

Statement of Disassociation

The “End” of London ABC

London ABC

February 12th, 2022

In short, we believe that the assumption that a specialist ‘department of prison’ is required by an anarchist movement is fundamentally mistaken. Anarchists come across prison in two ways: firstly, we might end up there, as a banal if frequent consequence of the course of struggle, and we also have a critique of the prison in its disciplinary function on the plebian classes, as well as its reproduction in many different techniques of control deployed by capital to subdue and extract from the living things entrapped in its entrails. But these elements of our encounter with this apparatus of power should not be specialised, represented, demarcated, separately from the rest.

We have considered and abandoned the idea that London/UK prison conditions are a ‘specific’ struggle by which the scope of rebellion can be widened or generalised. Why? Why in fact does it so often become narrowed and specified there? Our provisional answer is as follows. We do not take the prison system ‘by surprise’ in our reactions against its high walls and the horrors they contain. People go to prison, and have prison-techniques imposed on them, because, as a matter of fact, the state is at war with the exploited and especially the portion which are rebels and refuse to bow down under any circumstances. We are meeting the enemy then, only at the waste pipe of their machinery, where it wants us to go and expects us to be, and forget the whole blood-stained processing plant which leads up to this point, where most of the real opportunities for sabotaging the existence of this suffocating exit-chamber really are.

This is not the same thing then, as what antagonism against a nuclear-waste dump site, the gentrification of a neighborhood, or even the construction of a new prison can be. This is because the anarchist proposal in each of these situations is for the immediate seizure of life, by taking it into our own hands: the self-organisation of the struggle. Prefiguratively, in the activities of the ‘anti-prison/repression group’ the organisation of struggle is already out of our hands: it is purely responsive, to the locations, terms, situations IMPOSED BY CAPITAL. So the prison-centered anarchist contention ends up being in a negotiating position from the outset – reactive, and separate from the struggle that such an organisation is supposed to be ‘about’ – ignoring the wider context in which repressive episodes arise in the first place.

Let’s consider for a moment the fate of the Earth Liberation Front prisoners in the Pacific U.S, from a struggle which started off by identifying and moving decisively against capitalist projects destructive of the wilderness. This became, after the FBI operations and Anarchist Black Cross

groups had a hold on it, a struggle only about the terrible repression itself; with only minimal, and defensive reference, to its 'justification'. Any perusal of the tone and attitude of the overwhelming majority of material for and about these prisoners by an 'official ABC' group will confirm this. The clear exceptions, and something which we take inspiration from, is the June 11th initiative, which has attempted valiantly to put the reflex to 'support' back into solidarity-in-act. Perhaps this is because the initiative is not directed at 'support groups', but at everybody with a mind to think and a life to throw into the fray.

By pursuing the former path of specialisation we deprive ourselves of the most basic and important developments in the anarchist perspective of the 20th and 21st century. Namely and for instance:

- Its proposal of a methodology of small groups of affinity engaged together in a destructive experiment: to destroy a sector of the prison-society which can serve as an example and an inspiration to anyone in confrontation with any similar apparatus anywhere in the world. To practically demonstrate, and theoretically elucidate (which must amount to the same thing), the weakness, permeability and mortality of the apparatuses of social control.
- Its refusal of collaboration with any fixed political or armed structure.
- Its complete deafness to the lullaby of quantitative growth.
- Its tendency towards conflict to a permanent end, enriched by the concerns of practical solidarity (for example, a struggle which starts off proposing to seize empty properties in a housing estate earmarked for demolition and replacement by yuppie condos, may transform into a proposal for attacking immigration raids, given the practical interconnection between these forms of power in their attempts to discipline and exploit the same neighbourhood).

Anarchist methodology is beautiful precisely because it is agile, intelligent, subversive and experimental. To reduce it to the activities of discrete 'departments' which might concern 'work', or 'the climate' or 'prison' is, in our view, to raise a complaint about the very thing which is lively in anarchy, in our proud inheritance.

What does an 'anti-prison', or 'anti-repression' group, really have to do with the actually physically existing prisons, the power behind them, OR the technological diffusion of its form into reality – this concept that we term 'prison society'? Which part of power is really struck by fixing and concentrating overlapping social tensions into a 'single issue' structure?

If we are anarchists (for which the clue should be in the name 'ABC'), then we should be able to perceive that perhaps the best way to wound the prison system is to trouble the equilibrium of social peace and resignation which hangs like mist over society-at-large. Perhaps, the distinction between the world within and without the walls are not as cut-and-dry as we would imagine? Furthermore, maybe the best way to achieve resonance with the specific horrors of the prison archipelago, on this island and beyond, is to achieve mutual recognition by rebellion itself?

