family "marked" because of what she's done. But she felt strongly enough that it was important that North Americans know what the reality actually is. Especially since countries like the United States and Canada have militarily and economically underwritten the occupation. ...that's basically her story up to now. And to me, I can't even imagine a more courageous thing. ...we met her when she sang the freedom song at an East Timor benefit we played, like four years ago.

Jord: Yeah, and that's actually the sample on the record- that's her singing in Winnipeg.

Chris: I saw her speak in Winnipeg again last year. ...she's such a small little woman, from a tiny country in the Pacific who went through all this hell, and it makes you double think all the shit you learned growing up about what you think is hopeless and what's not.

Jord: I think it's important that people in the United States and Canada and Western countries realize that their tax dollars are going to training and arming dictatorships to the teeth that are really committing genocide for the benefit of business- which is supposedly what are governments are supposed to be against. ...I think we're just trying to contribute to a movement that hopes to dispel the notions of what our governments are supposedly for and show, clearly, what they are actually involved in. The idea that our governments are about democracy and freedom- that's just an illusion to keep people passive and thinking that things are really alright with everything. Which is absolutely insane, and it's my hope that as people do come to understand- like regular everyday people in Canada and the United States- that they'll be outraged and want things to change in a fundamental, basic way.

MRR (McMike): Especially with Sudharto being an ally of the U.S. and Canadian governments and serving to pave the way for U.S. and Canadian corporations to take up more space and find cheaper producers and more consumers for their shit.

Jord: Yeah, and it's bizarre. Why is it accepted that people should wear Nike shoes over here that aren't made in the States, that come from half way across the world? It's just totally absurd for something to travel all the way over there to get assembled and then come all the way back and be cheaper than if it was done right down the street. It's so absurd and people don't realize that there's a reason for that.

Jord: Yeah, and even on more of a dire level, just knowing that our tax dollars are going to fund the military and this totally conscious training of torture techniques is just horrible. And I just don't think that if people really knew how that operated that they would go along with it all.

MRR (Jenifur): Well, I just told my mom recently about the School of the Americas, and she's a Fundamental Christian, totally far right wing, but she was like "What?! We're doing that?" and just couldn't believe it. It was a really small conversation, and then she just turned it off because she just didn't want to hear it anymore, you know.

But at least it's out there.

Jord: That's important, and I think people should be very, very skeptical and critical of the sorts of patchwork solutions that come up. Like when things got too hard for Sudharto, he's out of there, but who filled his place? His hand-picked, military-rooted successor to the whole thing. So what changes? Almost nothing. The genocide continued and even escalated under the new regime. With the approval of the Left side of the political spectrum, who are the counterparts to the Democrats here. It's just crazy, and so that's going on. Then there's the military assistance to countries like Turkey from Western governments, and then Serbia's getting bombed at the same time.

Chris: Yeah, Turkey and Columbia, who have some of the worst human rights records in the last ten years, receive the most military funding from the United States. ...there's clearly something wrong with that.

Jord: I think that if the true historical record is shown, then there will be hopefully nothing short of a true social revolution to put things back to square one.

MRR (McMike): So let's talk about how all this relates to something like the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) summit this April in Quebec, as one example of people attempting to draw attention to true historical records. How all these things that we've been talking about often end up getting expressed in the streets. And how large is the fence that Quebec is erecting around the summit meetings?

Chris: About four miles.

Jord: I think that it ends up showing the true colors of the system, you know—the reactions to these

anti-economic globalization (if that's the right term to use) summits happening all over the globe. Whether it's first world or third world countries, the police response has been similar—which has been to shut it all down illegally.

Chris: Resistance is rising, like you're saying. But at the same time, repression seems to be becoming more transparent too. Which obviously is bad for the system because as things become more transparent, it may bring more people into the movements. Jord: I think it's extremely important to discredit the corporate media because a lot of people just have a very simple faith in what they hear about—like “freedom of the press” and all that. But you have to look at who's owning these papers and what interests that media represents.

