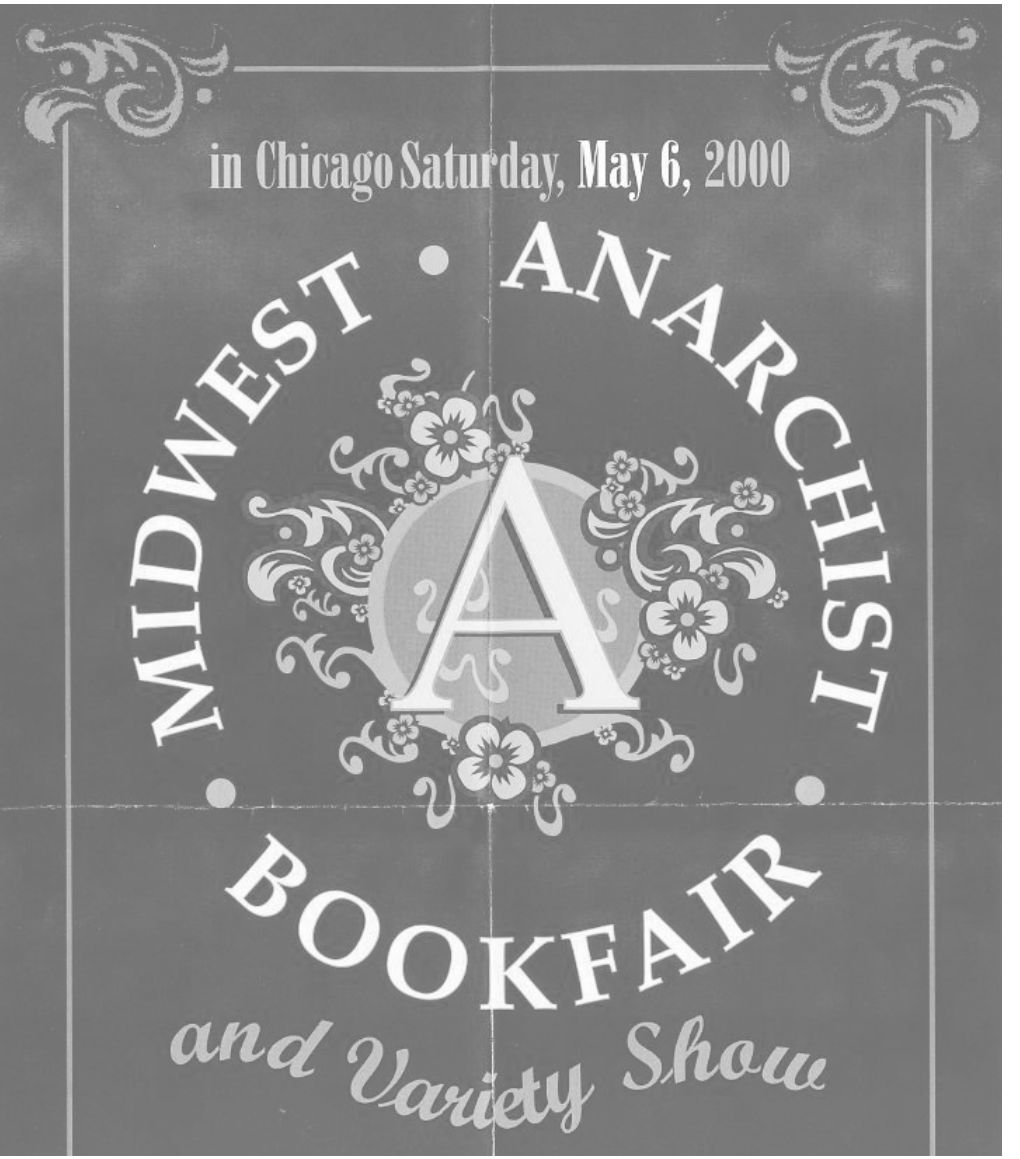
The A-Zone & A Decade of Anarchy in Chicago

2nd Edition



The A-Zone Essay Project

by Alex Iwasa

WHAT IS AN INFOSHOP?

According to the Wikipedia, "An infoshop is a storefront or social center that serves as a node for the distribut political, subcultural and arts information, typically in the form of books, zines, stickers and posters. Infoshops often serve as a meeting space and resource hub for local activist groups."

Like many people in the U$ who got involved with radical-Left politics in or around 2001, I had spent some time looking at Infoshop.org, but at the time I had no idea Infoshops as physical spaces existed, much less predated the website! The first Infoshop that I ever visited was the Autonomous Zone Infoshop (A-Zone) in Chicago, IL (Chi).

THE NEED FOR AN AUTONOMOUS ZONE

The first time I set foot in the A-Zone was for a forum on Anarchist economics, held in opposition to the TransAtlantic Business Dialogue (TABD) meeting which had just happened in Chi, in November 2002.

The forum was originally supposed to be held at De Paul, but the school had retracted its permission without explanation, and it just may have been something pretty sinister since later we found out the Chicago Police Department had indeed re-activated its so-called Red Squad (read White Squad) to monitor and infiltrate the A-Zone and four other groups organizing against the TABD. These groups included Anarchist Black Cross Network (ABCN), the Direct Action Network (DAN), the

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and Not In Our Name (NION).

Immediately it occurred to me the importance of having an alternative space outside of the regular control of the state, church, and schools, to host the forum which represented a direct challenge to the corporations and their governments whose interests were being presented in the TABD meeting.

About three months later I moved to Chi and became very involved with the A-Zone. It was an open collective, meaning that membership was decided by who showed up to meetings and made things happen. I helped organize monthly public forums hosted by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) which I was also a member of, though most of my time there was spent just keeping the door open for whom ever may drop in.

This was the Bucktown, Chi space, at 2129 N. Milwaukee Ave. Some of the other groups involved at the time were ABCN, a juggling Free School, the Anarchist Skins and Punx Unity Crew (ASAP) and people from the South Side Punk House/South Side Crew and the Vegan House.

POLITICS OF THE A-ZONE

When I was in the A-Zone Collective, we had a pretty wide range of political ideas, that I think balanced out roughly to being half life stylists, mostly Anarchists, and half political activists, again mostly but not only Anarchists. Personally, I was already a De Leonist when I showed up, and my belief in Socialist Industrial Unionism and political action had led me into the IWW and Green Party. But at the same time I looked at the A-Zone as a much needed public forum, and was willing to work with people there with a consensus decision making process, which had appealed to me in theory from Food Not Bombin' (FNB) in Cleveland, OH though I'd already been disillusioned with it there, but considered it a worthwhile compromise to be in the Collective.

