

that time. I liked their work, but didn't want to commit to their agenda. I saw that I could create an autonomous ABC and fill a great need. Prisoners needed both an outlet for their writing and artwork and also a source of such literature that wasn't available to them, especially free!

So, I adapted the idea of a zine distro to focus on this vast prison struggle. At first, I wrote some zines and added others I thought had something to say. Soon, I began to collaborate with prisoners and shortly thereafter, made it the central focus of my work.

I wanted to work closely with like-minded thinkers and writers and I found them alright - usually already in prison! ABC has a wonderful history of dedication to the cause of liberating prisoners and dealing with prisoners on a human level - whether they were anarchists or not, although it was begun to specifically take care of anarchist prisoners that were being neglected by the other support groups. Anarchism is a very open and vast set of powerful tools of understanding and engagement. It can be adapted as local groups see fit. To me, it made perfect sense to start a heavy-duty anarchist-driven, prison-focused zine distro to help educate and empower prisoners and myself and others. It fit perfectly with basic anarchist tenets such as mutual aid, prison abolition and solidarity. It's from the underground up, not top down. It resonated.

8.) Q: I think that you, Twitch, Coyote and a few other ABC writers and activists have given us a new perspective or impression (for those who don't really know) what an anarchist is. In that sense, you guys have been like the ambassadors for ABC. For our readers who might identify with ABC, what's unique about ABC? Are there any particular zines that you'd recommend?

Answer: Yeah, I was very impressed with the wonderful anarchists of yesteryear, their articulation and dedication, but I wasn't satisfied with what I was seeing written and done when I first became so motivated. So, I figured, OK, you'll have to make what you want to see actually happen and not expect somebody else to do it. I felt I could do better than what I was seeing. I saw a lot of confusion and too little explanation and lasting, written analysis, history, literature, etc. We needed to create a whole new culture of anarchist revolt! For the best that anarchism can bring to the people is thinking and doing in real time focusing on the issues of most concern to people and especially, especially working directly with the most oppressed. That was what was really lacking. Too many "anarchists" were out-of-touch talking heads, intellectuals or sort of secretive and working only in their small affinity groups. I decided to get back to the basics of anarchism and get right in the trenches with the oppressed militant and firebrands of today, many of whom are prisoners. Coyote wrote a zine entitled, "How to Start a Prison ABC Chapter." All the zines have something to offer. Get a catalog and choose your pick. Thanks Byron. I appreciate your interest in my work. Feelings mutual!

So: Chicago ABC Zine Distro / P.O.B. 721 / Homewood, IL 60430

BEHIND THE ZINE

with Anthony Rayson

1.) Q: What's your plans for 2013? Do you intend to keep the distro in operation?

******* It is in part accredited to you that WOD is in its #3 edition now and even as WOD begins to branch online and explore new ideas, venues, and options, we're also reviewing our collective efforts to promote the work you do through your distro - encouraging a NEW GENERATION of prison authors.

Answer: Well, I have indeed retired from my wage-slave job, after 38 straight years. December 31st was my last day. So, I will not have the money I had to fund the sizable printing and mailing costs. I had fallen behind on numerous projects and the whole distro was in a real mess. So, I'm trying to sort through this massive amount of publications, organizing them, taking stock of what I have, what I want to continue to distro, work up new publications, continue to provide zines to the torrent of onrushing requests and figure out how I'm going to switch gears and develop alternative funding sources to keep this vital service going.

I have an appointment with the librarians at DePaul University to update my collection on February 20th. I really haven't sent new zines to them, since 2008. Also, I need to figure out what to put in a 2013 catalog, whether to ask for money or postage, limit the amount of material prisoners can receive, etc. I'm looking for certain individuals to step up and provide genuine donations. I don't want to try to get strings-attached grants, 501(c) 3 status or a bank account for this distro. That is more trouble than it is worth. Doing things this way is difficult, but I refuse to have any kinds of strings attached to this work, nor any government or corporate involvement, which is the antithesis of my beliefs. I do it this way to try to help teach people that alternative ways of doing things are possible. People power is possible, but it needs people to get off the dime to make it happen. You can't expect one person to do all the work and also pay for everything. It's a challenge to people. If they can't or won't help me help them and others, then it may be hard to continue this service. I'm cautiously optimistic that a couple of brothers in particular, will follow through with their pledge to help me fund this.

