

Neither East Nor West NYC (NENW-NYC) was a group that formed in the 1980s to form relationships of solidarity with comrades in the East. They organized, published, and otherwise raised awareness of repression in the East. With a focus on political prisoners, in many ways, NENW-NYC functioned as a de facto anarchist black cross.

We're excited to share this history by Bob McGlynn as part of our larger project of uncovering recent anarchist history.

NEITHER EAST NOR WEST NYC

a De Facto Anarchist Black Cross
History, 1980-1994



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Prologue

By Bob McGlynn, for Neither East Nor West-NYC

Dated History – Written awhile ago for that time period – maybe ‘94?, and lengthened/updated bit by bit maybe 3 dozen times—ugh. But the history of the 1st version and this one remains in its essentials unchanged. It was approved by the group aside from my small tangent following on the Asiatic mode of production/oriental despotism re: Communism.

A tweak is needed in this article as special mention should go to the U.S. anarcho-syndicalist Workers Solidarity Alliance (which I was also kinda a member of) who were major players in NYC-Neither East Nor West (special thanx to Mitch Miller and Steve Rabinowitz), it was a major player alongside us in the U.S. in anti-Soviet-type work. we were among the premier people who put anti-Leninist thought into practice – successfully!

The same should be said about the (now defunct) Revolutionary Socialist League (special thanx to Billy Holliday, Chris Hobson) which was a wonderful group of humane and sane leftists. It was me that met them 1st and introduced them to the (suspicious of course at 1st) anti-authoritarian milieu. I correctly believed that what was in their hearts contradicted their party line. They graduated from an anti-authoritarian take on Trotskyism to anarchism and libertarian socialism and then dissolved. They too were major players in NYC-NENW for instance giving us the wherewithal to produce some of the On Gogol Boulevard (named after a hangout for Moscows’ counterculture, artists and dissidents) zines (descibed later). (They were such a cool leftist party they NEVER tried to recruit any of us – not even me! – man, that’s unheard of among leftist parties.)

Someday I hope to see an @analysis of Communism as related to modern Asiatic modes of production (AMP’s)/oriental despotisms/”asiatic” i.e. ancient state despotic collectivism with direct connections in Russia and China [and wiping out the racist Asian connotation though they are the historical terms that were used by all the main thinkers way back including Marx and Engels who discussed

“Third World” and “Fourth World” (land-based Indigenous peoples), with a particular focus on supporting activists with anti-authoritarian and anti-Stalinist perspectives. For instance we bring such contacts and news to the east of the 3rd and 4th world they wouldn’t ordinarily get, like trustworthy news of the past U.S. invasions of Somalia and Haiti. It was done by mailing Easterners anarchist and other anti-U.S. publications and literature that report on the South.

(now defunct except sometimes signing onto petitions or whatever AND we agreed to resurrect if possible – tough) NENW-NYC c/o Bob McGlynn, 56 Pondfield Rd. W. #2A, Yonkers NY, 10708 U.S., email: BobNenwOgb@aol.com – If u don’t have a short question then I need an SASE as I don’t talk in email – I mean it or no reply PLEASE.

to groups no one else had contact with.” (*Love and Rage*, “Changes for OGB and ABC,” Feb./Mar. ‘93)

NENW-NYC was a specialized de facto Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) group – filling a void – dealing mainly (but not exclusively*) with east-west matters. [At the time of the original writing of this] We were stable and larger and busier than ever. We were in the process of initiating a continental network. While we hadn’t published *On Gogol Boulevard* for awhile due to no money, it had lived on as a section in many many publications, which we mailed to hundreds of our major contacts – mostly eastern. (Such as *Fifth Estate*, *Profane Existence*, *Black Fist*, *The Shadow*, *Anarchy*, and the former RSLs “News From the Soviet Bloc” in *The Torch/La Antorcha*.)

For most of our history – with the strong exception of ABC activists in NYC and Toronto, and the ABC affiliated U.S. *Bayou La Rose* newspaper – we had little or no contact with other ABC groups. ABC, in name, seemed to be a mostly nominal or non-existent affair. It appeared we and the national and international milieu we were part of was not only de facto ABC – but as far as we knew we were doing the great bulk of ABC-type work around the world. (We now know that the Black Flag paper from England was a regular source of prisoner news, and that International Workers Association sections did prisoner support. But again there was no contact between us.)

Happily today that’s changed. We welcome the renewed formation of organized and coordinated ABC’s. Our contacts and resources were open to all.

