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# A Draft Proposal for an Anarchist Black Cross Network

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

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1994

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must join with the Black Cat Collective of the Black Panther movement, and with other political prisoner movements to make a mass coalition. I propose the convening of an ABC conference to unite the ABC's and discuss the building of a mass political prisoner defense movement. It will have to have be a large conference to gather the forces needed to make this a real thing. This conference also should include the other movements as both observers and participants. Some of these groups are political prisoner defense committees and have been working on the cases of political prisoners for many years, such as those for Geronimo Pratt, Sundiata Acoli and other political prisoners. They have been very isolated and with few resources. But there are also groups like the Communist party-dominated National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, which for years has had a questionable reputation in its dealings and with its tepid support of political prisoners, though it has tremendous resources to bear, legal and financial. Either they must support the liberation of prisoners in a real way or be exposed in the most ruthless fashion. We can no longer brook sell-out or opportunist groups in this struggle.

We can build this revolutionary ABC movement if we will but commit ourselves both prisoners and the movement outside. There is much we both must do, this is no cakewalk and is very serious. But the alternative of doing nothing is even more dangerous: more will suffer and die. Let us make a difference with a powerful Anarchist Black Cross Network.

**We shall have our freedom, or we will level the Earth in our attempts to gain it!!!**

## Preface to the Second Edition

This pamphlet is dedicated to all those suffering in the dungeons of North America and all those revolutionaries who have lost their lives in prison anywhere in the world. I first wrote it in 1979 in hopes that it would raise the issue of political prisoners and lead to the building of a prison support movement which could save those prisoners who followed me into the prisons of North America from a fate of living death like I suffered (15 years in jail), or from a violent death like comrade George Jackson, the Attica prisoners, scores of whom were murdered by State pigs at the orders of billionaire Governor John D. Rockefeller during the revolt at that camp in 1971; Black revolutionary Andaliwa Clark killed in New Jersey during an escape attempt; or the brutal assassination of Anarchist political prisoner Carl Harp, founder of the Anarchist Black Dragon Collective in Washington State prison, who was killed in 1981.

Ojore N. Lutalo, who describes himself as a New African Anarchist political prisoner, and is confined at the New Jersey State penitentiary at Trenton, has been quoted as saying that "any movement that does not support its political internees is a sham movement." I obviously agree with this, and it is clear that we must turn the Anarchist Black Cross into a united mass movement, instead of just a number of isolated collectives who want to help particular prisoners. As one who went through this process myself, as a political prisoner (1969–1983), I know first hand that this piecemeal support structure will not work. What also will not work is sectarian support, and by that I mean not working with others because of ideology or refusing to support prisoners because of ideology. This is the antithesis of class war defense, and is really sellout opportunism. We must work with all those who believe in the democratic principle of class war defense, regardless of political disagreement.

Our objective is to build a mass movement strong enough to free all political prisoners, and to raze the prisons to the ground. Prisoners like Ojore rate our highest priority. We can and must free these prisoners, those imprisoned or tortured because of political beliefs or revolutionary activity. And if we had a strong movement we could free them today! This was proven in the case of the Anarchist prisoner Martin Sostre. He was framed and imprisoned in the 1960s, and was freed because of a mass movement made up of all kinds of radicals, prison supporters and others persons of conscience.

Not all can be freed by mass movements, but most can. We must also recognize that some will have to be freed through military action. The state simply has sworn not to release some persons while they still live because they represent such a threat to state security. George Jackson was obviously one such person, but there are others still alive and in the dungeon. The Anarchist and other radical movements in North America must build an underground struggle capable of taking action like the freeing of Assata Shakur in the late 1970s, and getting those persons to safe haven. It is not easy to do this, but it must be done. Prisoners must appreciate the difficulty involved in taking such military actions, while the comrades outside must appreciate the dire threat to life of those still left inside. This is not an easy issue, it a matter of life and death on both ends of the spectrum. Such a movement cannot be built overnight, but the problem is that we are no closer to it now than when I was in prison asking the same question this group of internees have asked themselves many times: have they forgotten about me? Must I fight this battle alone? This should not be the case, but it is. Here is the deal for all to see: if our revolutionary movements outside are weak, then we cannot build a movement capable enough to free prisoners or fight for social change.

gle. We cannot free any of the prisoners without building a mass movement which links up with all those in favor of democratic rights. That is why I said we cannot engage in sectarian politics. The case of Martin Sostre in the 1970s, who although an Anarchist, did not refuse the aid of Liberals, Communists, Christians, Muslims or anyone else who believed in the injustice of his frame-up conviction, should be a perfect example. The only reason he was freed was because of a mass ferment and agitation by a large sector of the population demanding his release. The governor of New York granted his pardon. It is political suicide for a political prisoner, and the movement which supports him or her, to take a sectarian position and refuse to work with others, even though we may vehemently disagree with them on a whole host of other issues. This is a matter of life and death, where the usual rules do not apply. The only issue here is the freedom of the prisoner. We have to work with all other political prisoner committees who will work with us.