Plus I had an inside joke with at least one of my comrades from the Collective about how we were the government of the A-Zone. Other people would come to us to use the space, and we would try to work something out. But ultimately the power was ours, and some people really abused it. People who made the A-Zone their little fiefdom have reinforced my general dislike of consensus decision making. The Collective very nearly collapsed in 2003 when a number of people left, including myself briefly, from various personality conflicts that were going on. We never really fully recovered, our numbers hovering around six members when I came back around about a month or two after I left for a good chunk of spring 2003. I've heard and read about the early years of the Collective when membership was between 30-50, I never attended a Collective meeting that was maybe more than a dozen, and I

doubt there were any more that were more than six after April 2003 or so.

Green Anarchism, Queer and Trans Liberation, anti-Corporate Globalization, Labor Organizing and Prison Abolition were the biggest focuses of the activist types, and music, visual arts, especially silk screening, bicycles, gender, sexuality and food were the biggest focuses of the life stylists. There was tons of crossover, like most of us would cook FNB at least once in a while, though the actual A-Zone FNB chapter folded just before I moved to town, and we generally supported each other's efforts.

ANARCHIST PEOPLE OF COLOR

The A-Zone had an unfair reputation for being an all white, ex-suburbanite space. The only person who was a member from start to finish, Darrell G., is an African American who was born and raised in Chi, and still resides in the Austin, Chi.

Sometimes when I was there, I'd be the only person of color (POC), yet at other times the Collective would be upwards of half POC, though all of our events I participated in were attended by predominantly white crowds. Sometimes people would tell me to my face my Collective was all white, and it was always stunning. Did they consider me white? Then why did I grow up being called the n word and a Chink in Ohio? Plus it was always white, University or four year college educated, ex-suburbanites who would say it to my face, and most of them were involved with even whiter, more privileged groups at the time.

Yes I am an ex-suburbanite, but I fled the suburbs to get away from racist harassment. But when I was in the Collective there were two POC comrades who were born and raised in Chi proper, and nearly everyone lived in town, there was one exception who lived in Lombard.

In the summer of 2003 I was invited to help form the first Anarchist People of Color (APOC) group in Chi and declined. Starting as a POC caucus in Midwest Unrest, an affinity group formed for the upcoming protests against a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) summit in Miami, quickly the comrades from the first Chicago APOC group realized the need for such organizing to be ongoing. Two of my comrades from the Collective were in it, and at least one ex-member. But I felt like we had a really great, legitimately multi-racial Collective going at the A-Zone, and with my other activism at the time in the IWW and the St. Francis Catholic Worker House, I didn't want to take on another project, especially one that excluded whites and was explicitly Anarchist.

THE LANDLORD'S GOON SQUAD

Quite possibly the only time I actually showed up on time for a volunteer shift in

the fall of 2003, I was followed in by three rather large men. One told me he wanted the rent. We had already been evicted, and the letter of eviction clearly stated that we would get our last three months in the space rent free if our landlord broke our lease.

The facts of the matter didn't change things with the goon squad, and they told me they wanted the rent any way before they left.

Upon reflection, it was no surprise since our landlord had already tried to raise our rent higher than allowed by our lease, and when we refused, he evicted us. Then he tried to shake us down for money we didn't owe him, even according to his own words! I think it showed how even the term itself, landlord, is just a throwback feudalism. The capitalist pig never did get that money! Also upon further reflection I think it was probably one of the nasty signs of the beginning of the gentrification (read gentrifuckation) of that part of Bucktown too. Being a gentrifying force was one of the down falls of the A-Zone pretty much from the beginning. When I started doing research for this project I read in (Dis)Connection that Wicker Park, Chi was still 70% Latin@ when the A-Zone was there in 1994, and the Collective was well aware of how they were effecting the area, at least in this sense.

THE BAKLAVA AUTONOMIST COLLECTIVE AND *WIND CHILL FACTOR*

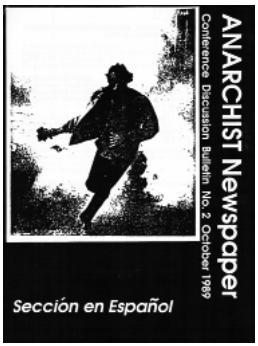
When we were packing up the 'zine library of the A-Zone in December '03, Mike D. handed me a copy of Wind Chill Factor (WCF) and told me it was the 'zine that the A-Zone came out of. I think at that point I had already known the collective used to make the journal Sandpaper, which we sometimes still got mail for, but WCF was new to me and I was excited!

When I started doing research for this project and found the article announcing the opening of the A-Zone in WCF streetsheet 9.1 from the end of 1993, I felt like I had struck gold. It was exactly the kind of thing I had come to the Chicago Underground Library to look for!

After the first edition of this 'zine I continued this research and became familiar with how WCF was produced by the Baklava Autonomist Collective, and how they had been involved with the start of Love and Rage (L&R) as an Anarchist newspaper, then a decentralized network.

LOVE AND RAGE

Though when Darrel G. mentioned L&R in the interview for this 'zine it rang a bell, I couldn't tell you why. Then what started as research on the A-Zone became a more general study of first 1990s Anarchism with a focus on the Infoshop Movement, then 1980s Anarchism. At the Long Haul Infoshop in Berkeley, CA 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 things such as the call for the first Black Bloc in North America, and early coverage of the Zapatista Uprising from the Mexican L&R group, Amor y Rabia. There is one co-founder of both the local Anarchist newspaper, Slingshot, and the Long Haul Infoshop still involved with both, and we had some amazing conversations about these materials. Younger comrades were equally excited to be shown these articles too.

A split in L&R in 1993 between people who wanted to maintain the decentralized Love and Rage Network the groups that produced the paper had become, and those who wanted more cohesive politics within a cadre organization 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 to 1998, when it again split leading to both new organizations such as the Fire by Night Organizing Committee and Bring the Ruckus, and ex-members joining already established groups such as the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO).

THE NETWORK OF ANARCHIST COLLECTIVES AND (DIS)CONNECTION

Shortly after leaving the Love and Rage Network, Baklava helped start the A-Zone, and also helped start (Dis)Connection, which according to the first issue 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 radical space in Philly which is still going! The Network of Anarchist Collectives (NAC) came out of this which included the Long Haul Infoshop, 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 know at all for radical politics!

The second issue was written by Chicagoans, and was largely about the A-Zone. The words, "Left Bank (another longtime radical space still going, this one in Seattle, WA--editor) donated $50.00 to assist in our goal of one Uzi per A-Zone member" on the inside cover instantly sparked my interest. This was actually the first issue I was able to read in early 2009 when my comrade, ex-A-Zoner Rachel A., lent me this and the third issue to help with my research for this project. Articles in this issue such as "Against Half-Assed Race and Class Theory and Practice" by Ken Wong, "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 was a large part of the point of this project.