(As an aside in non ABC-type work we were the 1st to have coordinated planetary demos against the West’s multinational financial imperial agencies such as the World Bank and IMF the appeal in 16 languages. And for instance we also raised money for Prague’s spacious Ladronka squat in the NYC’s squatted punk club ABC No Rio.)

* We used this needed eastern specialty as a doorway to incorporating (in many concrete ways) the concerns of and making contacts with the

it much but is generally unknown as the Soviets decided AMP’s “didn’t exist” as they looked too much like Communism [Leninists want to hide this] and it’s not debatable that many were Asian because of arid conditions, the mid-east included [“hydrolic societies” as named by “daddy” of AMP theory Karl Wittfogol in his groundbreaking book *Oriental Despotism* in ‘58] of in the most unless forced on them from the outside and other stuff – the ancient Incas being one of many exceptions. I DON’T mean “state-capitalist” – AMP theory is another planet and highly regarded in the east by even former Communist Party members. China, Russia the east were extremely different from western feudalism all agree. A Russian I met once put it perfectly. She shrugged her shoulders and said of course Russia was in part an AMP [Lenin et al used the proper term for Russia “semi-Asiatic”] and that calling Communism “state capitalist,” “trivialized” the horror and difference of Communism. The anti-Communist sentiment of “state capitalist” theory might be nice on the part of Westerners but it is an imperial way of defining the Communist East thru a Western lens. Capitalism is (and now in plenty of the East but as of 2015 DON’T FORGET CP’S ARE FULLY IN CHARGE IN SOME NATIONS AND REMAIN DICTATORSHIPS POLITICALLY AND WE ALL KNOW ABOUT N. KOREA NOT CHANGING AN INCH) our problem – don’t graft it on others who are oppressed differently. . .)

The Group Neither East Nor West-NYC As In Part De-facto Anarchist Black Cross History – The years 1980 to Spring ‘94.

There has always been a milieu of anarchists/left-libertarians living outside of the east who have had a special interest in Soviet-type countries. Among this milieu’s interests is in countering the way even many anarchists treat Communism as a secondary concern, if at all. Much of this milieu treats official Communism and Fascism/Nazism as similar twin totalitarianisms, opposing both with equal vehemence, and refusing collaboration with Leninists. The interest is also in part due to the ultra-closed nature of Soviet-type societies and the lack of

info about non-pro-western activism within them, leaving a gap which we wanted to fill.

This changed in 1980 with the formation of Poland's Solidarnosc (Solidarity) free trade union. With a nationwide general strike and 10 million workers signing on in 2-3 months, Solidarity exploded Communism's frontiers. Neither East Nor West-NYC (NENW-NYC) traces its roots back to this time when a number of anti-authoritarians in the New York City metropolitan area took advantage of Solidarity's opening. Individual anarchists and members of the Workers Solidarity Alliance, along with the (now purposely disbanded) anti-authoritarian Revolutionary Socialist League, hooked up while doing Solidarity support. Then in 1983, with Soviet exiles – prominent was Sergei Batovrin – this crew and others formed the New York Trust Group (NYTG), a sister group to the Moscow Trust Group (MTG), a semi-above ground and much persecuted anti-nuclear organization. (Following the Moscow lead other Trust Groups formed in the USSR.) Some in the committee were also members of the New York Anti-Nuclear Group and the Brooklyn Anti-Nuclear Group-BANG such as myself. These two helped pioneer putting the struggles of the subjugated in the Russian Empire on the anti-nuclear agenda. The latter's well circulated and known publication (BANGNotes) was the 1st ever anti-nuclear periodical in the West to chronicle parallel Eastern scenes.

Being involved with dictatorships automatically brought one into political prisoner support. The NYTG acted in part as a de facto Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) section as so many of its members were involved in the anarchistic milieu, bringing prisoner activism regarding the east to anarchists. One successful campaign was launched after another against repression of the Trust Groups and for their prisoners; petitions, pickets at the USSR consulate in NYC – the works. Others around the U.S. and the world also picked this work up, some forming Trust Groups, many being anarchists (ironically with few or none being officially ABC).

Among NYTG campaigns to numerous to count: Freeing MTG'er Nina Kovalenko from a mental hospital incarceration (where many

We also had the case of punk promoter Bob Z. Bob who wheat posted flyers for his shows (I was his house poet). But along comes Big Brother who gives him not one summons but 3000! We asked the Poles for help with a photo of Bob with a grin and a half his hands choking with the summonses. The Poles and their Freedom and Peace group responded with hundreds of signatures on petitions. So I handed them to the judge thru radical civil rights attorney Ron Kuby and the embarrassing case folded. Thank you Freedom and Peace.

