

Anarchist Black Cross Federation Constitution & Structure



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Who and What are Political Prisoners (PP) and Prisoners of War (POW)?

Political Prisoner: A person incarcerated for action carried out in support of legitimate struggles for self-determination* or for opposing the illegal policies of the government or its political subdivisions. (Special International Tribunal on the Violation of Human Rights of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States Prisons and Jails, December, 1990)

Prisoner of War: Those combatants struggling against colonial and alien domination and racist regimes captured as prisoners are to be accorded the status of prisoners of war and their treatment should be in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva conventions relative to the treatment of prisoners of war of 12 August, 1949 (General Assembly resolution 3103{XXVIII}).

***Self Determination:** the right by virtue of which all people's are entitled freely to determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic cooperation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence. (Common Article 1(1) of the International Human Rights Covenants, 1966)

As is evident, these definitions were not our creation. We do take objections to the term "illegal" in the PP definition and know full well that the United States and all capitalist and imperialist governments have now and will always murder, oppress, and/or otherwise deny people the right to self determination under the guise of and protection of "law." We also believe that the POW definition lacks recognition for

those combatants struggling against institutionalized and "legal" economic and class oppression. However, as accountable members within an international community of activists, we feel it is our responsibility to respect these definitions that were collectively agreed upon at the 1990 Special International Tribunal on the Violation of Human Rights of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States Prisons and Jails. We also feel it is our responsibility to develop our analysis and positions of these objections so as to best articulate them to this international community for acceptance in an appropriate, inclusive forum. Changing these collectively agreed upon definitions, without adequate dialogue between the activists and prisoners affected by these definitions is unaccountable and irresponsible. It would also deny us the opportunity to hear possible objections or possible improvements to our positions.

The Anarchist Black Cross Federation (ABCF) recognizes that there are many who fall into the category of PP/POW, including right wing militia leaders and white separatists, Lyndon LaRouche and Timothy McVeigh, etc. Because of this, we will further define PP/POWs the ABCF shall support as being *"those persons incarcerated as a result of political beliefs or actions consciously undertaken and intended to resist exploitation and oppression, and/or has - ten the implementation of an egalitarian, sustainable, ethi - cal, classless society, predicated on self determination and maximization of all people's freedom."* (Bill Dunne)

Also, the ABCF recognizes the subjectivity that may arise in evaluating prisoners. Should any prisoner seeking support and/or recognition as a PP/POW be unable to supply documentation as defined in the ABCF Guide to PP/POW Support, our collective judgment will be based on the prisoners overall personal/political history and their overall accountability and responsibility in their action(s). Such an evaluation must still be made based on a factual account or report, not one person's subjective account or evaluation.

less seriously should certainly be avoided.

3. People/groups can be expelled from the Federation based on by-laws, Constitution and Structure and 2/3 vote of entire Federation Council.

4. There will be an editorial policy of public Federation material mandating all to be specific about whom one is speaking about when referring to an individual(s).

5. Because we view the purpose of this Federation as critically important to the development and defense of our revolutionary movement, we are compelled to take full advantage of the strength its diversity represents in accomplishing that purpose and in prefiguring the institutions of the society for which we struggle. Accordingly, participation in any aspect of the Federation will not be denied or limited on the basis of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. The intent of the Federation is to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

6. The ABCF is a volunteer organization. By voluntarily joining, you are voluntarily agreeing to the principles and methods we have collectively and democratically developed. Members should not accept these principles and methods for a desire to join the ABCF, but should want to join the ABCF because they agree with them already.

7. All ABCF members should abstain from illegal drug use and from abusing alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs. This is to defend our organization against the harm that substance abuse has caused to many organizations and communities of resistance. All members are responsible for doing everything within their power to prevent illegal activity from being associated with members of the ABCF.

V) CAUCUSES:

1) Purpose:

Caucuses are internal groups that are formed to work upon or promote specific issues or agendas within the ABCF.

