

FIRE OF FREEDOM

I once had a very boring job, juggling figures. Things improved somewhat when my boss's secretary took it upon herself to further my sex education. No sooner was the old man out the door than we were up on the table working on the birds and bees.

One Monday morning, my education came to an abrupt end. A new numbers cruncher joined the firm. Tom was a middle-aged man with a wicked sparkle in his eye. He had even less interest in figures than myself and was given to expounding on matters poetic and philosophical.

Having recently departed from the fold of Holy Mother Church, I was ablaze with heresy and revolution and could spout for hours on Marx, Lenin, Mao and diverse other trouble-makers. Tom would sagely suck on his pipe and cluck in sympathy. Meanwhile, my former teacher wallowed in a stupor of boredom and grimly painted her nails. Soon thereafter, she married a farmer and now has 4 kids, a 100 head of shorthorns, 3 goats and a Massey Ferguson tractor. Thus did teenage sex and international revolution part ways.

One day, in the midst of one of my more bombastic rants, Tom inquired if I was familiar with Robbie Burns. I ventured to suggest that he might be a low-level Scottish Party apparatchik. Tom frowned and shook his head gravely. "Rabbie," he explained in glorious Highlandese, "was nae only the father of modern revolution, but a poet a' the highest order."

Thereupon, he ceremoniously closed his accounting tome, stood up, rearranged his testicles and recited:

"If I'm designed to be a slave
By nature's laws designed
Why was an independent wish
'Ere planted in my mind."

The simple truth in those four lines demolished all of my posturing and didacticism. I left the firm soon after and headed to the new world. Over the years, I have tried many times to capture Robbie's words in song. Fire of Freedom is the closest I've come. Thanks Tom. Sleep tight, old friend.