

APOC Rocks Detroit

People of color explored anarchism as a movement towards self-sustainability

M. Mayuran Tiruchelvam

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Descending on Detroit from all parts of the nation and the globe, nearly 150 people attended the Anarchist People of Color Conference from October 3 to 5. Anarchists and anti-authoritarians drove over 20 hours from Texas, flew in from Seattle and rode the rails from the Northeast. Over a dozen activists from Canada made their way across the border, while others hailed from Brazil, Colombia, Bhutan, Jamaica and Korea.

It was repeatedly noted that this was the first conference bringing together anarchist people of color. When one thinks of anarchism, the image is of a predominantly white movement.

Joe from Montreal explained the importance of the event. “You go to places in Canada, any major city...you don’t see conferences with people of color like this, and it’s so important. You can’t necessarily depend on the fairly Euro-centric stances that are present all across Canada.”

Beyond the geographic representation of the conference attendees, there was a variety in the movements and struggles represented. Anarchist people of color also brought together experiences of multiple generations—former Black Panther Party members alongside queer youth—gender identities, sexualities, class backgrounds and ethnicities.

The APOC Conference was advertised as a people of color only event. While white activists provided off-site support, conference attendees worked to create a community of support and trust. Attendees also volunteered to provide security in the face of violent; but ultimately empty threats, by white supremacists.

Representing movements in popular education, Palestine solidarity, punk rock, queer youth activism, transgender housing rights and mental-health advocacy, among dozens of other causes, conference goers expressed a desire to connect and build a new vision of people of color activism and understanding. Many people spoke of unsavory experiences in white anarchist spaces or in authoritarian people of color organizations, fueling camaraderie among attendees.

Workshops were delivered on women of color and feminism in the movement, spoken word, organizing against the criminal justice system, the police and cruising, white nationalist movements, sexism, cop-watch groups, community alternatives to police, and karate.

Several plenaries allowed attendees to explore the significance of what it means to be an anarchist person of color and how to move forward as a movement or support network. In Detroit, people of color explored anarchism as a movement towards self-sustainability and self-determination that is rooted in acknowledgment of relationships and internalized oppression and challenges traditional white modes of organizing.

The Conference was called for by the Black Autonomy Network of Community Organizers (BANCO), based in Michigan. However, disputes in the final weeks of the planning stages led to BANCO members boycotting the event a day before the conference began. BANCO member Lorenzo Komboa Erwin sent a letter addressing disputes with other conference organizers, using terms such as “character assassination” and “sectarianism” in reference to the organizers. Though the presence of these sisters and brothers was missed, the conference itself went on as planned.

This article originally appeared in *New York's Independent*.

The East Coast APOC conference is scheduled for MLK weekend (which is January 16 through 19, 2003). Details to follow. Contact bornguerilla@hotmail.com for info. For more information on upcoming APOC events, go to: www.illegalvoices.org/apoc

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