All members of the ABCF are empowered to create caucuses within the ABCF if they feel there is a specific area of interest they hold or an issue they want to develop within the Federation. Caucuses within the ABCF will use the list-serve to publicize their work and they may engage in email discussion, chat rooms, snail mail, newsletter production, study groups as well as caucus meetings at semi-annual ABCF meetings or any other activities which they feel will further work of the caucus. Caucus activities are expected to fit within the ABCF's mandate and not compromise the Federation By-Laws or Tactical Unity explained elsewhere in the Constitution, but they need not be sanctioned or approved of by the ABCF as a whole.

Criteria for becoming a Caucus:

1. A caucus must have two members or more.
2. A caucus must provide a report in the ABCF Update every six months.
3. All caucus activities must be in addition to all ABCF activities.

Federation By Laws

1. Members of this Federation are/can be members of other political organizations, but this Federation is a distinct entity not affiliated with any.
2. ABC groups becoming a part of this effort should adopt the common ABC and type of group's acronym (Branch Group BG - or Support Group SG) as a affix, and their locality as a prefix. The use of names that could cause the prisoners, political formations and the masses in general to take us

Four Basic Foundation Principles of Federation

I) Unity of Purpose

II) Tactical Unity or Methodology

III) Collective Action and Discipline

VI) Federalism (Internal Democracy)

I) UNITY OF PURPOSE

Every organization has a purpose for existing, and when organizations join together in a league or federation there must be unity of purpose. The unity of purpose within this federation is to build an organization capable of offering long-term, non-partisan support to class war prisoners (PP/POWs).

II) TACTICAL UNITY OR METHODOLOGY

The fundamental Tactical Unity or Methodology of the ABCF can be found within the "ABCF Guide to PP/POW Support" (in the form of Federation policies of support work). Tactical unity is decided by the Federation Council, which represents the various bodies of the Federation. The purpose of the Federation is the foundation on which the Federation works out its basic and tactical direction. This enables the Federation to exploit all the advantages that come with federating: continuity, accountability, concentration of efforts, economy of strength and the ability to respond to needs and circumstances with utmost effectiveness at anytime. Tactical unity reduces inconsistencies in the organization that can undermine the Unity of Purpose.

Because the ABCF is a strictly above-ground PP/POW support organization, all activity done in the name of the ABCF, or as an ABCF local, must be legal under the law of the land. Extra-legal activities taken in the name of the ABCF are grounds for expulsion.

Crucially important to maintaining the anarchist integrity of this organization is the fact that chapters are freely autonomous to take on whatever initiatives they can to further the Unity of Purpose of the ABCF. So long as these initiatives do not contradict any preexisting agreements (Tactical Unity) that have been made by the ABCF, it is not necessary for all groups to approve of and/or agree with programs, projects or work of other ABCF collectives. To take initiatives that do contradict preexisting agreements can be grounds for expulsion.

III) COLLECTIVE ACTION AND DISCIPLINE

When a course of action is decided upon by the Federation, agreement must be reached as to what is to be done and who will carry out the various tasks needed for the successful completion of the action. Those who take on responsibilities are obligated to complete them, absent a credible reason for failure.

Should a credible reason for failure to complete a task is lacking, or any ABCF member be thought to have violated any of the Four Basic Foundation Principles of the ABCF, the FC has the ability to suspend ABCF members/chapters. Grievances may be resolved through the mail. Grievances through mail will be settled within 6 months. If representation and/or resolution through the mail is insufficient, an ABCF meeting will be called at the end of the 6 months. When possible we will settle grievances in a timely manner using the most accessible form of communication available (phone, email).

Communication within the ABCF is of vital importance. Thus all members should be aware of how the ABCF Constitution and Structure works and how all members can and should pass grievances or observations to the ABCF through the ABCF listserve. The onus is on the member/collective to do this in a non-disruptive way, working through and using proper channels all the time.

