

Anarchist Black Cross

an introduction

History

The Anarchist Red Cross was started in Tsarist Russia to organize aid for political prisoners captured by the police, and to organize self-defense against political raids by the Cossack Army. During the Russian civil war, they changed the name to the Black Cross in order to avoid confusion with the Red Cross who were organizing relief in the country. After the Bolsheviks seized power the Anarchist movement moved the ABC offices to Berlin and continued to aid prisoners of the new regime, as well as victims of Italian fascism and others. The Black Cross fell apart during the 1930s depression due to the incredible demand for its services and a decline in financial aid. But in the late 1960s the organization resurfaced in Britain, where it first worked to aid prisoners of the Spanish resistance, which had not in fact died after the civil war and



were fighting the dictator Franco's police. Now it has expanded and works in several areas, with contacts and other Black Cross groups in many countries around the world. The North American section started in the early 1980s.

The ABC has sought to bring attention to the plight of all prisoners, with an emphasis on Anarchist and class war prisoners; and, through contact with and information about prisoners, inspire an Anarchist resistance and support movement on the outside. We fund-raise on behalf of prisoners or defense committees in need of funds for legal cases or otherwise, and organize demonstrations of solidarity with imprisoned Anarchists and other prisoners

We believe, as most Anarchists do, that prisons serve no useful function (except for the benefit of the ruling classes) and should be abolished

along with the State. We differ from liberal prison reformists and groups like Amnesty International in two main ways: firstly, we believe in the abolition of both the prison system and the society which creates it, and we initiate all our actions with that in mind; secondly, we believe in direct resistance to achieve a stateless and classless society. Groups like Amnesty International balk at supporting anyone accused of so-called violent acts, thus insinuating that anyone who resists oppression and takes up arms in self-defense, or during a revolutionary insurrection, is not worthy of support. The message is clear: do not resist. Our message is exactly the opposite, and this is what we work to support. We share a commitment to revolutionary Anarchism as opposed to liberalism and individualism or legalism.



Outside of prison work, ABC groups are committed to the wider resistance in which many of these prisoners are engaged. We see a real need for Anarchists to be militantly organized if we are to effectively meet the organized repression of the State and avoid defeat. What is also needed is commitment to revolutionary politics. We see the setting up of Anarchist defense organizations, such as the ABC, as a necessary part of the growth and development of an Anarchist resistance movement, not divorcing ourselves from the revolutionary struggle and then just fighting for prison reform.

As Anarchists we believe in the promotion of direct action and collective organization in the workplace, the schools, the community and the streets, as a means of regaining power over our own lives and creating a society based on mutual aid and cooperation.

Working Towards Liberation

We believe that prisons serve no function except to preserve the ruling classes. We also believe that free society must find alternative, effective ways of dealing with anti-social crime. But a decrease in anti-social crime is only likely to happen (and therefore prison abolition can only be a realistic option) accompanied by a dramatic change in our economic, social and political systems. These conditions lie at the root of both anti-social crime and the reasons for a prison system. Our primary goal is to make these fundamental changes. We work for a stateless, cooperative/classless society free from privilege or domination based on race or gender. But it's not enough to build the grassroots movements necessary to bring about

these changes in society, we must also be able to defend them. The ABC defends those who are captured and persecuted for carrying out acts on behalf of our movements.

Support for Imprisoned Activists

The ABC aims to recognize, expose and support the struggles of prisoners in general, and of anarchist and class war prisoners in particular. The form our solidarity takes depends on each individual's situation. To some we send financial or material aid. With others, we keep in contact through mail, make visits, provide political literature, and discuss strategy and tactics. We do whatever we can to prevent prisoners becoming isolated from the rest of the movement. We fundraise on behalf of prisoners or their defense committees for legal cases or other needs, and organize demonstrations or public campaigns of solidarity with prisoners we support. We regard prisoners as an active part of our movement and seek to maintain their past and potential contributions by acting as a link back to the continuing struggle. Increased communication between activists both inside and outside prison inspires resistance on both sides of the prison walls. We hope that we can encourage other activists by providing assurance that even if you are persecuted for your activities, the movement will not abandon you: we will take care of our own. Through the ABC, we are building organizational support for resistance.

Defending Resistance

We see a need to be highly organized if we are to effectively meet the organized repression of the State and avoid defeat. When power is challenged, be it in South Africa, occupied Palestine, Chile, Ireland or Canada, it inevitably turns to violent repression and political imprisonment to maintain itself.

Remember: We're Still Here

Various ABC groups decide what prisoners to support and what work we will do on a case-by-case basis. These groups put priority on the cases of political/politicized prisoners and POWs as this corresponds to our commitment to building resistance. Although imprisonment is in itself "political", such prisoners are being held specifically for their beliefs or actions. Unlike Amnesty International, we don't place judgements on what are valid and invalid expressions of resistance: non-violence is not a criterion for support. Unlike other organizations supporting political prisoners, we include those who were "politicized" by the prison experience and have since become organizers inside prison. Many "politicized" prisoners face increased harassment.

Join the Anarchist Black Cross movement

Get involved with your local Anarchist Black Cross group or start one!

Start an Anarchist Black Cross collective

1. Get a way to contact you. Get a post office box and a voicemail. An email address is also good, but make sure you can check it weekly!
2. Get a computer as soon as you can afford it. Using a computer makes it so

easy to get — and stay — organized.

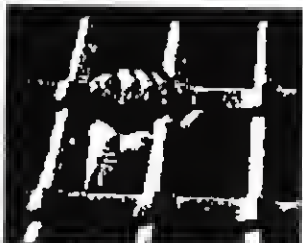
3. E d u - c a t e

yourself. Writers like Christian Parenti, Ward Churchill, Angela Davis, Marilyn Buck and many others have written extensively on relevant topics.

4. Learn about your area. Become familiar with the people and facilities

in your area. Keep the names and addresses of good resources for easy reference.

5. Pace yourself. You do not want to overextend yourself in a blaze of glory, only to burn out in six months. Think carefully about how you're going to schedule activism into your daily routine.
6. Choose issues? Think about choosing the issues that mean the most to you. Your energy and enthusiasm around topics you have the most interest in will show.
7. Connect! If you would like to affiliate an existing or new Anarchist Black Cross collective with the Anarchist Black Cross Network, please drop an email to abc-net@anarchistblackcross.org or mail Austin ABC (below).



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