This is not 1979, the time when I first wrote this pamphlet. There was no real ABC movement in North America like there is now. There may be fifty ABC units now worldwide. We must unite them into a powerful tendency, with its own press, political orientation and agenda. I hope we can formalize the group, while not necessarily centralizing the movement. We need to build an ABC Federation of groups so that we can raze the prisons and free all class war prisoners. We can build a powerful international revolutionary prison movement, since we now have activists in many countries which agree with the ABC. Many others would join with us, if they can find out what we are doing.

The ABC Network must strike out on its own at this stage, since there is no consensus among Anarchists about prisoner support generally, and revolutionary political prisoners specifically. No one else will take up this fight in either the Left or the Anarchist movements, and the inside prison movement cannot be effective without the outside active support. The ABC's

## Policy

We have to be non-sectarian when it comes to fighting for the rights and freedom of the victims of prison state slavery. Our policy must be that we will work with and for any prisoner and prison support group, if they will work in sincerity and unity with us. We do this so as to obtain the widest possible mobilization on the part of the people in support of the prison movement and the cases of political/class war prisoners. However, we will not subordinate our ideals and identity as anti-authoritarians and Anarchists to any other struggle or group. And we will not sustain attacks or make apologies for our beliefs in a Libertarian world, rather than a State Socialist or Western Imperialist one. We won't moderate our struggle or still our tongues concerning any injustice we see anywhere, in order to accommodate anyone, friend or foe.

## Conclusion

The American State in the past has murdered and imprisoned far too many of our Anarchist comrades: Alexander Berkman, the Haymarket martyrs, IWW members (such as Joe Hill), Sacco and Vanzetti, Martin Sostre, Carl Harp and so many others. Also many Anarchist prisoners are in prison today such as Ojore N. Lutalo, Shaka Shakur, along with other political prisoners like those in the Black Liberation Army or formerly with Black Panther Party, like Herman Bell, Sundiata Acoli, Marshal Eddie Conway. We must organize to ensure that these comrades (and others now in prison) are freed and that further repression of our movement by State/Class rulers is prevented.

Therefore, we must talk about making the Anarchist Black Cross into a mass movement against State repression, one which can counter the drive of the State Capitalists towards a police state, along with our work in the anti-prison strug-

## An Introduction

The Anarchist Black Cross is an international network of autonomous groups of anarchists who work to ensure that Anarchist, class war, and other prisoners aren't forgotten.

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 hopes to bring attention to the plight of all prisoners including, psychiatric prisoners, with an emphasis on Anarchist and class war prisoners; and, through contact with and information about Anarchist prisoners, inspire an Anarchist resistance and support movement on the outside. Although we aren't able (except with a few exceptions) to send regular financial aid to our comrades in prison, we do keep in regular contact with as many prisoners as possible, make visits and do whatever we can to prevent prisoners from becoming isolated. We fund-raise on behalf of prisoners or defense committees in need of funds for legal cases or otherwise, and organize demon-

strations 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, the ABC's 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.

**Raze the prisons, free the prisoners!**

Vanzetti, and so many others put to death "legally" by the State, as well as those like Mumia Abu-Jamal, who have been sentenced to death.

12. Expose the fallacy of the Capitalist system of cops, laws and prisons being for the protection of society or as a social necessity. We should hold community forums on crime, the prison system, racism and Capitalism, to expose the system itself as the crime, and to show that there is another way to social peace and harmony: the Anarchist way.
13. Set up Black Cross Amnesty Committees all over the Continent to demand the freedom and amnesty of political/class war prisoners, and the abolition of prisons. Especially demand the immediate release of prisoners who have served unnecessarily lengthy sentences.
14. Demand the immediate closing of all Control Units in federal and state prisons. We should have mass marches at the prisons, in front of politicians offices, and at the "corrections" offices. We should make the issue of Control Units in North American prisons an international human rights issue, and in addition work to try to free all such prisoners on a strict timetable.
15. Those outside the prison support movement (and especially in underground units) must be willing to engage in armed support actions. Where the lives of political/class war prisoners are in immediate jeopardy, they must be forcibly liberated. This is an extreme measure for extreme conditions of repression. It cannot be taken lightly and without full understanding of the consequences. But because of the State's bloody war against innocent victims it must be considered and done.