When asked to be on a panel about "Zines & Libraries" at Chicago 'Zine Fest in 2010 when I was doing the initial research for this project, I made a point of inviting Ken Wong and bringing the second and third issues of (Dis)Connection with me, and 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, Chi for anyone who was still not taking it seriously.

In the other issue of the journal I was able to check out at the time, #3, Winter 95, one particular article stood out to me, "A-Zone!? WHAT THE fuck?!?" "Recently we decided to have an 'Existentialist Blues' discussion at the A-Zone. We decided to do this because we REALLY needed to, because we hadn't had one in a long time, cuz we thought it'd be fun (ahem), and because we were (possibly) moving to a new space." The article is mostly an analysis of the discussion, and it's follow up, and larger one was produced as a pamphlet, Existentialist Blues, that I would still Love to get my hands on for a future edition of this 'zine or a similar project.

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. It was also fascinating to see Food Not Bombs in Chicago declared dead forever. There were three different neighborhood chapters going strong when I was reading the journal years later! The death of the Earth First! Movement was also pondered in this 1990s journal, showing how we can often despair when there is still hope. As I continued my research in early 2014 I found copies of #4 & #5 at the Taala

Hooghan Infoshop, in Flagstaff, AZ and with the help one of the Northern Arizona University (NAU) comrades, Carrie D., got PDFs of them posted on scribd.

These issues include four articles of interest to this project on Intercollectivism and can be read and hopefully learned from by the many comrades who have been in similar discussions since the 1990s and perhaps are unaware of these older ones. Especially in Arizona where we recently had a state wide Arizona Radical Coalition (ARC) which initially came out of the three cities that had Infoshops, Flagstaff, Prescott and Tucson, and Phoenix which is the sixth largest city in the U$, and whose metro area saw two Infoshops start and stop within the time ARC was still going.

The networking that came out of these journals culminated in Active Resistance, a series of events that were held in Chi in opposition to the Democratic National Convention (DNC) that met there in 1996. We had an Active Resistance banner hanging on the wall in the main room of the Bucktown space when I was in the Collective, and the events were the stuff of local legend to me. Also, from what I understand at least one of the main artists who worked on the banner, Kevin, went on to work with if not co-found the Beehive Design Collective!

With the recent wave of street demonstrations demanding the acknowledgment that Black Lives Matter, and the formations of the Black Rose Anarchist Federation and the Torch Anti-Fascist Network, while 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 early1990s, radicals have a responsibility to try to learn from the past mistakes recorded in places such as the pages of L&R and (Dis)Connection so we can try to take this rotten ass system down once and for all and replace it with some justice and equality that has been denied for far too long!

THE A-ZONE IN EXILE

About two months after we left the Bucktown space, I started volunteering at the New World Resource Center (NWRC), which was a non-partisan, collectively run, Leftist bookstore located at that time at 1300 N. Western Ave., in Humboldt Park, Chi. We started having A-Zone Collective events and meetings there, reaching a peak in June 2004 when dozens of people showed up to watch *Underground*, a film about

the Weather Underground Organization, and participate in a discussion about race and class privilege with ex-Weatherman cadre Bill Ayers.

PILSEN'S CRYPTO-INFOSHOP

The main inspiration for this project came from my involvement with La Biblioteca Popular del Barrio Pilsen. After the A-Zone Collective had formally disbanded, though I maintained friendships with some of my comrades from the space, it was never really the same spending time in Chi.

I tried to move to Madison, WI (Madcity) in early 2005, and the Madison Infoshop was one of the places I hung out a great deal. Though it was very different than the A-Zone, it was still a great place to hang out, read, get literature, borrow films, use computers and just hang out with people.

About a year later I had a somewhat disastrous trip to Tucson which one of the only good things that came out of it was the time I spent at the Dry River Infoshop. Catching a punk show, a film screening, finding out about stuff going on around town, reading, using computers, and of course just hanging out; I even lucked into a ride all the way back to Chi from both Infoshops!

While visiting Chi in October 2008 I found out about an Infoshop opening in Pilsen called the Sowing Circle, and I was ecstatic! The next day I swung by, and was glad to see people working on getting an Infoshop going in town again. Over the next week or so I hung out there a few times and found out people were thinking of not calling it an Infoshop and changing the name, even though it had pretty much just opened to the public.

By the time I returned to Chi in April 2009, sure enough, the space was still going, but it was called the Lichen Lending Library. When I returned to Chi yet again in late fall that year I became more involved with the space. In the midst of the discussions about transitions that were going on at that time, such as yet another name change to La Biblioteca Popular del Barrio Pilsen, I mentioned the A-Zone a great deal, and was asked many questions about it. That's when I got the idea for this project, and started working on it.

As all too many people know, 2009-10 was a very divisive time, even by Chi's standards(!) for the Anarchist and Anti-Authoritarian Left. After another southern Iowan farm season, I went back to the Bay Area where I was born, and spent sometime at the Long Haul Infoshop and the Cat Haus, where amongst other things I met with a couple old timers including the one co-founder of both the Long Haul Infoshop and Slingshot Collectives who was still in both, and another long time radical who had ventured off to Chi for Active Resistance! For as inspirational and exciting as these conversations were, I also met a younger radical who was involved

with both collectives who was down with nerding out over a couple of the issues of (Dis) Connection I hadn't seen before and one I had. The younger radical was totally unaware of this aspect of her collectives' past, and I started to get a new vision for this project. Instead of being only about the Infoshop Movement in Chi (though it may be the center of the universe!) perhaps it can be about the Infoshop Movement in general and how it has related to Anarchist and Anti-Authoritarian praxis at least in the U$?

A SPECIAL THANKS

I would like to thank all the contributors!

Darrell G., as mentioned above was the only member of the Collective start to finish. Our interview came to a somewhat abrupt stop when he criticized Weather Thought and what he considers the politics of white guilt. With things going around the gentrification of Pilsen, Biblioteca Popular and the current APOC group in Chicago, I kind of drew a blank and wasn't sure where to go from there. After typing it up I felt a little better about and sent him a copy, asking if there was anything he would like to add to it. As with this whole project, maybe sometime in the future. He was also involved with the Sandpaper Collective.

Bill Burns and I only met once, when he came to speak at one of the A-Zone events we held at the NWRC. We screened "Rebels With A Cause," a film about Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and he spoke casually with another ex-SDSer with the ten or so people who showed up for the event. Bill Burns' life has been a search for freedom. He has been a part of many revolutionary organizations. He is still seeking revolution. As an anarchist he is still very active in social change. He is on the steering committee of a taxi drivers union. He is active on the defense committee of a friend and cabdriver, charged with providing material aid to a U.S., defined terrorist organization. Finally he is part of a collective called RELATIONSHIP ANARCHISM.