ABCF formation for a period of over 4 months shall automatically cease to be in the ABCF. Members or Groups who are dismissed for lack of contact may reapply for membership at the discretion of the FC.

3) Starting a New ABCF Group

Any group or individual wishing to join the ABCF as a SG needs to submit an application in the form of a report of their activities to the ABCF.

This application can be printed in the ABCF Update, or be sent to ABCF collectives separately should the application be submitted between publications. Upon reading the application, ABCF collectives having anything to report in favor of, or in objection to the applicant's approval will forward comments to ABCF listserve within one month. Should any group, without reasonable cause, fail to submit any report in favor of, or in objection to the applicants approval within one month, the said group forfeits its opportunity to do so.

Should there be any objections or points to consider to the applicant, discussion shall be settled in the ABCF listserve between the ABCF and the applicant until:

1. The FC and applicant reach consensus over any objection, in which case the applicant is approved
2. The FC denies approval based on the legitimate objections of ABCF collective(s)
3. The applicant retracts the application

Should there be no objection, the FC must inform the applicant and all ABCF collectives of their approval and the group shall be officially recognized as an ABCF collective in the following ABCF Update. It is appropriate for a newly admitted ABCF collective to submit their first work report to the Update in which they are introduced, to inform the ABCF and Update readers to their activities.

Support Groups strengthen the Federation by spreading and supporting the goals and projects of the Federation and possibly becoming a Branch Group.

Four types of Support Groups can be:

1. Newly formed ABC groups. After 12 months of meeting BG criteria, a SG can be admitted as a Branch Group (if meeting the criteria and approved by FC).
2. ABC Formations that do not wish to be a Branch Group or do not have the resources or capabilities to become one.
3. Individuals (especially those in isolated areas) who wish to support the Federation.
4. Groups and individuals, who don't consider themselves anarchists, but support the goals and programs of the Federation.

2) Responsibilities of Support Group

1. Support Groups not willing/able to become a Branch Group must commit to raise a minimum of two hundred dollars (\$200) per year to the WarChest Program. A year shall be defined as a typical calendar year ending on December 31st. Support Groups who fail to meet their obligation to the Federation will be up for review and subject to expulsion by the FC.
2. Support Groups not willing/able to become a Branch Group must submit work reports to the Federation no less than every 6 months.
3. Undertake locally determined initiatives that further the objectives of the Federation.
4. Support Groups who have been affiliated with the ABCF for 6 months or more may submit an application to elect a FC delegate. Applications will be voted on by FC (excluding PC). A decision will be reached based on the SG meeting and exceeding SG minimum requirements.
5. Any member of a SG or SG as a whole that, without reasonable cause, ceases to maintain contact with any

1. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE:

The problem of working out tactics is much greater than working out a purpose of unity. The nature of organization is to coordinate forces toward a common goal. When all arguments for the different tactical proposals have been made, when discussion can not usefully continue, when similar opinions that agree in principle have merged and there still remains an irreducible opposition between the tactics proposed, then the federation must find a way out. And there exists three possibilities.

1) Accept tactical differences and leave everyone to pursue their own tactics.

Conclusion: can only be allowed in certain cases on points that are:

- A. not of crucial importance
- B. concern local group issues, not national

2) After consulting its constituents, the Federation Council will attempt to sincerely seek consensus on the issue at hand. However, when consensus is impractical or impossible to achieve, the Federation Council will vote on the proposal. If there is a strong objection toward the proposal by one or more delegate on the FC and the proposal conflicts with the statements and by-laws of the Federation, the proposal may be blocked. It is the duty of the acting Facilitator, or the Federation Council as a whole, to then open the floor for discussion until a consensus or vote is made.

