

Armed defence, illegality, expropriations & letter-writing



24 things you should know about the Anarchist Black Cross

1. A **Political Red Cross** was formed inside Russia as early as 1872, to aid political prisoners & their families suffering under the oppression of the Tsarist regimes. It initially supported, and drew support from, radicals of all persuasions including anarchists, Social revolutionists, and Social Democrats (later the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks).
2. Eventually it became clear that aid sent in to all political prisoners was often only reaching the Social Democrats, where they were the controlling group amongst prisoners.
3. Soon after 1900 **Anarchist Red Cross (ARC)** groups were set up inside Russia to aid anarchists & social revolutionaries.
4. The failure of the 1905 revolution in Russia saw many more political prisoners imprisoned in Siberia, whilst others fled to exile in Europe and north America. The ARC was established internationally, based in London, around 1906/7. Leading players included R Rocker & A Shapiro. It sent aid to prisoners and their families in Russia, and helped others flee.
5. The ARC was established in America in 1907 by exiled anarchists.
6. The **Siege of Sydney Street in 1911**, involving the famous Peter the Painter, occurred after a robbery went wrong. The Painter has been identified as a Latvian anarchist by P Ruff (see below), almost certainly expropriating money to send back home. He may or may not have had links to the ARC, but such actions were not untypical of fundraising efforts in those times, and many anarchists lived clandestinely...
7. After the **1917 Russian revolution**, political prisoners were freed. The ARC largely dissolved itself, and with other Russian anarchists returned to Russia... where many were imprisoned or killed by the Bolsheviks.
8. Prisoner support became vital again across Russia. To avoid confusion with the Red Cross aid agency, the name **Anarchist Black Cross** arose.
9. In **1918 Makhno** organised the Black Cross into armed civil defence units to defend town and cities across the Ukraine.
10. Escaping anarchists again set up the **ABC internationally, in Berlin**, in 1921/2, led by A Berkman & E Goldman.

11. The ARC was revived in the US in 1922 by Russian exiles, and worked closely with prisoner aid groups there who supported American radicals arrested as part of the 'Palmer Raids', a crackdown on the US left.
12. In both Europe and the US a large variety of names were used by prisoner support groups, due to the repression of anarchists.
13. In 1933 the ABC moved to Holland, and later Paris. It fell apart by 1940 due to pressure of work and the growing fight against fascism. Contact with Russian anarchist prisoners ended in the mid-1930's.
14. In America the ARC continued until 1958 as the **Berkman Aid Fund**, based in Chicago. In its later years it supported Spanish prisoners.
15. The **ABC was resurrected in London by A Meltzer and S Christie** in 1968 to aid, support and even free Spanish anarchist prisoners. In 1970 they brought **Miguel Garcia** over from Spain after he was released.
16. The Bulletin of the ABC changed its name to **Black Flag** in 1970, reflecting the need for a more antagonistic, class struggle anarchist resistance paper than Freedom was then. Black Flag continues today.
17. The ABC quickly spread internationally. In the late 60's and 70's it was interlinked with resistance and underground groups such as **First of May**, and the **Angry Brigade**. It faced state repression and arrests. Activists were killed by cops in Italy and Germany, others were arrested.
18. ABC activist P Ruff was imprisoned after a failed attempt to rob a betting shop in 1977. The 1979 **Persons Unknown** trial involved I Mills & R Bennett, editors of Black Flag.
19. ABC's support for prisoners spread way beyond Spain. In the 80's, in the UK at least, its activities became less associated with clandestinity and resistance groups, although it continued to support such prisoners, and still does today. A lack of anarchist prisoners saw more interest in other radicals, and not least in ordinary prisoners fighting the system.
20. In the mid-1990's there were 14 ABC groups/contacts in the UK, with a regular paper '**Taking Liberties**'. By 2000 most of these had folded.
21. In 1995 some north American groups formed a membership based **ABC Federation**, which continues today, but only involves a minority of active ABC groups on that continent. It is possibly the only time an ABC group has had formal membership.
22. ABC groups / informal networks continue worldwide today. Some have an open public profile like in the UK, others work more quietly, and some operate clandestinely due to ongoing state repression.
23. Today there are **4 overtly active ABC groups in the UK**, plus some individuals here and there in places such as Nottingham.
24. Other prisoner support groups exist in the UK, often for specific campaigns, and anarchists do engage in prisoner solidarity. In recent years there has again been direct action in the struggle against prison.

<http://bristolabc.wordpress.com>