

New anarchist federation and anti-fascist network form and a look to past efforts

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With the recent wave of Black Lives Matter street demonstrations and the formation of the Black Rose Anarchist Federation/Federación Anarquista Rosa Negra and the Torch Anti-Fascist Network, I wanted to gather together some historical examples of attempts at local, national and international organizing by Anarchists in North America in the 1980s and '90s, intervention in mass movements, and the importance of having our own media in this work.

Materials such as those from the 1990s Love and Rage Network/Revolutionary Anarchist Federation and the Network of Anarchist Collectives can serve as a good example of how Anarchists in the US, Mexico and Canada organized, how they perceived then-current events, and what they tried to struggle with and against. There were some successes, but also many failures and shortcomings that could be studied systematically to benefit comrades now and in the future immensely.

The Baklava Autonomist Collective and Wind Chill Factor

Only with the demise of the Autonomous Zone Infoshop (A-Zone) in Chicago, where I was a member of the Collective at the time, did I find out that the A-Zone had been formed largely by the Baklava Autonomist Collective. As we packed up the A-Zone's 'zine library, one of my comrades handed me a copy of Baklava's 'zine, *Wind Chill Factor*, and told me it was the origin of the A-Zone. As I began to do my own research on the Anarchist movement during the A-Zone's 1993 formation, I also found out that Baklava members had been involved with the start of *Love and Rage* (L&R) as an Anarchist newspaper, then a decentralized Anarchist network.

Love and Rage

Here at the Long Haul Infoshop in Berkeley (where the *Slingshot* office is located), I had my first chance to go through old copies of *L&R* and internal documents, including a pre-founding conference discussion bulletin!

I was amazed to see major history, such as the call for the first black bloc in North America at a national action against Operation Desert Storm in Washington, DC in January 1991; early coverage of the Zapatista Uprising from the Mexican L&R group, Amor y Rabia; and street level reports on L&R members' participation in escorting patients to abortion clinics, in Anti-Racist Action (ARA), and many other struggles.

L&R split in 1993 into groups of people who wanted to maintain the decentralized Love and Rage Network that had formed from the groups that produced the paper, and those who wanted more cohesive politics within a disciplined, cadre-type organization. This led to groups such as Baklava splitting, and the re-organization of the Network into the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. The Federation continued to print *L&R* until it broke up in 1998. This led some ex-members to immediately form the Fire by Night Organizing Committee and others to join already-established groups, such as the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Later, some ex-members were pivotal to the formation and development of other new organizations such as Bring the Ruckus (BTR) and the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC).

Internal documents were a major aspect of L&R. Both the Discussion Bulletin (Disco Bull) and the Federation Bulletin (Fed Bull) are full of materials related to debates and decisions, news about actions and contemporary world events, and reflections on all of these things and more.

These activities are largely carried out online now, though I generally believe that a great deal more thought and intention goes into this sort of work when people take the time to type, then print out and mail these sorts of things, as opposed to posting snarky comments on websites or promptly shooting off fiery e-mails.

There are aspects of snark and fire in the letters and articles printed in the Disco Bull and the Fed Bull, but I feel like the general thoughtfulness of these internal bulletins are literally the polar opposite of listservs and message boards online now.

Plus, it was simultaneously exciting and a bit depressing to read L&R members' debates and discussions of so many of the same issues and participation in many of the same struggles as we face today. It was clear how, in many ways, they were a pivotal link between the New Left era and today, but, in other ways, I think a lot of their lessons have been lost as people have left or seriously stepped back from political struggle.

Once, while discussing squatting in Oakland, a younger comrade from the Long Haul with far more experience than me in both squatting and volunteering at the Long Haul said to me, "There's no history of squatting in the Bay Area."

Having just read in *Nine-Tenths of the Law* by Hannah Dobbz about the White Panther Party in San Francisco during the era of the New Left cracking open squats, then hooking people in need of housing up with it, I replied with that story.

After discussing it briefly, I took out *L&R* Vol. 1, No. 2 from May, 1990 whose front cover below the fold has the headline: "BERKELEY POLICE ATTACK SQUAT" along with some now-vintage riot porn as a concrete example of this history.

Though this comrade had been in the Long Haul Collective for years, she had never seen anything from the extensive *L&R* archive!