Anthony Rayson is a writer, editor, publisher and distributor of @nticopyright and free 'zines. He has also been involved in co-founding and organizing for grassroots citizen's groups, such as Shut This Airport Nightmare Down (STAND), Southside Anti-Racist Action, Southside Citizen's Coalition and others. For STAND, Rayson wrote newsletters, 'zines and the newspaper, Rural Life Standard. He's done many interviews, mostly with conscious prisoners, such as the MOVE women, Sundiata Acoli, Russell Maroon Shoatz, Sean Swain, Coyote Sheff, Lee Savage and many others. His complete 'zine collection (over 400 titles and counting) is housed at DePaul University and his publications can be found in 'zine libraries, literature tables and prisoner study circles throughout the vast Amerikan gulag system. He had a chapter published in the book, *Igniting A Revolution*, put out by AK Press. His work has been published in numerous 'zines and newspapers, such as Sandpaper

and AREA Chicago.

Rust Belt Jessie (aka Jessie Lynn McMains) wrote the one completely new contribution to this edition! She is a writer and zine-maker currently based in southeastern Wisconsin. She writes, mainly, about her misspent youth and about punk. Visit her website at recklesschants.net or her blog at rustbeltjessie.tumblr.com.

It's a personal failure of mine that the gender balance of the Collective is in no represented by this project. Pretty much all events and Collective meetings were roughly half male and half female bodied people when I was active with the A-Zone. This is another reason I would like to see another edition with other contributors sometime in the future.

Thanks to everyone who helped with the research, especially ex-A-Zoners Rachel A. and Tracy K., Raechel Tiffe, the Chicago Underground Librarians, the Anarchist History Nerd Brigade, the Long Haul and Taala Hooghan Infoshops and AK Press.

Thanks to everyone who helped with the technical stuff especially people from La Biblioteca Popular, Wax Wing 'Zines, Voices for Creative Non-Violence and the School of the Art Institute in Chicago where I was sort of a Resident Hobo when I started working on this and did a lot of the initial work there with help from a couple of students. Ditto for the NAU comrades who helped with the second edition in similar circumstances! Thanks to everyone who helped with the networking for this especially Scribler, Locked Out and Mess Hall. And thank you all for taking the time to read this. This is only a small part of the history of the A-Zone, and if there is anything you would like to add to this history, please write the Anarchist History Nerd Brigade! anarchisthistory at riseup dot net!

AUTONOMOUS ZONE

"One method I'd like to see experimented with is large spaces rented by a few or more people... (to) provide space for everything from printshops, organizing centers, soup kitchens and spaces for fundrazors, all in one space. ...if 4-6 people get a large warehouse space, furnish it & put some time in, space could be provided for such a purpose for next to nothing... if even one space like this could be used efficiently, in a multifaceted way, run collectively, with no decision making apparatus used except that which is determined by the needs of this starved society and the limits of the geography..."

That is an excerpt from an article that was written in the last issue of WCF. about 3 mo's before we knew we were leaving our old collective space **Chaos House** (sobs and wailing), and the concept of attempting an infoshop was being approached with caution. I didn't come close to realizing that I was describing something that I would become a part of in a year. The **Autonomous Zone** is open and we are still proceeding with caution. Caution is good. No need to rush into anything, right?

Well there are several projects running out of the space right now and we encourage anyone to come check it out, contribute and find ways to empower themselves, their neighbors, and the community at large. This is not a simple society that we live in and any enclave you can find is a good one, as long as it doesn't contribute to the alienation. We want to free ourselves of the dependence on the patriarchal, authoritarian structure of this society be it corporate, governmental, religious or otherwise. We want to encourage that locally, and support it globally.

Recovery Alliance, a HIV risk reduction and recovery outreach program has been doing training and focus groups here, and may soon be doing their syringe exchange program here as well. **Centros Beneficios**, another HIV and SIDA awareness project that is interactive and taught in spanish also meets here. Other groups like **Anti-Racist Action**, the **Industrial Workers of the World**, and the **Coalition for Positive Sexuality** have used our space as well. Chicago has recently been introduced to **Food Not Bombs**, a decentralized project that seeks to feed anyone who is hungry to free vegetarian food and possibly even show folks cooperative and healthy food getting alternatives. There is also **Yoga with Aloma**, and occasionally computer & internet classes! In December the **JAM Crew** will start hosting dope hip-hop parties. We will also be having speakers from time to time. The **Autonomous Revolution Forum Series** (ARFS), an open-ended series of discussions will be just plain rad.

Check the **Events Calendar** for the minor details like times and dates.

Some of the projects we will hope to start soon include a new and revamped return of **Thinking Faction** that we'll probably do with our new **Lumpen Pals**. We want to start several informal class offerings as well, the topics are varied and will always be free. We needyour ideas for this.

The **Autonomous Zone Free School** would like to offer: Spanish; Yoga; G.E.D.; First Aid; Self-Defense; Theater; Creative Writing; Quilting Bee-In; Secret Chicago History; English as a Second Language; Confronting Police Violence; Printmaking; Drawing; Homewbrewing; Graffitti Art; Music; Kropotkin's "Mutual Aid"; Computers; Self-Publishing; "The Technological Society"; Wild Edible Plants Foraging...and so much more. We're looking for folx interested in teaching and/or participating in classes starting in January. Give us a call!

There are also big walls in here with lists of things and posters of demos and events. There is a **Library**, that's right, you can borrow a book, just like downtown! Lot's of free stuff too: leftover **Food Not Bombs** food; clothes; books; coffee; lots-o-zines. We are out of control with **FREEDOM**. Radical literature and alternative music up the wazoo.

You can find an article in this infobulletin about the **Womyn's (Only) Space** on Sunday nights.

There will be as many descriptions of this place as people that you ask so you have to come see it, ok? It has grown out of necessity as well as desire. We are trying to interact with our community and make this a true com munity center. We have lots of new friends and alliances and we want to be a part of creating counter-institutions. We welcome you to visit and hopefully participate.

AUTONOMOUS ZONE 1726 W. Division (2 blocks W of Division L on O'Hare line) (312) 384-2991 -- Call for info, updates on events, or just to chat.-sedov trevor lucien, proceeding with caution-

NO BOYS ALLOWED

Since nearly the beginning of recorded history, wimmin have had to deal with a patriarchal society in which their voices have largely been lost. And since the start of "law", and "government", their opinions have been received with derision, or a light little pat on the head or a conciliatory chuckle, if they were received at all. So with centuries of socialization, and generations of learned behavior, wimmin have been "taught" that their opinions and feelings are less important than a man's and should be repressed. What we here at the Autonomaus Zone have been working to create is a space where any womyn can feel comfortable expressing her thoughts, feelings, or ideas without men around, and therefore without the almost unconscious fear of censure. So every Sunday, from 7 pm until close, we have a space in which wimmin can, if they so choose, participate in discussions, book readings, conversations, potlux and companionship. Or simply use it as

EVENTS

Every Saturday: Clinic Defense at American Women's Medical Center, 7am-noon, corner of Western & Diversey. Join us against the anti-choice bigots!