When the FC brings proposal to a vote, a 2/3 majority decision rules. The minority accepting that it will give up its ideas and tactics as far as public activity is concerned, while keeping its right to develop its arguments inside the organization- judging that if its opinions accord with reality more closely than the majority then they will eventually prevail by proof of events. This procedure in no way is coercive, it applies because the members of

the organization accept it as a rule and the minority accept it as a necessity which allows the tactical proposals accepted put to the test. *Conclusion: This is the goal of the federation in regards to tactical unity (No one will be required as a condition of Federation membership to undertake or participate in an action to which they're ideologically or otherwise opposed.)*

3) When no agreement between majority and minority proves possible on a crucial issue which demands the federation take a position.

Conclusion: there is naturally and inevitably a split

Overall Summary of Three Possibilities

In all cases tactical unity is the goal; meaning option two is what is accepted by the federation to manifest and attain on points of tactical unity.

-Option one is an extremely exceptional choice

-Option three is the natural outcome when those in the federation reject the agreed upon collective action in favor of an action decided personally.

IV) FEDERALISM - INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

Federalism combines the advantages of centralism with those of autonomous decision-making. It allows members and chapters to reach decisions with a view towards common work (Tactical Unity) with a shared goal (Unity of Purpose).

Composition & Structure of ABCF

The Federation is composed of the following formations. A brief description of each will be followed with a detailed explanation.

I) FEDERATION COUNCIL (FC)

The FC consists of a 5 member rotating Prisoners

5. Submit bimonthly reports to the Federation.
6. Encourage formation of Support Groups (ABC-SGs).
7. Encourage and aid existing SGs to become BGs.
8. Undertake locally determined initiatives that further the objectives of the Federation.

3) Criteria for Becoming a Branch Group:

To open a branch of the ABCF the formation must meet the following criteria:

1. Each Branch Group must commit to raise a minimum of seven hundred dollars (\$700) per year to the WarChest Program. A year shall be defined as a typical calendar year ending on December 31st. Branch Groups who fail to meet their obligation to the Federation will be up for review and subject to relegation to a Support Group by the FC.

2. Members of formation must have a minimum 12-month history of ongoing consistent prison related work they can present to the Federation, as well as 6-months experience within the ABCF as a SG (if meeting the criteria and approved by the FC).

3. Formation must have maintained an active mailing address for at least 12 months.

4. Any member of a BG or BG as a whole that, without reasonable cause, ceases to maintain contact with any ABCF formation for a period of over 4-months shall automatically cease to be in the ABCF. Members or Groups who are dismissed for lack of contact may reapply for membership at the discretion of the FC.

IV. SUPPORT GROUP (ABC-SG)

1) Purpose:

The purpose of Support Groups is to both strengthen the Federation and strengthen the Support Group. By networking with the Federation, the Support Group links up to PP/POWs and those in the prison movement who can offer the Support Group aid, knowledge and experience.

ABCF groups who wish to nominate a PP/POW to the PC should inform the ABCF of their nominee (who must have previously accepted the proposed nomination) in the ABCF Update two months prior to the time the Committee rotates. For example, if an ABCF group wishes to nominate a PP/POW to the PC for the May rotation (in which 3 seats need to be filled) they would nominate the prisoner in the February edition of the ABCF Update. Groups should be mindful that this means they should inform the PP/POW they wish to nominate of their intentions well before that February.

Should there be more nominations than seats available a vote shall be taken among FC members on who will be given the seats.

Those PP/POWs who have agreed to be nominated, but do not receive a position on the PC, will be given priority placement upon the following PC rotation. Said prisoners continued interest in serving on the PC is obviously a pre-requisite to this condition.

III. BRANCH GROUP (ABC-BG)

1) Purpose:

The Branch Groups make up the foundation of the Federation. Their purpose is to propagate and support the goals and aims of the Federation, form coalitions with other Political Prisoner support groups in their area, hold events fundraisers, etc.

2) Responsibilities of the Branch Groups:

1. Consistent support of Federation goals and projects.
2. Fund raising.
3. Propaganda distribution.
4. Elect 2 members to Federation Council.