After a similar conversation with another younger comrade who had also spent more time squatting in Oakland and volunteering at the Long Haul than me, the second comrade went about discussing this article with one of the older comrades who was around at the time. The older comrade helped contextualize the article, saying that around then, many street level radicals in Berkeley had gotten their teeth sharp in the Anti-Apartheid struggle, and rowdiness and oppression were expected at demonstrations. He also identified that squat in Barrington Hall as part of the co-op defense against gentrification, which continued with Hellarity in Oakland, where they had both lived.

With all the focus that significant numbers of revolutionary Anarchists put on understanding the thoughts and actions of Anarchists from the mid-to-late 1800s and early 1900s, why hasn't similar energy gone into understanding and analyzing the theories and work of 1980s and '90s Anarchists? Especially since their movements are literally the direct predecessors of what's going on now in Anarchism and not only are there all these great newspapers and newsletters around, much more importantly, many of the militants that made them are, too!

The Network of Anarchist Collectives and (Dis)Connection

Shortly after leaving the Love and Rage Network, Baklava helped start the A-Zone, whose Collective members in turn helped start *(Dis)Connection*, which, the first issue said was "a journal dedicated to information sharing for Radical Collectives and Counter Institutions. It was conceived during the 1994 Counter Institution Gathering in Detroit. 1,000 copies printed in Philadelphia,

PA. Infoshops and collectives received master copies to reproduce as well. The producers of this issue can be reached at the Wooden Shoe, a long established collective bookstore in Philly which is still going! The Network of Anarchist Collectives (NAC) came out of this, and included the Long Haul and some long-since-closed radical spaces such as the Emma Center in Minneapolis, MN and Beehive in Washington, DC. There are 29 (Dis)Locations and 16 (Dis)tributors listed, in a time not largely known for radical politics!

The second issue was written by Chicagoans, and was largely about the A-Zone. The words, "Left Bank donated \$50.00 to assist in our goal of one Uzi per A-Zone member" on the inside cover instantly sparked my interest. Though I'm sure there was never a gun fund for A-Zoners, I couldn't help but enjoy the thought of Left Bank Books, a collectively-run radical bookstore from Seattle that's still around, sending the A-Zone money for weapons!

This was actually the first issue I was able to read, when a comrade lent me this and the third issue in early 2009 to help with my research for a 'zine on Infoshops in Chicago. Articles in this issue, such as "Against Half-Assed Race and Class Theory and Practice", "Gentrifuckation and White Frontier Collectives," and "On Boys In Collectives," were somewhat-painful reminders about how many current Leftists in general and participants in the Infoshop Movement in particular are pretty good at re-inventing faulty wheels. Bringing back these past discussions and insights continues to be a goal of mine in both the research and writing that I do.

When asked to be on a panel about "Zines & Libraries" at Chicago 'Zine Fest in 2010, I made a point in inviting one of the authors of these articles and bringing the two copies of (Dis)Connection with me, then talking about how Wicker Park was still 70% Latin@ at the time the A-Zone was there, according to the journal. I brought this up while talking about the current gentrification of Pilsen, for anyone there who still might not be taking it seriously.

It was also fascinating to see Food Not Bombs in Chicago declared dead forever. There were three different neighborhood chapters going strong, years later when I was reading the journal! The death of the Earth First! Movement was also pondered in this 1990s journal, showing how often we despair when there is still hope.

In an era of so-called "social networking" websites, these journals were a real charge to get a hold of, and I'm sure I would have read and re-read them if they were new. As I continued my research in early 2014 I found copies of #4 & #5 at the Taala Hooghan Infoshop in Flagstaff, AZ and posted them on Scribd (www.scribd.com). These issues include four articles dealing directly with the subject of this article, written under the rubric of Intercollectivism.

The networking that came out of these journals culminated in Active Resistance, a series of events that were held in Chicago in opposition to the Democratic National Convention, which met there in 1996. For years I perceived this as the main preceding step towards the mass mobilizations against the main political party nominating conventions that have happened steadily since 2000, but my study of L&R materials showed that similar protests also occurred in 1988 and '92!

Those of us who dwell in the belly of the beast still live in an empire, even if it has gone into serious decline since the early 1990s. Radicals have a responsibility to try to learn from past mistakes, so we can take this rotten-ass system down once and for all, and replace it with the justice and equality that has been denied for far too long!

The Torch Anti-Fascist Network includes what I consider to have been the most radical elements of the Anti-Racist Action (ARA) Network, such as Chicago's South Side ARA and the Los Angeles chapter, who send their paper, *Turning the Tide*, to prisoners in the U\$ for free.

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