Every Sunday: Wimmin's Space: 7pm-Midnight at the A-Zone, 1726 W. Division. Bring food. WMMIN ONLY!

Every Thursday: FOOD NOT BOMBS serving free vegetarian food, 2pm, at the A-Zone 1726 W. Division.

Now 'til Dec. 24: Holiday Sale at the Gallery/Store of the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POW's and Political Prisoners, 1112 N. California. (312) 278-0885. Hours M-F 2-5, Sat 12-4.

Dec. 18 (Sat): A-Zone Benefit with the Jaks, Think & Da Bad Kidz (radical rap), and the Grussors (hip hop), and possibly more. With open mike & vegetarian potluck! 8pm.

Dec. 21 (Tue): ARF on INFOSHOPS AND AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY CENTERS, featuring a slideshow on Rosebud Commons in Portland by Squirrel, and hopefully other Midwest infoshop-center activists as well. 7pm, at the A-Zone, 1726 W. Division.

Jan 12 (Wed): on PRACTICAL STRATEGY FOR ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN REVOLUTION, with speakers (from several different viewpoints, including anarcho-syndicalists, feminists, autonomists, and others) and discussion. 7pm, at the A-Zone.

Jan. 26 (Wed): ARF on Feminism, details tba.

Future: ARFs on Prisoner Support & Prison Issues, and a series on Revolution in West-Town, spotlighting Gentrification, Housing, Gangs, Confronting Police Violence, and more!

Note: Phone first! Events subject to change.

read in peace if they so desire. Suggestions for other activities are always welcome, and will serve to make wimmin's night the truly diverse and supportive place it is meant to be. So wimmin, come on in, and share your ideas and tasty vegetarian dishes.

Thanx, love eaty

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the more we talk about "constitutional" rights the more we prop up this illegal government for having claimed them. these rights and privieges have existed and been fought for long before the constitution was framed, the fact that we have to speak of these things in legal and formal terms is enough proof for me that we are allowing them to escape us.

all i desire to add at this point is that the prison society encroaches every human at this moment. more prisons and malls are being built at the moments that i write and you read this. the prison society is on many humans.

identify.

raze ir chicago

addendum: i would like to reiterate the fact that we are losing the war against racism and deceit. here in chicago the police torture and the wealthy want to develop the river. cabrini green is target for gentrification. we are witnessing a "recolonization". at this point it is just an attempt. apathy and inaction is complicity.

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Interview with Darrell G.

by Alex Iwasa

Alex Iwasa: What were the A-Zone spaces?

Darrell G.: October '93 to summer '94 Division near Damen, maybe Wolcott. The second space North Ave., Damen and Milwaukee, '94 to late '95, the third space was North Ave. and Claremont, late '95 to I think May '97. The fourth space was Chicago Ave. and Damen, July '97 to fall of 2000, the fifth was Division, Kedzie, 2000 to summer 2001, the Bucktown space, the one you were involved with, 2001 to December 2003 was the last one. Then we were renting from the New World Resource center in 2004.

AI: What brought you to the A-Zone?

DG: I was involved with people who were involved with the A-Zone, some longer than others. Some I worked with things for years prior to the A-Zone, some who put out the pilot issue of what became Love and Rage, an Anarchist Collective in the late '80s. The majority I met during the demonstrations against the Persian Gulf War in Chicago. At the time, these folks used to have Anarchist house parties. There were music performances, speak outs. Eventually there was Anarchist Federation meetings, located at the De Paul North Side campus around 1991, 1992. Later on they were in people's homes. There was a mixture, a milieu of different Anarchists, and the idea was to get them to work together, which is very difficult to this day, because people's egos dominate, and they don't want to work with others, or they are comfortable with their friends.

People involved with Wind Chill Factor were interested in starting an Infoshop, like in other cities. A couple people wanted it to be a co-op and live together. I just wanted to be continually involved with an Anarchist milieu after being out of one for a short while.

Then I started doing my History and Politics of Rhythm and Blues video narrative presentation. In the early days of the first space of the A-Zone, weekly meetings always consisted of 25 to 30 people.

AI: That has always blown my mind. Were they operated on consensus?

DG: That was the original model, from the beginning. Also in the early days of the A-Zone, homeless people would stay there, and that was not always an easy task. Because of the differences in the culture and background of the majority of the homeless and the backgrounds and cultures of the majority of the people involved with the A-Zone. Unfortunately some of the homeless men were blatantly sexist,

and didn't treat the women from the A-Zone with respect.

The majority of the members of the A-Zone were very young, and very inexperienced with working with the homeless. And this also made dealing with the landlord hard.

Also what came out of the first period of the A-Zone was the Free School. Initiated I think by early members Kate S. and Dina.

AI: What were some of the classes?

DG: They were various kinds of things. Discussions on things. Historical things, not necessarily relevant to Anarchism. But of interest to people. Eventually conflict management, silk screening, and it varied, with the idea that we were all learning from each other. There was no expert. It was a skill share in a non-hierarchical environment.

Quickly there were problems already within the collective, which was the weakness within the A-Zone always, through out all the various spaces, an inability to resolve conflicts.

Within this first period there were lots of accusations and name callings of comrades within the A-Zone.

AI: What kind of accusations and name calling?

DG: I think it was some people calling other people, or accusing them of being sexist, not loyal, or felt they weren't listened to.

AI: What sort of work did you all do for overcoming sexism?

DG: I think we discussed some of this stuff, but we didn't deal with stuff very well. When we started the space, there wasn't enough discussion about political unity. Then part of it was I guess a lot of them were very new to this sort of activism. Then eventually the numbers of the collective started to drop.

Ken W. and I attempted to have a couple of discussions about race and class issues, both about organizing around race and class, in an attempt to bring more people of color into the AZone. The second one became a white guilt discussion, it was taken over by people who didn't want to deal with more complex issues.

The first one we attempted to address a lot of racial and class issues that are often not dealt with in Anarchist or Leftist situations. Some people in the A-Zone at that time were politically influenced by the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee/John Brown Anti-Klan, Maoist politics of the late '60s, white people should follow the leadership of people of color, and should stay out of communities of color. That made it difficult for people to deal with the real issues of race and class.

In 1998 in the Chicago and Damen space, Camille and I were frustrated because we thought I would have been a good idea for us to relate to the founding congress of the Black Radical Congress. To provided literature at UIC. What happened was the organization had to put a table together, and there was an issue of cost, and so Camille was upset that we weren't able to do it, and I second that, because as an Anarchist Collective we should be able to go beyond the accepted politics of the converted Left, and it was a missed opportunity.

