

*TO HELL WITH POVERTY! A Class Act:
Inside the Gang of Four
(Brooklyn, NY: Akashic, 2025)*

Reviewed by Bill Brown

In his Acknowledgements, Jon King thanks “Steve Diggle for suggesting I write a memoir,” which is something King hadn’t considered doing before then – Steve Diggle being a member of the Buzzcocks, a band that, early on, took King’s band Gang of Four under its wing. King doesn’t say when Diggle’s suggestion was made, but it must have been fairly recently: his *Autonomy: Portrait of a Buzzcock* was published on 29 October 2024 by Omnibus Press (London).

Generally speaking, an autobiography takes a long time to write, especially when, like King, its author wishes to start his narrative at the year of his birth and to devote a relatively large number of pages to his childhood and formative years (it takes King 100 pages, that is to say, almost one-third of his book’s total pages, to finally get to his days at the University of Leeds, where Gang of Four would be founded, in 1976).

Born in 1955, King is now 70 years old. For the sake of comparison, let us note that Keith Richards’ autobiography *Life* was published when its author was 67; it is 567 pages long. Pete Townshend’s memoir *Who I Am* was published when he was 67; it is 544 pages long. Like Richards and Townshend, King has remained active in the decades since his heyday, but his book is only 326 pages long, that is to say, at least 200 pages shorter than the others.

And that’s precisely the problem: *TO HELL WITH POVERTY!* stops rather suddenly in 1984, when the band broke up, ends on a very sad, dismissive note (“We won’t find out for sure [...] but Andy and I were each ripped off by an estimated seven-figure sum – when a million dollars *was* a million dollars. Whatever.”), and has *absolutely nothing* to say about the 41 years since then. Missing is any discussion of or even passing reference to the reunion of King and his band mate, guitarist Andy Gill (1987); the release of *Mall* (1991); the release of *Shrinkwrapped* (1995); the reformation of Gang of Four with all four original members (2004) and the release of hot new versions of the old material under the name *Return the Gift* (2005); the release of *Content* under the name Gang of Four by King and Gill (2011); the departure of King and the decision by Gill to continue recording and touring under the name Gang of Four, releasing three albums between 2015 and 2019; and the decision by King to take on the mantle of Gang of Four in 2021, one year after Gill’s death.

What the fuck? Is King so embittered by his experiences with the music business that he is willing to let all that history – certainly enough to take up 200 pages – go without any mention whatsoever? No: it is obvious that he had an artificially imposed deadline and simply ran out of time. *TO HELL WITH POVERTY!* was published just three days before a group calling itself Gang of Four (perhaps that should be “Gang of Two + Two Others” since King and drummer Hugo Burnham are the only remaining original members), and playing all the old songs, started its “Long Farewell” tour, after which Jon King will be officially retiring from the music business. And so this is the dirt

behind the daydream: King's book is primarily intended to drum up interest in the tour. Without it, his book has no real purpose, no real reason to exist, at least not at this time or in this particular form – unless, of course, King plans to write and publish a greatly expanded second edition of his book or produce a new volume that covers the years 1985 to 2025. I wouldn't hold your breath.

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