Put simply, those trying to subvert the prison from within, by direct insurrection or by just maintaining non-collaboration, dignity and autonomy within those difficult conditions, are probably best met, engaged with, put into relations of affinity, by OUR direct insurrection, OUR non-collaboration, OUR sense of dignity and autonomy on the 'outside'. In general we think it's a

serious practical and theoretical mistake that the 'exploited other' needs 'supporters', 'listeners', 'campaigners'. What is desperately needed by our moment is to stop cheerleading – living and struggling vicariously through others – and instead to self-organise our own struggle, to be inspired to MULTIPLY the dimensions of threat to power, not centralise and formalise behind someone else.

More broadly, 'repression' is not a thing in itself. It is always 'repression of -' something. Repression is trying to quell a specific opening through which generalised rebellion might emerge. Therefore to 'fight repression' is not to denounce its injustice (of course the state wants us locked up – why wouldn't it?) but to find ways to continue, to be inspired by and actualise, whatever the repression is trying to erase before its time. But how far is this basic principle understood, particularly within the english-speaking world (and its prisoner solidarity or 'ABC' milieu)? It seems that (if there is any interest at all) people want to know everything about prisoners, about their identities, the names of the repressive operations, the conditions they are subjected to, the dates, times and statistics... But how much is thought, discussed, let alone put into practice, of the struggles which the state is in fact trying to repress behind this wall of names? Rather than an amorphous, ambient 'solidarity' basically based on 'sympathy', we think anarchist principle is only consistent with an undertaking of solidarity which is a continuation, exacerbation, a putting-into-practice of the struggle. Otherwise roles are again created: those who are 'repressed' and those who 'support them', those who are 'exploited' and those who 'listen to them'. In fact, anarchist theory and methods aspire to demolish all these easily state-mediated roles and replace them with the complexity and intensity of rebellion.

We do not believe this basic truth implies the old cliché that all specific oppression is somehow overcome in a street-fight or riot. But we do think that the problems of relation (which by no means 'go away') can only be worked out between rebels whose ambition is the destruction of a life-evacuating prison-society. This is how we can seriously 'challenge our subjective position', and how we can challenge other peoples' petty privilege or stupidity i.e. by attacking what sustains these elements directly. The exploited and excluded, in prison and 'outside' are not stupid. People can smell when you are using them instead of acting yourself. We believe this problem is a significant obstacle to the spread, diffusion and intensification of the struggle for freedom, and the source of many well-meaning friends' and comrades' general sense of pointlessness and resignation (usually only admitted after a meeting late at night, in private conversations, in bed or over a pint). Groups like London ABC can unfortunately contribute to this, as it can perceive itself as performing a 'role' which divides people in this way, which obstructs the dangerous project of really working out who we are (which is the same question as discovering what we are capable of).

The point of the statement is this: we have come to think that WE DON'T NEED, trainings, departments, conferences, workshops. We don't need fixed organisations to hide behind. We want to have organisational forms which allow us to gain real knowledge of ourselves and each other in the process of direct conflict with the structures and persons of exploitation and exclusion. We want to fight repression by making what they are trying to repress LIVE, to spread it, to intensify it BEYOND what the state was initially afraid of. We don't want to delude ourselves that obsessing over the practico-legal technicalities is in any way a replacement for this indomitable spirit which is the REAL SUBSTANCE OF SOLIDARITY. Do we need an ABC group to organise ourselves to attack the prison system? No. Do we need an ABC group to act as a 'specialist' for the movement on prison? No, we don't want specialisms of any type. Simply being 'against repres-

sion' is everyone's responsibility who feels affinity to the thing that is repressed; if this is not the case, or if it always has to be 'outsourced' to an acronym, then we are nothing. Do we need an ABC group to keep consciousness of imprisoned fighters and rebels in the movement? No: we can organise ourselves informally to continue this – and by deploying our energy and hands to the task of contributing to their struggle (which should be OURS or it is meaningless!), not by gesturing at an empty name. Do we need an ABC group to communicate and recognise those exploited by prison structures? Not if we want to meet people based on mutual struggle and rebellion, rather than 'assistance' to their struggle (which has the limitations we have described).

