

December 19 2020

Dear Mr. Bernheimer:

As a member of the small press community and a client of and contributor to SPD, I was understandably deeply distressed by Damaged Book Worker's recent allegations and the revelations that have followed since. SPD's attempts to respond to these, including your open letter dated December 18th, have unfortunately not been adequate in my view — certainly not to put out the fire that is raging, and not on the inherent merits of the case either. Yesterday's open letter from SPD staff reveals that they perceive the actions of management and board to be self-serving and in bad faith. I don't wish to attribute any such motives to you personally; I'm sure you believe in the cause of SPD as I do, and as do they. But that's the divide that exists. Let's not beat around the bush: bringing in consultants, who are answerable fundamentally to the board, and HR people, who are also structurally responsive first and foremost to management, is a "put-this-to-rest-get-back-to-the-way-we-were-and-stifle-further-unrest" response to this situation. It's not going to fly with the small presses looking on. And we're looking, and we're talking. If SPD is going to survive, it is going to have to address this head on in a way it hitherto apparently has not dared.

I strongly support the extraordinary open letter from SPD staff. These people need to be given the seat at the table they want, unambiguously, publicly, with no possibility of a statement from you about their being granted some sort of role being, much less being taken as, lip service. As long as the Board's statements can be taken to indicate that its main concern is keeping a tight hold on the reins — and that frankly is how your statement is being read — the Board's actions will be a failure.

Let me be clear — I love SPD, or I would not be writing to you. I hope that this inflection point will be, in the long run, in the best interests of it and the literary community. There are also major structural reforms needed in the work SPD performs and how it conceives of its mission as a distributor. Changes in the publishing landscape have created a widening gap between what small presses need today from SPD and what SPD is able to offer. I would be eager, in a better time, to work with SPD to address this.

Respectfully yours,

Jacob Smullyan
Publisher, Sagging Meniscus Press