In our Cuba work we found an environmental group called Green Path. In Cuba they seemed to be permitted to have small hikes to spread their message. They visited the U.S. and then weren't admitted back to Cuba and they wanted to go back – wow. We spread a small leaflet about this to both pro and anti-Castro events etc. that were entitled "Stop the Embargo Both Ways". We know for a fact the Cuban Interest Section in Washington D.C. was upset about what we were doing but at the time they still weren't let back home and we lost touch with them.

At another point we had found Cubans that liked us and against the embargo so we had a meeting with them to start some sort of group. Without my democratic "leadership" and without the permission of NENW-NYC our Cuban member went in it with a total anarchist program that of course failed with the mixed group of Cubans and unfortunately that was the end of that.

Of our political prisoner/anti-repression activity (just part of our work), few have been conducted only by us – one point was always to get others involved. But we often initiated or took the lead in the work, and were the major players.

Smartly done consistent protest, with planetary coordination, can get the goods. "Neither East Nor West-NYC were one of the few anarchistic groups that were around for many years back then, consistently getting results from their actions. They had access to info no one else had, and

anti-authoritarian leftists were arrested. We (and others) immediately picketed local East German consulates. All the East Germans were quickly released and expelled to the west, but were allowed to come home after a short time -another precedent setting victory. And we got one of them – Wolfgang Templin – to come to NYC to make the rounds, give talks, etc., and see the real America.

We and the Workers Solidarity Alliance went outside of the east and conducted a large worldwide campaign for the release of 4 political prisoners of Nigeria's anarchist Awareness League: Udemba Chuku, Garba Adu, Kigsly Etioni, and James Ndubuisi. In yet one more precedent, the 4 were let out on bail and then left alone – the first prisoners to be allowed bail under the emergency decree they were arrested under (yes, another precedent). That we know of, 59 articles in 16 languages were published on the case from as far away as Turkey, Estonia, South Korea and South Africa, over 1400 signatures on petitions from a score of countries has been received, over \$1,800 raised, and there were 7 demos at Nigerian consulates on international days of action Feb. 22-26, '93: Moscow, Rio de Janeiro, Dublin, NYC, London, Berlin, and Hamburg, with Norway and Bulgaria lacking targets. The Nigerian state then left them alone.

Prior to the Awareness League campaign we ran a similar large scope worldwide protest for NYC's Lower East Side Tompkins Square Park anarchist activist political prisoner Kenny Tolia. (Tompkins Square Park was popular among the homeless and part of the gentrification war, the Park being eventually closed in a police state atmosphere and the homeless with squatter supporters being violently ejected in a bloodbath.) Kenny was unfairly arrested on riot charges during a police riot in the park but was found guilty. But we were asked to do Kenny's campaign too late – after his trial was over (and due to bungling, infighting and other problems among many in the anarchist scene). He did his minimum 8 months – but on daylight work-release which was a partial victory. But at least he had the morale boosting that at U.S. embassies as far away as Minsk, Warsaw, Mexico City, and Moscow, people were in the streets for him (with the Poles suffering beatings and arrests for their efforts).

were tortured and force-drugged as she was): Getting Trustee Alexandre Shatravka “paroled” from his 7 year labor camp sentence (an unheard of precedent setting victory); Springing Yuri Popov of Moscow's counterculture/pacifistic/anarchistic Free Initiative from a mental hospital; And saving an MTG leader Nikolai Khramov from being forced into exile.

The (Soviet) Trust Group wanted “mutual citizens based campaigns” to link easterners and westerners in common effort. Although much of the activity was a one-way street in supporting the Trusters in one human rights emergency after another, the Trusters also supported struggles abroad. For instance when the MTG protested the jailing of U.S. draft registration resister Andy Major, or when the Lvov (Ukraine) Trust Group sent a solidarity message to a protest at the Pentagon against U.S. imperialism in Central America (linking it to fighting Soviet imperialism in Afghanistan).