MRR (McMike): Speaking of escalating repression, at the Republican National Convention here in Philadelphia last August, there were over 400 arrests, of which 42 were multiple count felony arrests which has people looking at the potential of facing decades in prison because they took to the streets and demonstrated against this rotten system. Some were arrested simply for having a cell phone and then received upwards of a million dollars bail. While most others were arrested at the whim of the cops and charged with the most ludicrous things, and this includes all the people who were arrested at the puppet warehouse illegally and who then after having all their shit confiscated, their puppets destroyed, and thrown in jail, ended up with charges that asserted that they had in fact been blocking roadways on the other side of the city or turning dumpsters downtown. ...the court battles are still ongoing, with the first of the felony trials finishing tomorrow. People are going to be in the legal system for the next year and facing serious jail time still. Which, of course, works to send a message to people thinking about going out to the next round of large scale mass action demon-

strations.

Jord: These are political prisoners. This is what I would have thought of the Soviet Union from what I was taught growing up. ...the U.S. being the country with the highest incarceration rate per capita in the entire world now. It's like, let the truth be told, and let the people figure it out themselves.

Chris: Threats of facing hard time is purposeful in deterring any other citizens from coming out to these things, from coming out. You can't blame them—like somebody has got a kid at home, and they want to come out to this thing—but if they get arrested and sent to jail who's going to take care of their shit?

MRR (Jenifur): ...but it also succeeds in exactly the opposite of what they want to do, which is totally pissing people off and pushing them further and further.

Chris: Yeah, hopefully!

MRR (Jenifur): Hopefully! And it organizes more people. (fortune cookies intermission)

Jord: I have a good one here.

Todd: What's it say?

Jord: “a surprise treat awaits you!”

Chris: “answer just what your heart prompts”

MRR (Jenifur): What? I “have an ability to sense and know a higher truth.”

MRR (McMike): That's pretty good!

MRR (Jenifur): Yeah, it's my connection to the Lord. (laughs)

(back to the shit)

MRR (McMike): With the decline of U.S. union pressure and strength, we've seen this unprecedented move by corporations into

the U.S. prison labor pools, and the old image of a prisoner stamping license plates, which was a state job, has been eroded to contain the images of prisoners stamping Victoria's Secrets' underwear.

Chris: Yeah, and booking flights for TWA.

Jord: Making clothing for Eddie Bauer.

MRR (McMike): Totally. What's the situation with private prisons in Canada now?

Chris: I don't think there are actually any private, for-profit prisons yet, but under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that could be swept away quite easily I think down the road.

Jord: Yeah, but again, it's approaching a totalitarian system where if you can create some crazy law that a lot of people will let slide, then you can just brand an entire sector of society as being criminal by say, illegalizing marijuana, or something like that. ...or a number of different things.

Chris: Canada is in the top 5 per capita for incarceration rates, so even though there's not privatization yet, it's still another “free” country putting people in jails at astronomical levels.

Jord: Especially, it's important to mention, the race factor—which is predominately meant to disenfranchise and incarcerate Black people, Hispanic people, and Native people. It's an extension of the racist policies that have been around since the beginnings of these “great nations.”

MRR (McMike): I think it's amazing how little is actually talked about the Canadian political world. Even in most corporate media I see so little mention of Canada, and I'm left with such a question mark when it comes to specifics around how shit runs there, and what's happening.

Chris: I'm like that in a lot of ways—I seem to know more about the American system, like as a process, than I do about the parliamentary process. I know more about how a bill gets passed

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down here than I do in Canada.

Jord: Well, our media is mostly American media. And our media, as well as the rest of the world's, obviously covers a lot of American happenings, since the rest of the planet is so directly effected by American policy.

MRR (McMike): Let's talk about another song off of the new album, "Ladies' Nite in Loserville." Where exactly did the idea for the song come from, and how?

