

On a MOVE In Maine

Ramona Africa speaks in rural, small towns

Robcat

2018

“MOVE’s work is to stop industry from poisoning the air, the water, the soil. And, to put an end to the enslavement of life—people, animals, any form of Life.”

—MOVE Statement

I am driving south on Interstate-295 in a freezing April rain toward Portland, Maine. In the car with me are Ramona Africa and Fred Riley of the black liberation organization, MOVE. We pass an SUV that has slid off the highway into the ditch.

Our destination is the Space Gallery for the last event of a three-day speaking tour where “The MOVE Documentary” by Cohort Media will be screened. Ramona and Fred will speak and answer questions following the film. Similar events were held in the Maine small towns of Waterville, Rome, and Belfast. The MOVE speakers received a surprisingly good turnout in rural and small town Maine with up to 50 people at the events, many of whom made generous donations for the group’s support.

The tour is organized by Maine anarchists to raise awareness and funds for the MOVE Nine political prisoners. It’s their 40th year behind bars.

MOVE surfaced in Philadelphia during the 1970’s. Characterized by dreadlock hair, the adopted surname “Africa,” and an uncompromising commitment to their beliefs, members practiced the teachings of founder, John Africa, which included a deep respect for all living things. By 1974, MOVE appeared in public with increasing frequency demonstrating at zoos, pet stores, fur stores, political rallies, public forums, and media offices.

Under Mayor Frank Rizzo, Philadelphia had one of the most brutal police forces in US history. In response, MOVE launched continuous demonstrations focusing attention on police abuses. After years of police harassment and beatings, including a baby being crushed to death by a cop and several pregnant women miscarried due to beatings, MOVE decided to do an armed demonstration in front of their residence.

In response, the police obtained a court order requiring MOVE to vacate their communal household. This led to the city blockading the area, shutting off their water, and trying to starve out the occupants.

On August 8, 1978, the police attacked MOVE headquarters. MOVE members were in the basement, which was flooded with fire department deluge guns. Babies and animals had to be held up to keep them from drowning. This was a major military operation under orders from Rizzo.

The police began shooting into the house and a cop was shot from behind by friendly fire. MOVE was trapped in the basement, six feet below ground. When they finally came out of the house, Delbert Africa was severely beaten, all nine adults were arrested, and the children taken by authorities. The MOVE Nine were sentenced to 30 to 100 years each for killing the cop that everybody knows they did not, and could not commit.

In 1985, the police obtained arrest warrants on a series of charges against MOVE members, evacuated the row houses surrounding the MOVE house, and Launched another military assault. The FBI and Philadelphia police fired

over ten thousand rounds of ammunition into the house before finally dropping two C-4 bombs from a helicopter, killing six adults and five children.

Maine anarchists first came in contact with MOVE in 1995 when we traveled to Philadelphia for MOVE events and demos. In 1996, we brought them a truckload of organic vegetables in an act of solidarity.

We were attracted to MOVE's beliefs, especially their Earth/Animal liberation, anti-technology, and anti-prison work, and distributed MOVE's First Day newspaper in Maine. Along with comrades from New Hampshire and New Jersey, we fought to get the Earth First! Journal staff to list MOVE prisoners on their Prisoner Support page. It took many angry letters to get it to happen.

We make it to the Portland event despite the weather. The event is well attended, with enthusiastic, generous people interested to learn more about MOVE.

The MOVE family has never backed down from fighting this system. Their fight is our fight.

More information about the group and MOVE political prisoners, visit onamove.org.

Read the book, *25 Years On The MOVE*. Travel to Philadelphia, August 5–11 to demand the release of the MOVE Nine; info on their web site.

Robcat homesteads and does prisoner support work in Maine.

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"Police Attack MOVE," FE #293–294, August 21, 1978

"MOVE Background," FE #295, November 3, 1978

Letters to the Fifth Estate, FE #296, January 29, 1979

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