On January 15th, our son and his wife had a baby boy, who they named Lincoln. This is our first grandchild, so that is a big change this year. I hope to do more traveling to do presentations, participate in conferences, meetings, actions, etc. I'm heavily involved in grassroots work in my area, as the Outreach Coordinator for STAND (Shut This Airport Nightmare Down) which I co-founded in 1998. We're menaced by the possibility of eminent domain and quick take by the bankrupt state of Illinois for this unneeded airport and now, a private, foreign-owned toll road. Also, ICE, CCA and the nearby city of Joliet are in talks to create an unwanted Immigration Prison. There's a lot of ongoing struggles - class struggles, anti-war work, anti-prison advocacy, you name it! Hopefully, I won't have to get a part-time job. We'll see.

2.) Q: What must we do in order to support this medium - zines and "prisoner zines" in particular in a significant way? Is it the funding as noted above, postage, resources? Is it lack of innovation? Or is it a lack of interest for a dying medium? What are your thoughts on this?

*** I definitely have a new respect for the work you do through your distro since you've started publishing the WOD series. Seeing how much is invested in the printing & distribution of just one zine has made us extremely grateful for that support.

Answer: I think WOD and other people who realize how transforming zines are, particularly for prisoners, need to rethink everything they think others feel about them. Look. It is all about the "ideas" in these zines! It is not about slick color covers, fancy, computer-generated graphics and glossy pages. It is about direct, one-to-one education. Going online, doing "e-zines" and buying into all this hyper-technology is a bad move. This is low tech - easy to do. It is relatively cheap. It is a great way to get explosive ideas into the hands of indigent, lumpen prisoners, who are starving for empowering education. Why more people aren't doing this and opting for "smart" phones, texting and all that zombie stuff, is very infuriating to me. Yeah, you can google anything and get the "facts" - but all this is really a sort of admitting that they have given up on being a genuinely thinking human being. Are we going to regurgitate bogus, violence-glorying "culture" or explode with thrillingly written all new truth and reality? Make no mistake. The written word is potentially the most impacting of all cultural mediums.

"Dying medium?" Who says? Prisoner zines are an exploding medium! "Lack of innovation?" What is meant by this? I'm thrilled by zines and I'm not easily impressed. I'm bored to death by the computer, movies, the idiot box, etc. People are so plugged into this rotting society, that even in prison, they can't think outside the box - even while they waste away in one! People need to become self-reliant and not a slave to some computer or high-tech gadget. Revolution incubates in the brain!

As for helping me, people can help fund my work, ask how I can help them do similar work, ask family, friends and radical student groups to help defray costs of printing and mailing - and get real, not virtual!

3.) Q: I know you collaborate & work with a number of prisoners on assorted projects. What's the future hold for zines coming out of your distro? Any new zines, projects, or talented revolutionary, anarchist prisoner writers you'd want to introduce? this is where to do it. We would like to be the nexus for them.

*** Over the past several years, I've read and enjoyed many zines written by some very talented writers and activists. Political prisoners, New Afrikans, anarchists. These are undoubtedly some of the folks responsible for inspiring and motivating me to start writing but most notably, were the

I think I've reprinted #1 four times and #2 three times. So, that is 200 and 150 copies, respectively. I have maybe 20 of each left. So, soon, I'll have to reprint more of each, not to mention the upcoming #3.

On December 15th, I did a presentation at the College of Complexes - "The Playground for People Who Think!" It was about the free school education that I do. I wrote a 4-paged introduction and had the testimony of 29 prisoners as to why zines are so important to them. I finished it by giving a quick history lesson about the free school educators of yesteryear who inspired me, quoted them, etc.

Coyote Sheff, a prolific anarchist prisoner writer, who is beloved by prisoners everywhere, wrote some powerful stuff for my presentation. He wrote two essays and a poem. He mentioned WOD as one of eight zines prisoners should lay their hands on. That's a pretty good company you guys are keeping! It's all over the country, mostly in California. Coyote also wants to write for WOD, as you know. I've sent it to zine reviewers, like "Show Me the Money" and it received a positive review. It takes a while for zines like this to gain "legs." But, I'd say, with your social media component and the pro-active work you do promoting it in your circles, it is being sort of fast-tracked, more so than other good zines who don't have these other avenues of outreach. So, yeah, people are getting hip to it and asking for it.