NYTG work culminated on Aug. 3rd, 1986: After months of secretive preparation, American members of the of the NYTG and Brits from U.K. Trustbuilders were accompanied by the MTG in a post-Chernobyl (and symbolically timed for the Aug. 6 anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing) anti-nuclear leafleting at the entrance to Moscow's Gorky Park. We had a sign that said “No more Hiroshimas, No more Chernobyls – Peace and Environmental safety for all”. The team was, as expected, busted in 5 minutes and detained by the KGB. (Ann-Marie Hendrickson and myself from the NYTG, Peggy Walford and David Barnsdale from the U.K Trustbuilders, and Nina Kovalenko from the MTG.) The action garnered page 2&3 coverage in major dailies worldwide. One week later Elizabeth Abraham and Angela Muga from the U.K. Greenham Common Women's Peace Encampment repeated the action at the Moscow Zoo, but this time not getting detained (they were surrounded by the militia though). Glasnost was beginning to flower (unknown to many is that it began with Chernobyl) and savage repression against the Trust Group was abating, pretty much ending with the Moscow actions. Sergei Batovrin, its rep abroad in the NYTG, concluded that the special support work could then be brought to rest. (One reason for the “Mission to Moscow” was to solidify the

umbrella of protection some western (in this case by brave action and publicity) anti-nukers had provided the Trust Groups against complete annihilation – like other dissident groups suffered – at the hands of the KGB. The MTG took a gamble that if they supported disarmament just like the Soviet state propaganda machine did then they might survive. And the western anti-nuke movement was watching – much of whom collaborated regularly with the Soviets - so the Soviets didn't want to risk losing some of them if the Trusters were smashed. The Soviets were trapped by the Trust Group – the USSR's hypocrisy was made plain . . .

The Soviets continued to influence and infiltrate and create (don't believe it? just Google if you're too naive – see “Soviet Peace Committee” etc.) the western anti-nuke scene but the Trusters - east and west – put up a stumbling block they would crash on.

The Trust Group work was a resounding success. The MTG formed as a brilliant way to prick open a hole in Soviet despotism by creating a “peace portal,” taking advantage of Soviet propagandizing around “peace” the way the west countered with “democracy” propaganda. Though victimized daily (unending surveillance, detentions, house arrest, beatings, torture, 2 extra-judicial executions...), partly thru our help they survived – much to the note and astonishment of Soviet-watchers, the human rights establishment, and even themselves...

During this period we continued our Polish work and were involved where possible with other east countries, for instance in protesting repression of Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 dissident human rights group.

Soon after, in the Fall of 1986, many of those involved above plus others (including New York ABC) formed Neither East Nor West-NYC to continue the work but solidifying the agenda of mutual solidarity with all the people in the east. That is, not only did we picket for imprisoned Polish conscription resisters, but the Poles were asked, if they could (their conditions being far more repressive), to support struggles here. And yes, they did, for instance with petitioning in favor of NYC bike messengers fighting an attempted ban of bikes in part of

midtown Manhattan. (Both campaigns winning!) In the Fall of '87 we published our first issue of *On Gogol Boulevard* (*OGB* -6 then), chronicling the news of not only the traditional eastern dissidents, but of the newer peace, green, gay, feminist, youth, counterculture, anarchist, democratic socialist and other oppositions. Political prisoner news was right up front, with a number of *OGB*'s having a section on repression and political prisoners in the U.S., bringing easterners a trustworthy source (anti-Communist, giving us credibility) of anti-western info. *OGB* was a networking tool (providing contacts, names, address's, phone #'s, languages spoken etc.) for alternative oppositions in east and west. It was an immediate hit – nothing like it was being published anywhere.

Like with the Trust Group, other NENW groups sprang up. Prominent among them in North America: Toronto-NENW, Bay Area CA-NENW, Lawrence KS-NENW, Albany NY-NENW, Latin America/Miami FL-NENW, Mexico City-NENW, Chicago-NENW and others. We formed the North American East/West Network of almost 40 groups, and networked with contacts around the world, many of course in the east, many of whom by this time were openly identifying themselves as anarchist. *OGB* was the chief means of communication and networking.

Again NENW-NYC's (and others) campaigns against repression and for political prisoners are too numerous to list. To name a few: In mutual coordination with Moscow's Free Initiative the twinning of Soviet prisoner Sergei Troyanski of the Free Initiative and U.S. prisoner Rainbow Hawk of the Rainbow Family, both busted on fraudulent drug charges in politicized trials involving their peace/counterculture/anarchist activism. We initially twinned Rainbow with 2 Moscow anarchist punk political prisoners. The two and Sergei and eventually Rainbow were freed (thanks in part to the work of the ex-USSR's Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists); We (and others) petitioned and picketed for Polish anti-authoritarians in the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution) and anarchists in Poland's Freedom and Peace group who were denied passports and freedom of travel. All were given passports; In pre-revolution East Germany a number of leading