Committee, 2 elected delegates from each Branch Group as well as 1 elected delegate from each eligible Support Group.

II) PRISONERS COMMITTEE (PC)

A rotating committee of 5 PP/POWs shall serve on the FC for 12-month terms.

III) BRANCH GROUP (ABC-BG)

The Branch Group is the foundation on which success of the Federation relies. There is a criteria an ABC formation must meet in order to be considered a Branch Group.

IV) SUPPORT GROUP (ABC-SG)

ABC groups without the desire, ability or resources to become a Branch Group, or any other group /individual wishing to support the aims and goals of the Federation.

V) CAUCUSES

Caucuses are internal groups that are formed to work upon or promote specific issues or agendas within the ABCF

- Purposes and Responsibilities of Formations -

I. FEDERATION COUNCIL (FC)

1. Purpose:

The FC is the decision making body of the ABCF. Each Branch Group elects 2 delegates to serve on the Federation Council. Support Groups who have been affiliated with the ABCF for no less than 6 months or more, may submit an application to elect a Federation Council Delegate. This application will be reviewed and voted on by the FC based on the demonstrated commitment and comprehension of ABCF procedure and policy. The FC delegates represent their branch and the Federation. They are a link between their branch as well as other branches. FC

members must serve no less than 6 months in their local before becoming eligible to serve as a delegate.

The FC also consists of a Prisoners Committee (PC) made up of 5 PP/POWs who serve 12-month terms.

2) Responsibilities of the Federation Council:

1. Voting on policy and proposals of the Federation.
2. Confirming the legitimacy of prisoners claiming PP/POW status.
3. Submit and help develop proposals.
4. Encouraged to stay in touch with the FC and PC.
5. Attend conference (with the exception of PC members). At the start of each ABCF conference, those FC members present shall decide if absent FC members shall be allowed proxy votes.
6. Voting on Support Group applications (with the exception of PC members).
7. The FC must communicate on a basis of no less than once per month.

II) PRISONERS COMMITTEE (PC)

1) Purpose:

The Prisoners Committee is a tangible effort to include PP/POWs in their own support. In addition to having the ability to offer outside ABCF members with a unique insight to political imprisonment and the effects of our work in support of them, the PC also connects the primarily younger activists in the ABCF to the many years of political struggle many of them have been involved with.

While other PP/POWs should and do offer their perspectives and opinion to our work in an effort to inspire us, having a small representative body who shall take in all expressed opinions and participate in the voting body of the ABCF is both the most practical and manageable by an organization such as ours.

2) Responsibilities of the PC:

1. Allocating funds of the Warchest Program to PP/POW's.
2. Allocate Emergency Funds from the Warchest Program.
3. Voting on policy and proposals of the Federation.
4. Confirming the legitimacy of prisoners claiming PP/POW status.
5. Submit and help develop proposals.
6. Stay in communication with other FC members

3) Criteria for becoming a PC member:

1. PC members must fall within the criteria of PP/POWs the ABCF shall support.
2. PC members who do not come from the anarchist or anti-authoritarian community must make all attempts to try and respect and understand the autonomous based procedures and practices of the ABCF.

4) Election of Prisoner Committee Members:

As previously mentioned PC members serve 12-month terms, at the end of which, new PC members shall replace their position on the FC. All members of the ABCF (including current PC members) are encouraged and welcome to nominate PC members to the FC. Ideally, this nomination will be after a period of general work and discussion between the ABCF group and prisoner. BGs and SGs should refer to the ABCF Guide to PP/POW Support for helpful hints on how to develop such a work relationship or discussion. The ABCF should make all attempts to maintain a well-balanced PC, representative of the different communities PP/POWs comprise (i.e. Black/New Afrikan, Women, Puerto Rican, Anti-Imperialist, etc, etc.)

Prisoner Committee terms are as follows:

- Three new PC members are elected to the FC every May.
- Two additional PC members are elected to the FC every October