



Black Prisoner Organizing

I also learned this lesson during my association with the African People's Socialist Party during the 1980s. When I had gotten out of the joint I had met Omali Yeshitela while I was confined in Leavenworth (KS) federal pen, when he was invited to our annual Black Solidarity Bay festivities in 1979. This association continued when they formed the Black prisoners' organization, the African National Prison Organization shortly thereafter. ANPO was definitely a good support organization, and along with News and Letters Committees, the Kentucky branch of the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression, and the Social revolutionary Anarchist Federation (now defunct), they wrote letters and made phone calls to have me hospitalized after I had been infected with Tuberculosis, which saved my life. But the group folded when the proposed coalition of founding organizations collapsed due to sectarianism.

After I got out of prison, I lost contact with them as they had moved from Louisville to the West Coast. It was not until 1987 that I once again contacted them when we were having a mass demonstration against police brutality in my hometown. They were invited and came to the demo, along with ANPO and several left-wing forces, and for two years off and on, I had an association with them. But I felt APSP politically was always an authoritarian organization, and even though was never a member, I became more and more uncomfortable with their organizational policies. In the Summer Of 1988, I went to Oakland, California to attend an "organizer's school," but I also wanted to satisfy myself about the internal workings of the group. For six weeks, I worked with them out of their national headquarters in the local community. I was able to determine for myself about internal matters and also about the politics of the group itself. I found out that about a whole history of purges, factional fights, and the "one man" dictatorial leadership style of the Party. While in Oakland, I was asked to attend a meeting in Philadelphia that Fall to re-establish ANPO.

I attended the Philly meeting, but was very concerned when I was automatically placed as part of a "slate" to be officers of the ANPO group, without any real democratic discussion among the proposed membership, or allowing others to put themselves forward as potential candidates. I was in fact made the highest-ranking officer in the group. Although I still believe that there should be a mass political prisoners' movement and especially a Black prisoners' movement, I became convinced that this was not it. I believe that it will take a true coalition of forces in the Black and progressive movements to build a mass base of support. I got to feeling that these folks just wanted to push the party and its politics, rather than free prisoners, and so I just dropped out and haven't dealt with them since. I was very disillusioned and depressed when I learned the truth. I won't be used by anybody – not for long.