7.) Q: You've been a political activist for a long time? A "fierce free-thinker", but it wasn't until the mid-90's that you found yourself a serious anarchist, right? How did that lead you to ABC and starting your own distro?

Answer: Well, I was quite active as a high school kid. After all, it was the "60's" and things were popping all over. I went to demos since I was maybe ten, and continued to be quite active until my mid-twenties. But, I hadn't really hooked up with any organization that I felt comfortable with and I really had no say in how things were organized, who spoke at rallies, wasn't doing serious argument crafting, sitting in planning meetings, etc. I did, however, write my first zine at age twenty in 1974.

But, I was still a kid basically, who hadn't learned much, hadn't experienced much, and was peripheral to events. Once Vietnam wound down, it seemed that the air had been taken out of the resistance balloon. I was sort of dejected and focused on my private life - finding a mate, having a job, paying for a place to live, etc.

In the early 1990's, I read a powerful interview with Noel Ignatiev in *Progressive* magazine and this catapulted me into hooking up with the zine underground and the anarchist underground. By this time, I'd become a serious writer of essays - an anarchist polemicist. I wrote a zine entitled *Thought Bombs* which I looked to have people read and collaborate with. More and more, the more astute responses were coming from prisoners, so I gravitated to prisoner support as my form of anarchist expression and agitation. AK Press was now up and running and many great books were being published about anarchist history and ABC. I contacted ABC groups in the U.S. and Canada - ABCF groups at

the country and world. Some have more staying power than others. Some aren't even called "ABC" but some other name, but none-the-less are anarchist driven, prison abolitionist groups, doing prisoner support work of one form or another. There are other types of support groups - socialists, communists, Black Nationalists, whatever. But, the anarchists are the ones spearheading this zine revolution, particularly working closely with prisoner writers and artists - aside from the well-known prisoners like Mumia Abu Jamal, who gets his work published in books.

I work directly with prisoners mostly, but I sometimes work with other ABC's (or non-anarchist) groups supporting a particular prisoner, or as part of a support network for an upcoming action (such as a hunger strike.) I like to work with people who are determined to see a project through and get things accomplished. Mostly, I rely upon my self, solely. That way, I don't have to wait for someone else to do their part to see a project to completion. I haven't put a list together of "ABC" type groups lately. If people are really interested they can google ABC or ask me a specific question. Like anything else, people need to be pro-active to find out what they are interested in finding out.

As well, there is a definite "Black Scare" going on right now in America, and anarchist infoshops, collectives and individuals have been raided and arrested and charged with overblown "terrorism" charges. So, with snitches, government infiltrators and so forth, being used to hamper our work, many people are playing it sort of close to the vest. Not me, though. I'm very upfront about what I say, think & do. Then again, I'm an old man - 59. I have a track record and am respected by my community as an indefatigable grassroots organizer. I have a house, wife, children, job, car, etc. I used to have a job, anyway. I'm all about free school education. I'm not interested in getting arrested, so I don't involve myself in activities that might get me arrested. But I will not compromise my voice! I will call out this monstrous government always!

6.) Q: Upon release of our zine series last year, you advised that it was getting a lot of good feedback. Can you give me an idea of the number of prisoners who have requested WOD, and where it might be circulating to date?

Answer: I write a lot of letters to prisoners. I've developed a close and trusting relationship with several particularly active prisoners and we have extensive discussions, via these letters. Mostly, these are men who I've worked with on zines. Astute men, knowledgeable men, who make sure they keep up with all the latest zines and other real thinking going on in this world today. They're the ones who hip me about WOD. They tell others to get it. Once a prisoner gets it, he or she shares it with others at that particular gulag. Then they want their own copy. Then again, prisoners from other prisons write and say so-and-so from another gulag told them to ask me for WOD. Some prisoners list their favorite zines in a piece they wrote and might list it as one of their favorites. Some ask how they can contact the writers of WOD.

many introductions to zines that you partook in which evoked the curiosity that is now responsible for the genesis of Write or Die. Aside from the aforementioned intro's would you encourage aspiring authors / comrades to write a zine? If so, why?