In general at times, it was difficult for me being older, African-American, queer, not coming out of the punk scene, not liking punk music.

Feelings About The A-Zone

by Bill Burns

As you get older memories become a problem but the feelings of that very exciting time I will communicate.

The time of the *WCF* and Baklava was twenty years ago, they were the fore runners of the A-Zone. Sprite was the moving force in those organizations. I remember at Sprite's place on Lincoln Ave. and a womyn named Judy who was very intelligent but at some point decided to become a lawyer. In that time sets and fund raisers were held at various people's homes to spread the basics of Anarchism and get people to consider establishing a space as one choice of facilitating Anarchism. The years of 1990-1994 I had my own taxi cab and was driving 85 hours a week. So my participation in this movement at this time was not full but I did write articles for the *WCF* under the pen name of PURPLE BRUISE.

The first A-Zone space that I remember was on Division St. I remember large numbers of people and loud ruckus meetings. In time factional fighting took place and certain people emerged as an informal hierarchy within a process that was ostensibly consensus. As the years went on we went to the two spaces on North Ave. The A-Zone did not grow in numbers but because of the energetic leadership of Kim F., James M., Sprite, and Eileen R. the influence of the A-Zone grew worldwide in its renown.

In time I was able to reduce my taxi hours and in 1996 I became fully active in the A-Zone in our last space on North Ave. In about this time the four key people already mentioned began to gravitate to other projects. Vic S. came back to town and together she, Tony D., Darrell and I became the principal energizers of the A-Zone, and we were the ones who made the decision to relocate the A-Zone on Chicago Ave. where is stayed for the next three years. My last year to be involved with the A-Zone was 1999.

We were never able to build a broad based movement of a lot of people in which true consensus was practiced. Certain people who were articulate or had technology skills dominated and an informal hierarchy was practiced. Unless that informal hierarchy was adequately replaced, each time certain key people left, then the energies of the A-Zone flagged, and over time the Rachels and Mike D.s of the world where not able to keep the space going. I think of certain people as I look back in time who were more quiet, less aggressive, who I believe were not heard. They had something to say but drifted away. Other folks came in, felt who was in control, and did not come back. As Anarchists we did not increase our number and mass participation nor did we effectively reach out to the communities that we were a part of and find common issues. We were not able to effectively transcend the culture that most of us

came from. I am a long time Anarchist so my commitment to those much younger than myself, who were Anarchists, was total. At no time was there ageism practiced against me. But of course there was a difference as I came from an R&B culture.

How can we build a broad based Anarchist movement? One in which true consensus is practiced? That can interact with other communities in an effective way?

In 1998 Darrell, my companion Camille N. and I tried to hold workshops on building consensus, conflict resolution, and relationship building. We were not able to effect these processes within the larger A-Zone body.

Over the last year Jim N., Camille N. Darrell G., Zack S., Mike D. and I have formed a group called Relationship Anarchism in which we seek to build relationships in our inner selves and with others as a foundation for building an Anarchism in which real consensus and conflict resolution is effectively practiced. We have a web site called The Nearest Shore, and this summer we will be holding workshops on building effective relationships within our movement.

Sandpaper

MUMIA'S
FREEDOM STRUGGLE
CONTINUES

Another project that I am involved in is United Taxi Drivers Community Council (UTCC). I am part of the Steering Committee for the group that is organizing taxi drivers. I have introduced the concepts of Consensus, Affinity Groups, and Conflict Resolution into our processes, which to me are all Anarchist principles.

Recently one of our members from Kashmir was arrested for giving financial aid to one of the individuals working for independence; which the powers that be have deemed a terrorist person. My fellow cab driver, my friend, will be defended by the Defense Committee that will emerge. To me a fundamental principle of Anarchism is to show Solidarity to fellow workers.

The Sandpaper came out from December 1997 to the summer or 2000 I believe. Some of the issues you can find online. The articles were diverse and the writing good. As a collective we worked well together. The project ended when David Myers who had technological skills withdrew and I decided to go back to school. The paper was distributed all over the city to all the neighborhoods, and I believe it got around the world.

"Oh! Just Go To The A-Zone!"

by @nthony Rason

I grew up in the sixties and was very active as a high school kid and for a few years after that, but I was estranged from activist involvement for quite a while, from around 1975 until the 1990's. I never gave up my radical beliefs, still wrote and lived a sort of unconscious anarchist life. Then, my wife, son and I moved to the Peotone Airport "footprint" unbeknownst to us. There, I quickly got involved in a group called R.U.R.A.L. – Residents United to Retain Agricultural land.

I didn't even realize there was an "anarchist" presence, anywhere. I subscribed to publications like *Z Magazine*, *The Progressive* and some Marxist papers. I had a lot of books, but I had no connect to the anarchist "movement." I was never a punk, although I always loved certain punk bands, particularly, the Clash. I saw them once, too, in Chicago.

Then, around 1995 I read an interview with Chicago native Noel Ignatiev, who was then a Harvard professor and an editor of the journal, *Race Traitor*. This was a genuine epiphany for me, as I had been wrestling with this disconnect between my beliefs and my actual actions. Here was a man I could identify with. He was telling the truth in a matter-of-fact yet thrillingly radical manner. I finally saw a person in America who was for real. I wrote a letter, which was published. A Chicago editor of *Race Traitor*, Kingsley Clarke contacted me, and hooked me up with a group of students at the University of Chicago, who shared these beliefs. Noel came and spoke with us. Then I sat in on a group of writers and artists who were working on the student paper there.

I was working on a flurry of explosive essays to sort of catch up on all the ideas that were bottled up in my head. I got a hold of a copy of *The Match!* and could immediately identify with the pure anarchism Fred Woodworth and his collaborators were dishing. I sought any and every "underground" publication I could find. I sent my material to many of them, wrote letters and sent copies of *Race Traitor*, too. At a meeting, where the U. of C. writers were brainstorming up the next issue, I told them I was an anarchist and I asked them, "Where should I go to connect with other committed anarchists?" Almost in unison they said: "The A-Zone."

So, to the A-Zone I went and found a world of wonder. Magazines, books, newspapers and 'zines and flesh and blood anarchists greeted me. At this time, I had also contacted the Chicago Surrealist Group, spearheaded by Franklin and Penelope Rosemont. So, I was also captivated by the "marvelous" at this time.

They must have thought I was some sort of ringer because I was over forty, had no tats and yet, I was naïve as hell. I thought once I contacted real anarchists, that we would organize our asses off and blow the lid off of this whole, disgusting society. I had a sense of urgency that, no doubt, was very disturbing to some. I rubbed people the wrong way. Sometimes, I was a real jerk. I wanted some action!