7. Organize a Legal Defense Fund to raise funds for legal fees and to secure the services of an attorney, where necessary, to assist prisoners with criminal or disciplinary cases growing out of their prison organizing or the harassment by prison officials.
8. Organizing and/or participating in coalitions with poor people's movements, prison support, Black, Women's rights, Gay, Church, Left-wing, and other diverse groups, so as to win them over and to integrate the prison struggle into the general movement for social change in North America.
9. Assist prisoners in getting parole, probation or a pardon by securing them a place to stay, a job, some references or names on a petition demanding their freedom when they become eligible for parole or are seeking executive clemency. It may be necessary to hold demonstrations and other protest actions to compel the release of certain prisoners whom officials are continuing to hold even though they should have been legally released.
10. Organize a Correspondence Committee of people to write to prisoners and find out about prison conditions and to show their solidarity and human concern. Also to write protest letters to prison officials, politicians, the news media, prison support groups, professional or legal organizations and other persons, about prison conditions. Also have the ABC's to function as an Observer Committee to go into the prisons, visit the prisoners, investigate their complaints, question the officials and monitor the prison for violation of prisoners' rights.
11. Work against the death penalty and expose it as an instrument of racial genocide and class and political repression. Never forget the Haymarket martyrs, Sacco and

## Purpose of the Movement

The stated purpose of the **Anarchist Black Cross Network** is to actively assist prisoners in their fight to obtain their civil and human rights, and to aid them in their struggle against the State/Class penal and judicial system. The prison system is the armed fist of the State, and is a system for State slavery. It is not really for "criminals" or other "social deviants," and it does not exist for the "protection of society."

It is for State social control and political repression. Thus it must be opposed at every turn and ultimately destroyed altogether. The abolition of prisons, the system of Laws, and the Capitalist State is the ultimate objective of every true Anarchist, yet there seems to be no clear agreement by the Anarchist movement to put active effort to that anti-authoritarian desire. We must organize our resources to support all political/class war prisoners if we truly wish to be their ally, and we must give something more than lip service.

Organizing against the enemy legal and penal system is both offensive and defensive. It is carried on with individuals, groups and among the masses in the community. We must inform the people on a large scale of the atrocities and inhumanity of the prisons, the righteousness of our struggle, and the necessity of their full and support. We must organize our communities to attack the prison system as a moral and social abomination, and we must fight to free all political/class war prisoners.

Defensive work involves meeting the needs of the prisoners: whether those needs stem from the daily oppression of the prisons, police, courts, or the intensive repression by State/Class authorities of prison organizers. The prison support group meets these needs in two primary ways:

1. by educating the community about the class/racist nature of the prisons and the legal system and how to fight against it;
2. by forming outside support groups on a local and national basis in order to ensure prisoners' defense and survival from enemy attack and from inhuman prison conditions. There should be Anarchist Black Cross Groups all over the continent.

Offensive work means directly challenging the existence of prisons and this work also involves actively campaigning against prison conditions, and propagandizing the actual cases of political/class war prisoners (i.e. prisoners jailed for specific political reasons and those who have become politically aware of the reasons for their oppression while in prison, as well as victims of frame-ups) to the largest possible audience.

We must do this in order to expose, embarrass, isolate, confuse and demoralize the enemy's legal and penal system, and also to win community people over to support prisoners' struggles.

Some of our protest activities include this 15 point program:

1. Organizing Political Prisoner Defense Committees on behalf of prisoners framed or railroaded through the Capitalist courts for their political and social beliefs or prison organizing. For a prisoner in the hands of the State on political frame-up charges, the Defense Committee is the most effective instrument to fight for their freedom!
2. Holding protest rallies, marches and street demonstrations in support of prisoners' rights and against the repressive actions of State/Class authorities. Such protests can be held in and around prisons, Departments of "Corrections," Courthouses (where political prisoners' cases are being tried or prisoners' rights lawsuits are being

heard), at the White House, US Congress, State Legislatures, Governors' Mansions and other symbols of class rule and prisoner oppression.

3. Writing press releases and holding news conferences for the Black, alternative and radical news media (and sometimes the Capitalist news media) appearing on television and radio news and/or talk shows to discuss prisons. Priority should also be given to starting a Prisoners' newsletter or newspaper with an Anarchist focus . In fact, the old *Black Flag*, formerly the organ of the anarchist Black Cross Group in London, England (which has stopped publishing), should be started up again. (I remember what the HAPOTOC newsletter and the *Black Flag* did to publicize and politicize my case when I was in prison.)
4. Securing Anarchist and other revolutionary materials for prisoners to read, and fight for their right to receive this literature if prison officials try to ban or prohibit such literature for any reason.
5. Sending the prison officials and other State/Class authorities all over the continent a flood of telegrams, letters and petitions about the mistreatment of prisoners, and especially political prisoners and prison activists (who are 'dangerous' in the eyes of the prison officials). Let them know that there is someone who is watching their every move and that the prisoners are not alone!
6. Organize a **telephone brigade** to continually call "corrections" and other authorities about the treatment of prisoners. This is especially important if there is an enemy attack upon a political prisoner or an ongoing prison protest.