Answer: Like Coyote says, we will continue to churn out zines always striving to make them better, more liberating and useful. We have 100% control over the editorial content of our publications. No one else can say that. And we are serious revolutionaries who have practiced our craft of writing and involving ourselves in struggle. These are invaluable skills that anybody can develop for themselves and use to great effect. Making yourself a conscious, motivated human being is the highest calling there is. Sharing that insight and helping create other free-thinking human beings is what the powers that be (the liars and murderers we constantly expose and call-out) fear the most! They want cynical, TV-watching slaves who have given up on life and fight amongst themselves. We want driven human beings actualizing their talents and pursuing their interests to build a better world. It doesn't happen without a revolutionary, real-time culture and any culture's bedrock underpinning is brought to life by their best writers.

You yourself, testify to the motivating power of these zines, which helped you decide to embark on your own zine projects. I didn't hear you talk about *TIME* magazine or some best seller, now did I? But even you are buying into the "dying medium" bullshit of the scaredy-cat, do-nothings! Zines deserve to be genuinely respected for what they are - powerful weapons of liberation! Of course, most zines are garbage. But you can find that this is true of any medium. Even groups of people are like that. Most do a lot of nothing and a small number are seriously motivated and do not allow ANYTHING to hamper their work. So, the trick is to find these serious, talented and brilliant people and work closely with them to increase the volume & scope of the explosive truth!

There's a lot of "new" writers and artists I'm in various stages of collaboration with, as well as tried and true ones, who continue to create amazing work - even in the face of repression! This is about life and death, not about what some thoroughly conditioned to "go with the brain-dead program" person on the "ins" or "outs" feels about zines! They can ignore our work, not have their tender sensibilities disturbed by the blurted-out wrenching truth. Too bad for them because the best, most important writing is coming out of the prisons and written by those who genuinely are involved in this struggle. For those interested, and they are growing, write for a catalog and a sample. Stamps or personal money orders / checks would be appreciated and poured 100% back into all of this.

I encourage people to write zines all the time. Inertia is a powerful force. Just getting off the dime and starting to write is a major milestone! I've seen depressed, self-loathing people start to write zines and lo and behold, they blossom into brilliant writers, thinkers,

researchers, poets and essayists. I offer to help them, too! That's part of the really satisfying aspect of this work. Being there to help a Brother or Sister begin their awakening and seeing their work published, getting letters from perfect strangers lauding them for their efforts means the world to a prisoner. Their voice is important. They can and do have an effect on other people's thinking. In short, they become part of the struggle. Our enemies are aware of this and react like the fascists they are, by trying to gag them, intimidate them and hurt them. But, once a person become a respected writer that others draw strength from, they soar across what I call the "fear line." Life becomes very real! I liken it to when a newborn baby comes into a couple's lives. Their lives take an exponential leap into a very real, very serious, 24-hour-a-day level of crystal clarity. We're not playing games, here!

4.) Q: Not long ago, you donated several hundred zines to the DePaul University Zine Library which were later made available online. There are websites like ZINESWAP that create a PDF template of one's zine that can be downloaded. Any plans to do anything like that yourself?

Answer: Yeah, in 2007, I schlepped five or six boxes of zines I'd distroed since 1998 up to DePaul. Years earlier, they started a zine library, but I doubt they ever bargained for the massive amount of material that I brought to the table. As well, the quality of the writing and the explosive nature of the ideas expressed in these zines was stunning. A terrific archivist spent months sorting it all out, cross-referencing them and categorizing my collection of zines. The index of the titles is on their website. They are also willing to print and mail up to twenty one-sided sheets of any zine.

When the economic meltdown hit in 2008, I figured the zine library would be one of the first programs they would feel the need to cut. I was insanely busy all the time, working full-time and everything else, so I put off sending them more zines, as they are willing to absorb them and add them in on an ongoing basis. So, I'm going to catch up with that. I called them and they are cool with another couple of boxes of zines, maybe 200 new ones!

