

Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross Federation

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In January of 1998, members of several Los Angeles-based anarchist organizations (Black Star Collective, Alternative Gathering Collective and Whittier Food Not Bombs) came together to discuss better ways we might apply the values and traditions of anarchism. We felt the current movement no longer reflected the traditions and aspirations of the past. Concepts like solidarity and mutual aid, we felt, had been replaced with individualism and lifestyle-based politics. Anarchists no longer seemed to share in the common struggles felt by the rest of society. Instead, the movement had become a self-imposed alien to the rest of the world.

We wanted to embrace a much larger concept for the liberation of humanity than what we felt the Anarchist community envisioned. We wanted to reflect the true values and traditions of the anarchist movement, while at the same time embrace the diversity of all liberation struggles. We recognized the hypocrisy of those who discussed the idea of a global village, while only embracing the theories and cultures of Anglo-Saxon and European philosophies.

This new group refused to shy away from ideas like anarchist organizations and building better organizing skills. We were not afraid to use words like *leadership* because we understood that leadership was something everyone in the group could possess. In addition, we knew that anarchism was not just for white, middle-class punk kids, and it was not always going to be laid out in the manner that Anglo-Saxon anarchists have envisioned. Culture would play a valuable role in how anti-authoritarianism would play out in various communities. We wanted to begin laying the foundation for a new culture based on liberation politics, while at the same time respecting traditions and values of our own pasts and cultures.

We chose to come together as an Anarchist Black Cross for several reasons. First, we looked at the growing prison industrial complex and saw this as an issue that influenced many people's lives, including our own. We saw the brutality of the prison system as a weapon that continued the long tradition of racism and an extension of the American Apartheid system. ABC organizations openly supported imprisoned militants and revolutionaries who tried to relieve the oppression found within their communities. Members of this group believed the heart and strength of any movement for liberation must come from those who need liberation the most. People from privileged communities must take a step back and allow

communities who are oppressed to define their own terms of liberation. By supporting political internees from our own communities and from other oppressed communities, we were taking the first step of defining the terms of our liberation while supporting others in the same process.

By October of 1998, LA-ABC had been building a relationship with the Anarchist Black Cross Federation (ABCF) for months and saw a lot of commonality between the two groups. Both organizations seemed to have similar backgrounds and both saw the importance of supporting the right to self-determination of communities. The LA-ABC decided to apply for support group status in the Federation and was accepted into the ABCF.

Since our acceptance into the ABCF, the one project that has given us the greatest amount of pride has been *Running Down the Walls* (RDTW), a 5k run to raise money for political prisoners. Since it began in 1999, people in prisons and cities worldwide run on the same day to raise awareness and funds for political prisoners. The event also raises funds for organizations that stem from the same communities and movements from which our imprisoned comrades originate. This aspect of the event allows us to stay consistent with our position that we must support the prisoners and the communities that they come from. However, what is most important about this project is that it gives our imprisoned comrades a tool to organize behind the prison walls. They have used this annual event to illustrate to other prisoners that a movement of solidarity exists and it cannot be halted by a razor wire fence.

Within the last year, the Los Angeles Anarchist Black Cross has developed a new program called *The Black Rose Society*. The purpose of this program is to uncover the lost history of the anarchist movement in the Los Angeles area. We take the position that if the movement is disconnected with its roots that it will not be able to grow and flourish. By rediscovering our past, we will be inspired to honour our traditions and build a movement that is comparable or even surpass those of the past. We hope to uncover lost comrades that have been wiped away from the pages of time and bring them back into the limelight to praise their efforts.

As part of this project, we have organized walking tours through the city streets, stopping at plazas, buildings, and alleyways, which were once the homes and stomping grounds of our predecessors. We hope to illustrate the fact that the spirits of our ancestors are alive and well in the City of Angels.

In our fourteen years of existence, the organization has ebbed and flowed in size. We have been as large as thirty people and as small as one, but

our spirit and determination to support our imprisoned comrades has never wavered. To us, mutual aid and solidarity are the keystones to the ideas and essence of anarchism. We live by the words once spoken by Boris Yelensky, an anarchist and predecessor of the Anarchist Black Cross movement, “The work is not done for the glory, but because we believe in mutual aid”.

That is all that needs to be said.