It's clear that there is a wealth of instances across the anarchist galaxy where, to some extent, the same obstacles and shortfalls don't apply. Perhaps a definitive problem in the English-speaking context is the prominence of 'abolitionism', an issue that is eloquently raised by ASBO in our 2020 interview with her, and addressed by others in the anarchist paper 'Dysorganism' (September 2021). In a context where anarchoes were even found tagging along with Corbyn's Labour Party not so long ago, it's hardly surprising to find more or less enthusiastic assimilation of anarchist thought and action into this dead end of alliance or common cause. If ever there was a time to re-group and reflect, encountering the spectacle of 'transformative justice', of activists and radicals playing games of Dungeons & Dragons with hypothetical rapes and murders, battling 'harm in the communities', should alert us that something profoundly maladjusted is going on. Can an ABC group supply what is missing here?

Bristol Defendent Solidarity seem to us to provide a very contemporary and important answer to this question. Their diligent and energetic defense of the riot-prisoners, their court support of Toby Shone and so on, are precisely what some in London ABC always hoped to achieve. But nonetheless we perceive a difficulty which we hope will be overcome, but to which we fear rallying around assistance and specific prison-struggle is obstructing: that active consciousness and support of those repressed recently (particularly in the KTB context) in and around a milieu in Bristol does not seem to be spilling into enthusiasm for the adoption of anarchist methods in confrontation with the State. Fighting the repression of those who were fighting the future repression of themselves appears, to us, to be starting to resemble something like a closed circle.

As we have said many times before in this statement by now, the state represses that which could constitute an insurrection, the generalisation of revolt. And there are certainly ample reasons for tumultuous developments like these: the devouring of the earth at the hands of bourgeois parasites, the soaring 'cost of living' so-called 'crisis' – which is a straightforward disciplinary attempt to force us to piss our lives away working harder and longer in precarious gig-jobs just to keep the heating on... The proliferation of life-invading technologies of control which have numbed and poisoned the vitality of existence and offers to the boss-class an unbelievable new menu for social control and exploitation... So why do we find ourselves circling the drain of 'fighting repression', when just 'FIGHTING', with our eyes fixed on freedom and our hands on the neck of these techniques of control, contains the infinity of possible paths for breaking out of the 'prison island' that sickens us all?

Finally, we wanted to emphasise that much of what London ABC became known for is completely superfluous. You, in turn, DO NOT NEED another envelope-licking workshop. Writing to prisoners appears to us now to be a fetishism of form, the interesting question being WHAT we actually have to SAY to each other – a question which is unfortunately so rarely gone into, preoccupied as we too often are by an endless array of 'deadlines' in a quasi-activist obsession with 'doing' for the sake of filling time. We want to communicate when we actually have some-

thing to say, to people we have something to say to – and this is true in the streets as much as to those inside the walls. No workshop can teach us this: each individual has to discover it on their own terms. Similarly no one needs the NYE demos to be organised by a single group; people are very capable of doing it themselves, and in fact, as last year proved, do so very happily without the attachment of the acronym. This is even true of prison demos generally, like the movement from Pentonville to the Google Campus last year, which, again, seems to have emanated from the will and complicity of the small group who came, rather than any kind of ‘official endorsement’ at all. Our only wish is that we can meet each other again on different terms, where the same self-responsibility which means that rituals like December 31st will always continue, regardless of the status of ‘London ABC’, becomes applied to every dimension of struggle, and particularly the non-ritualisable, audacious, and unexpected aspects.

London Anarchist Black Cross is no more from now on – until, that is, someone wants to revive it (we just hope that they will come across this statement and consider what they truly want from the endeavour, and what the form itself might presuppose). In the meantime this is what we humbly suggest:

- If you want to assist prisoners then Prisoner Solidarity Network is the place for you.
- If you want a social media account to follow then NFA-ABC (No Fixed Abode Anarchist Black Cross) have many to choose from.
- If you want to keep up to date, to show up to court, to poster, flyer and fundraise against repression happening in the UK then Bristol Defendent Solidarity keep up all these activities with commendable reliability and energy.

But if your heart really burns for freedom, and this, not just fellow feeling, is what draws you into conflict with the prison society, then we suggest the following:

In terms of counter-information, there are few projects on the face of the planet which have been so absolutely dedicated to bringing the words and actions of comrades around the world, in an active experiment with freedom, to our consciousness, as Act for Freedom Now! (actfor-free.noblogs.org). To us, this is the appropriate place, in our context, for the necessary understanding of repressive operations, court processes and so on, because in this form it is not divorced from actions of solidarity, from the full force of the international tension – and this, to us, is the natural place of this ‘information’.

From there according to your conscience and capacity. Carpe Diem!

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