I started an ARA chapter in 1998, with the then secretary of the Chicago Greens, Lionel Trepanier, called the Southside ARA. The Chicago ARA would sort of mentor us. At this time, a Northside ARA also came into existence. We met at the A-Zone to get our feet. Then, we would meet in Blue Island. We put on benefit shows at a place called Off the Alley in Homewood. Wild bands like Race Traitor and Kung Fu Rick would play, and A-Zone folks would come down and spread literature around. We did some actions in the suburbs. Then, Chicago ARA organized an action out in Mount Prospect because a record store up there was selling racist shit. I came up there with a bunch of posters and it made the Chicago papers. Later, we learned the record store in front of Off the Alley, the Record Swap, also had this nazi crap behind the counter. Our group and other anti-fas in the south suburbs, most notably the Slaugherhouse crew, gave them hell over it. Soon after, they shuttered their doors. The owner was also involved in the Mount Prospect thing and he was very bitter towards me, but he deserved it for trying to profit on hate music.

This was a busy year for me, 1998. I also started my 'zine distro, which was originally called, South Chicago ARA-ABC Zine Distro. Also, in February, we started a new group to fight the Peotone Airport to supplant R.U.R.A.L. which I named STAND (Shut This Airport Nightmare Down.) The lady spearheading R.U.R.A.L. took on a job as a local reporter, so it was a "conflict of interest." We wanted to step up the level of the fight against this monstrous idea. I took on the role of "Secretary" and did a lot of writing and organizing for the group.

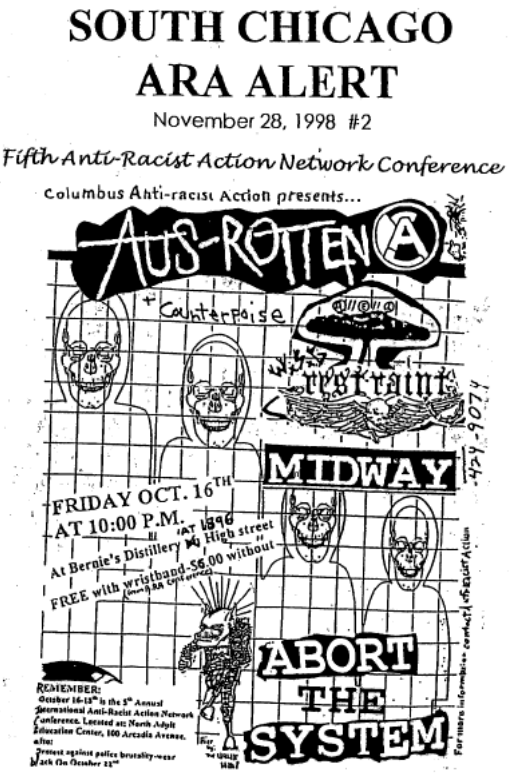
All the while, I would periodically check in at the A-Zone, go to meetings, speaking events and shows. I'd bring literature from my distro and STAND and bring home what they had. I soon left ARA and began to focus on the prisons, which I have continued to do to this day. I figured the prisons are ground zero in the struggle, here at home, and that is where I wanted to pour my energies.

There were some memorable experiences at the A-Zone, that had a huge impact on my thinking. One in particular, I remember. Sam Mbah came to speak one night. He was from the Nigerian Awareness League. He co-wrote the groundbreaking book, African Anarchism, which was available for a while through See Sharp Press. In my opinion, he along with Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, are the two most brilliant anarchist thinkers of our day. I was fascinating to here him break down complicated world dynamics with a clear-sighted anarchist analysis, on the spot. I thought to myself: "I could listen to him answer questions all day!" Afterwards, I gave him a phone card. He was so personable and gracious, something to emulate.

I was self-centered, unreasonable, paranoid and hotheaded – not too good. But, my heart was in the right place and on my own, I could perform excellent work. Like I said earlier, I was naïve and thought "anarchists" would and should work like bats out of hell. I never could adjust to the laid back way of doing things. Some people I didn't trust and I really resented what I perceive as a heavy city-centric attitude of city folks, not just anarchists. I've been to the city several dozens of times and I can count on two hands the times city people have come down to huddle with me. I guess I was looking for a reliable collaborator, which I finally found a few towns over down here in the suburbs in 2004. There was one exception to this and that was the South Side Crew. They would come down to Peotone or Park Forest or downtown or wherever we were staging an action, be it against the war, against racism or against this infernal airport. They'd bang their buckets and give our demos some life!

Around 2001 or early 2002, there was a weekend of activities, organized out of the A-Zone focusing on women's liberation. I did a workshop at the A-Zone about women prisoners. I wrote a thick 'zine specifically for this event, entitled Women are in Prison. During my remarks, I blurted out that is was shameful that the city of Haymarket did not have an ABC chapter. We then proceeded to start one on the spot. We took a lot of names that night, but only a scant few actually followed through with it. Jane Doe and I, would do most all of the work.

We held weekly meetings, sometimes twice monthly meetings in the basement of the A-Zone to work on projects. We published Chicago ABC 'Zine 1 & 2. Earlier, I had published the South Chicago ARA 'Zine 1 & 2 and ARA Primer, along with countless other 'zines. We worked with other groups, such as the News and Letters Marxist Humanists, even the Maoists, to hold demos around the city, such as at Cook County Jail. We launched support campaign for prominent, mostly Midwestern activist prisoners, such as Richard Flood and Khalfani Malik Khaldun, who we wrote thick 'zines about.



In 2004, it was discovered by

Sun-Times reporters I believe, that several activists groups, including Chicago ABC, had been infiltrated. All these groups got together to call out this outrage in front of Chicago Police Headquarters on Michigan Avenue. A lot of the organizing for that and many other actions, events and so forth, were organized out of the A-Zone.

In 2002, I was invited to participate in launching the ABC Network. We had a terrific kick-off conference in Austin, Texas to do just that. Sadly, the group damn near imploded at the launch pad, as volatile personalities in Texas did not get along at all – and these were the main organizers! [Did anyone else immediately think of Brandon Darby upon reading this? –editor]

So, the next year, the folks from Break the Chains put on a terrific conference in Eugene, Oregon, and this helped keep the Network on life support. The next year, I agreed to host the yearly conference, but it seemed more important to me to make it a "Prison Abolition" conference and not just a mere ABC gathering. So, we invited a lot of high-octane prison people, such as Pam and Ramona Africa, Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, Kathy Kelly (fresh out of prison, herself for violating the blood-soaked grounds of the School of the Assassins, down in Georgia), Robert King and others. We had a rousing conference that several A-Zone folks help make happen. This helped get ABCN on its feet. The next year, Lawrence Kansas ABC hosted the gathering and things really solidified from that.

Whenever a comrade from out of town would hit the city, it was convenient to meet them at the AZone. Whenever I wanted to show a suburbanite around radical circles, I would make sure we stopped in at the A-Zone. It was always a rush to pick up the latest publications from around the country and the coolest 'zines, which I often added to my own distro. I'm sure it was a helluva lot of work to make sure it stayed open and useful, what with dealing with Nazis attacking the space, police harassment and greedy, nosey landlords.