Chris: Well, in a way, anytime we've addressed what our concepts of feminism were, it has been directly from what we've learned from the women around us and what we've all read on our own. "Ladies' Nite in Loserville" is sort of a complaint from feminist women and pro-feminist men that in our society it's difficult to criticize... The point of the song is how people critiquing the sex industry, pornography industry, and anyone who critiques that sacred cow of culture, is automatically relegated to a drawer of religious fundamentalist prude, rather than someone who is still perhaps an intensely sexual person. And just trying to insert that while at the same time, saying that someone like Larry Flint is a piece of shit. -That should be recognized instead of him being held up on the culture's shoulders as some sort of folk hero. He gets free speech while people who criticize him for showing women going through meat grinders are told to shut up and are pushed down. That's the whole point of the song- trying to show that feminisms are not mutually exclusive actions, and to make them exclusive is just a way of dismissing any conversation or debate about the whole issue. Again, just writing it as some sort of moralistic fundamentalism. And I think that should be destroyed as a tactic of shutting up women. If that makes any sense. So that's why the lyrics were written in quotes.

MRR (Jenifur): Is that changing in Canada? I feel that here, well at least with mainstream feminism, that I've seen it change a lot since when I first was introduced to feminism. Which is also because of the community I'm in, where some of my friends are sex workers, and I have a different kind of exposure that I didn't have before.

Chris: I'm not sure really. With all the women I know there's different reactions from woman to woman, you know?

MRR (Jenifur): Yeah, definitely.

Chris: Some women think it's great that we talk about what we're talking about. Some object to us talking about feminism.

Todd: ...but I think also with that song, anybody who has sex, like everybody does sort of... well, at least almost everybody...

Chris: Hey, leave me alone!

(laughs)

Todd: Like even though you don't want the words to leave our lips, like even your mom... it's just not one type of person were talking about.

Chris: Yeah, I mean we didn't identify the woman in the song as being a punk rock feminist. -It's just someone sitting there listening to these liberals spout off about their concept of free speech. And then filing an objection to that liberal shit and asserting her power to screw..

MRR (McMike): ...and, especially in the punk scene, a band that's composed of all men and that's really trying to deconstruct patriarchal attitudes and actions through your songs

and liner notes and what you've talked about on stage, is unfortunately rare. And because you all manage, I feel, to push past the slogans and empty fucking rhetoric of "smash sexism/patriarchy" that's thrown around so much in the punk scene... I think it succeeds in making issues of patriarchy and sexism that much more tangible than more fucking rhetoric. I mean yelling, "Smash sexism!" tells me nothing. I don't have any idea what that means.

Todd: I think there's a conscious effort in all the songs to avoid the slogans- that it has to come from somewhere.

MRR (McMike): I think it comes across clearly, especially for someone who may not have really thought about shit before. Like the song on *Less Talk, More Rock*, "Refusing To Be A Man," has the line that says "...and do you know what patricentricity means? I found out just a couple of days/months/years/minutes ago..." It breaks it down and allows someone who has either thought hard about this shit for years to approach it further, or someone who's never even thought to try. It gives them a place to maybe start from. The awareness that we've all got to start somewhere, and nobody has this shit totally figured out.

Jord: I think it's important to mention that this is all a process... I think it's important

to let people know that, of course, we weren't the politicos and like, BOOM, all of a sudden, we were just here out of nowhere. Like, I like heavy music. I was into metal and all that, and just eventually I got into some political bands, but I was really just into the music. And it wasn't until just a few years later that it really started sinking in. Even to this day, I'm still trying to figure so much of all this shit out. I mean, we're all just trying to keep figuring all this out. It has to be this constant, ongoing process.

MRR (Jenifur): Yeah, educating yourself definitely has to be an ongoing process. I mean, you can't just learn about racism, sexism, homophobia, and global capitalism, and then solve everything just because you've read about it!

Jord: I think that starting at the grassroots, then getting involved, and slowly working on becoming more conscious, is really meaningful and really positive stuff. All that, with the hope in mind that people will be outraged when they figure out what's really going on in the world. I don't think anyone wants to be involved in a system that's contributing towards oppression and is rapidly killing the planet.

Chris: I guess it's the alternative to what's happening now, which is "do nothing; die."

Jord: ...and being complicit and contributing to it through your labor and being taxed. It's some insane amount of the income tax down here in the States that's given directly to the military. It's insane. That doesn't have to happen. The U.S. doesn't need three hundred or five hundred military bases all over the globe. The citizens in the U.S. don't need that. The cultural and economic elite need it to maintain their positions of power.

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