As for websites, I had a website for my distro for a while, but it was crashed when NBCi.com bought all the servers hosting free websites. Later, folks here and there put some of my zines in websites and made them downloadable, most notably Jeremy Hammond, who is now allegedly the "mastermind" of the Anonymous hackers. He's incarcerated in New York City right now. I never was much interested in computers. I liked pinball machines and hated PACMAN and all that other video game crap. I work with and for p-r-i-s-o-n-e-r-s. They aren't accorded internet access. Most people who care about prisoners and these issues are serious activists and make it their business to connect with other, like-minded individuals, not necessarily via the computer. I have a very easy means to be contacted - my P.O. Box. It has been the

same since 1998. Anybody can write to me, but 98% of the letters I receive are from prisoners. It is their lifeline, oftentimes! My question is, why do so many people have their thumb up their ass and are staring at a stupid screen, when they could access explosive writing and hundreds of exhilarating zines, simply by dropping me a postcard. Hell! They could even use their computers to google me and email me a request or something. But, they don't. So, why should I cater to them and tailor my medium to accommodate their comatose lifestyle? I want people with a pulse, you know?

I am overwhelmed with work, just crafting zines, making them available, filling zine requests, etc. Where are all the computer geniuses out there that could, if they wanted to, help me do that - make them available online? They're too lazy, flighty, or whatever. I can't waste my time holding their hands, you know? Besides, the authorities are always looking for ways to shut this type of stuff down. Going online makes it easy for them to track everything you do and people sort of self-censor themselves or otherwise accommodate themselves to Big Brother.

I've always proclaimed all my zines as *anti-copyright* and encourage other people to reprint anything and everything as they see fit. Prisoners are about the only group of people who are pro-active with this, sad to say. Again, I'm looking for collaborators who are down for the struggle over the long haul, not fly-by-nighters, dilettantes, wishy-washy types and etc. We're in the business of blowing peoples' minds, not kowtowing to the fragile, eggshell minders. I'd love to see this stuff all over the internet, all over the newsstands, nightstands, whatever. But, I have my hands more than full and to have it happen, others who have these skills need to step up and prove their mettle. Jeremy did some real cool work, but he had other fishes to fry, as well. Now, I have to send him zines.

5.) Q: The zines published via your distro find their way into prisons and facilities across the country, right? The ABC network, chapters and affiliates are a pretty broad prisoner support network. Give us an idea of the number of states and facilities your distro reaches. Further, would you find a moment to provide me with a comprehensive listing of the national ABC chapters (contact info) as well as what each of them "specialize" in?

Answer: Yes, my zines have made their way to all fifty states and many, many prisons, jails, lock-ups, psych wards and etc. I don't know how many prisons, but a lot. Many, many prisoners have run across them, one way or another. This, even though, guards and gulag censor trolls are constantly destroying them. Once in, many people read them, too!

There are three types of ABC's. The ABC Federation, which focuses on supporting recognized "political prisoners" the ABC Network, which does support work for social prisoners, too, including legal help and zines. The third type is the autonomous ABC groups. I am autonomous. I answer only to myself. These come and go like spring flowers all across

BEHIND THE ZINE

AN INTERVIEW W/ ANTHONY RAYSON

ANTHONY RAYSON

CHICAGO AREA POLITICAL ACTIVIST AND ZINE AUTHOR
ENABLES PRISONERS TO PUBLISH AND CREATE ZINES
WHICH HE DISTRIBUTES TO PRISONS ACROSS THE
COUNTRY VIA HIS SOUTH CHICAGO ABL ZINE DISTRO.

BEHIND THE ZINE W/ ANTHONY RAYSON

THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW WAS PART OF THE 2013
WODZ#3 ISSUE, WHICH I HAD WRITTEN OUT AND
MAILED TO HIM TO RESPOND. WHEN I RECEIVED
HIS ANSWERS, TRANSCRIBED AND FOLDED INTO A
ZINE, I WOULD LEARN SOMETHING VALUABLE FROM
THE WORDS HE WOULD REPLY WITH THAT WOULD
ALTER MY DIRECTION IN LEADING THIS ZINE
PROJECT, AND ULTIMATELY CHANGE MY TECHNICAL
PERSPECTIVE INTO A MORE MEANINGFUL AND
PASSION DRIVEN JOURNEY DOWN A ROAD LESS
TRAVELED.

... THAT'S ANOTHER STORY THOUGH, YB'LL. THE
SEQUAL. CHECK OUT THIS INTERVIEW.

Frank