I'm glad I wasn't banned from there, as I suppose I could have been. Those people at the U. of C. were right! The place for a determined, hell bound for leather anarchist back in those days, was most assuredly, the A-Zone!

Reflections On The A-Zone

by Rust Belt Jessie

I met a lot of people involved with the Autonomous Zone not long after I'd moved to Chicago, in the autumn of 2001. I got a message from an email list I was on, saying there was a benefit party for one of the local Food Not Bombs chapters. It was at an apartment within walking distance from mine, and I thought it might be a good way to meet people. I grabbed a stack of copies of my zines, figuring I could sell them at the party and give the proceeds to FNB, and I was off. I won't go into detail about the party, but suffice it to say it was a wild night. Most of the attendees were anarchists or queers or both, and - anarchists know how to party (at least, the "If I can't dance it's not my revolution" types do), queer people hella know how to party, and queer anarchists throw just the best parties. But the most important thing that happened that night was that I joined a chapter of Food Not Bombs, and I found out about the Autonomous Zone. The Autonomous Zone, during the time I spent there, was housed in a dingy storefront on Milwaukee Avenue, wedged between a hair salon and an empty shop that once sold storm windows. It was home to one of the most vibrant communities I've ever been part of. It was the place we mobilized before protests, and the place we met afterward, to figure out who was in jail, who needed bail money, who needed their medication taken to them. It was the place where I sometimes went when I had nothing else to do and needed to get out of my apartment. I'd stop by the A-Zone and see if there was any work that needed doing. There always was, and I'd hang out for an hour or two. I'd wipe away some of the decades worth of dust that coated everything and clogged my sinuses; or catalog and file radical zines for the library. But most of all, it was a place I went to meet people. Yes, I confess - I used it less as a place for revolutionary organizing

Halloween Party at The A-Zone, October 2002

than I did as a place to partake in underground cultural events, and to meet potential friends and lovers. It was a good place for that, because if I met someone at an Autonomous Zone event, I was sure we shared at least some basic beliefs. It was a good place for that, because only anarchists are pretty. It was a good place for that, because there, nobody thought I was weird for being a polyamorous bisexual punk rock anarchist. I attended vegan potlucks. Sometimes the food - like my friend J.'s super-spicy guacamole - was so delicious it made me say: "Meat-eaters who say all vegan food is bland or gross don't know what they're talking about!" And sometimes the food was so foul it gave all vegan food a bad name - I remember someone's atrocious attempt at vegan biscuits and gravy, wherein the biscuits were more like burnt seven-inches, and the gravy was more like watery mustard with mysterious globs of flour in it. I attended book readings and zine readings (at times I participated, and read from my own zine), acoustic shows and film screenings. "My favorite was Queerzone - a sub-Collective that hosted an event ever Wednesday night. It was "started to create an alternative to the bar focused/alcohol centered/yuppie/lame-ass queer scene in Chicago." Sometimes Queerzone had a theme, sometimes there were speakers or performers. Many times it was just a handful of us queer anarchists drinking coffee and being goofy. Once, there was a drag night. I donned an old suit of my dad's, put some buttons on it, and added a bowler hat and my low-top oxblood shoes to complete the ensemble. I looked like a rude boy, and everyone gave me a hard time all night - "Have you ever heard of The Specials?" Or "Hey, Jess, you dropped something. You need to pick it up! pick it up! pick it up!" I pretended to be mad, but I had a blast.

I stopped going to the A-Zone at some point in the summer of 2003. I'd had a falling out with some of the people there I'd been closest to, and I was distancing myself from the anarchist scene in general. I held onto my core ideals, and I came back to the scene after a while, but 2003 was the end of my Autonomous Zone days. I will always remember that place, and be thankful for the time when it was a positive part of my life.

Autonomous Zone Position Statement

by the Autonomous Zone

This is a press release we started at a collective meeting but actually finished at my work while I was on the clock for the press conference we had with Chicago Direct Action Network (DAN)-Labor, the local Anarchist Black Cross (probably called Chicago ABC, it was part of the ABC Network as opposed to the ABC Federation back in 2004 when this happened), Not In Our Name (NION), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), president of the local National Lawyers Guild (NLG) and Fred Hampton Jr. when we found out the Chicago Police Department's Red Squad had been re-activated to monitor the above named groups. - Alex

CHICAGO – We, the Autonomous Zone Collective, are an anti-authoritarian organization. We have been operating infoshops in the Chicagoland area for ten years. Our spaces are used to facilitate political-social events in a fight for liberation from state power.

We provided a space for some of the planning meetings around the time of the 2002 TABD Conference. Our group was one of the organizations that were infiltrated by the Chicago Police Department in 2002 and some of our members were targeted for harassment and false arrest.

The Chicago Police Department's response is just another example of the state's historical systematic targeting of activists. Chicago's history is rife with the institutional abuse of power: from the genocide of the indigenous inhabitants of the area to the repression we encounter today when people can't organize against military occupations abroad without being monitored secretly by the police.

It is illogical to say we are fighting for freedom abroad when our freedoms are being siphoned away at home. Our government is perpetuating a climate of fear in order to ensure compliance from the public. The security apparatus is designed to protect the privileges of the minority of corporations and their politicians at the cost of the civil liberties of the majority of the people.

Therefore, in defiance of this atmosphere of unwarranted fear, we feel it is imperative to the survival of our freedom that we continue to organize against the wars abroad and the incursions of our civil liberties at home.

Suggested Readings

If you are interested in reading more about the political context in which the Autonomous Zone operated, the following titles are worth checking out:

The Political Pre-History of Love & Rage by the Anarchist History Nerd Brigade

Passionate and Dangerous: Conversations with Midwest Anti-Authoritarians and Anarchists edited by Mark Bohnert

A New World in Our Hearts: 8 Years of Writings from the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation edited by Roy San Filippo

In this second edition of "The A-Zone and A Decade of Anarchy in Chicago," editor Alex Iwasa and other contributors share reflections on The Autonomous Zone (or "A-Zone"), an infoshop that existed in Chicago in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In many ways, the A-Zone was typical of the experiments in counter-institutions and infoshops undertaken by anarchists in the 1990s and as such the writings within cover an important aspect of recent anarchist history. It gives an interesting snapshot of the infoshops of the 1990s and the related anarchist milieu. Beyond the A-Zone, the zine talks about the Love & Rage anarchist federation, the anarchist networking project (Dis)Connections and the related Network of Anarchist Collectives, the Chicago-based projects Baklava Collective and Wind Chill Factor. Also covered are Food Not Bombs, Anarchist Black Cross, and Anti-Racist Action.

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