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Claim No Easy Victories

An Analysis of Anti-Racist Action and its
Contributions to the Building of a Radical Anti-Racist
Movement

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07/22/2003

Retrieved on September 30, 2012 from
<http://nefac.net/node/523>
From *The Northeastern Anarchist*

en.anarchistlibraries.net

07/22/2003

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I chose the title “Claim No Easy Victories” to point out that ARA has been an essential fighting movement in North American radical politics. Its success in mobilizing and politicizing hundreds of activists can not be ignored. Current organizing by anarchists would look vastly different if ARA had not exploded into the scenes, or had ceased when difficulties arose. However, while significant advancements have been the result of ARA organizing -- the development of anti-fascist politics, staunch defense of collective and decentralized organizing, the use of direct action and militancy in the face of a legalistic and pacifist Left, and the important defeats of various fascist organizing — ARA still has a long road ahead of itself, and it may be too easy to rest on what has been done thus far. Success is temporal and fleeting – the struggle continues...

1. WE GO WHERE THEY GO: Whenever fascists are organizing or active in public, we’re there. We don’t believe in ignoring them. Never let the nazis have the streets!

2. WE DON’T RELY ON THE COPS OR THE COURTS TO DO OUR WORK FOR US: This doesn’t mean we never go to court. But we must rely on ourselves to protect ourselves and stop the fascists.

3. NON-SECTARIAN DEFENSE OF OTHER ANTI-FASCISTS: In ARA, we have lots of different groups and individuals. We don’t agree about everything and we have the right to differ openly. But in this movement an attack on one is an attack on us all. We stand behind each other.

4. WE SUPPORT ABORTION RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM: ARA intends to do the hard work necessary to build a broad, strong movement against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, discrimination against the disabled, the oldest, the youngest and the most oppressed people. **WE INTEND TO WIN!**

- Anti-Racist Action’s ‘Points of Unity’

The current climate of war and repression is foisting on us an urgent need to try and decipher what in hell is happening. Questions of capitalist restructuring and expansion, occupation, white supremacy, racism, white privilege and fascism are all topics being raised in anarchist circles. Questions, that are of the utmost importance in our developing of a fighting movement that can intervene in struggles that are breaking out, or soon will.

Without veering too far into negativity, it must be said that for much of the North American anarchist movement, we are

short on theory and much of an analysis of historical conditions and developments. While there is growth and promise, we still have an uphill journey. Partly because the current anarchist movement is quite young in age and does not have a solid connection with any historical lineage – no institutions or infrastructure that we can claim some linear connection to, not much living history that is explicitly anarchist and maps out decisions or breaks made for the political or social advancement of our groups and people in struggle. However, this isn't to say we haven't participated in any way or that we were short on experience. Since the mid 1980's the North American anarchist scene/movement has been developing collectively and taking part in struggles that, when examined, can give lessons to build on. We are young, but we have been a part of many not-so- insignificant projects and battles. Looking backwards from recent direct action against the war, to the globalization protests, to political prisoner/prison abolition work, to Zapatista support, to further back with anti-apartheid work and solidarity with people of color and the oppressed, including Black and Native struggles, looking at this it is clear anarchists have sought to develop ourselves by learning from and being real participants in these many fights.

It is in these struggles that we can gauge our success and failings, and with the formation of critical perspectives, applied and integrated into our work, we may be in better positions to identify, defend, and help generate more autonomous and potentially insurrectionary action.

For fourteen years the work of ARA has been to popularize the ideas of direct action in the fight against racism. Along the way ARA's own internal development has meant connecting racism to other struggles against oppression, from the pro-choice and anti-patriarchal organizing to pro-queer struggles to emphasizing the continual need for participation and initiative in political direction from young people. While there is no single, homogenous, ARA political line beyond ARA's

In Conclusion

A recent article entitled "Revolutionary Anti-Fascism," published in NEFAC's agitational magazine *Barricada*, posed several questions about ARA. While it praised ARA's commitment to organizing street level defense against racist attacks and fascist groups, where most of the Left fails miserably, the article is critical of ARA's continued lack of developing positions on a range of issues: patriarchy, white supremacy, class, and even fascism. The article is important and I sympathize notably with its emphasizing that ARA needs to seriously grapple with political questions and commit itself to a higher level of debate, whether or not there is immediate agreement. Where I disagree with the article is that beyond articulating radical anti-fascist positions it sees ARA's main contribution in the past and future as its anti-fascist organizing, anti-fascist organizing that is based more times than not on straight-forward anti-nazi activity. A point the article makes is that where there is no visible or active nazi presence, ARA groups fall into a state of inactivity. This has become an unfortunate reality for a lot of ARA groups and shows an inability to connect anti-racism with other struggles beyond the pale of nazi activity. Anti-nazi action is important, but like past ARA attempts to attack inequality and oppression in the interconnected realms of race, gender, and class exploitation, current ARA activists would do well to connect with developments in their cities, communities, schools and workplaces. Sorry for the run on sentence, but the main point here is that anti-fascist politics should be a lens through which we view class society as a whole. It is a critique of power and anti-human tendencies and its incorporation coupled with a willingness to fight and utilize direct action in whatever arena we are struggling in, may help to develop the necessary mass movements capable of breaking down our society's rule of exploitation and division.

series of mass demos helped expand possibilities for quick mobilization and affinity that had in the past been established less frequently and taken a greater period of time to develop.

But ARA's orientation was not to be defined solely by its relationship to the anti-globalization movement. ARA had for years been struggling against racism and fascist organizing. Many Klan groups saw their rallies cease as they suffered from their own internal power struggles, State infiltration/repression, and having ARA out-manuever them on many occasions, by successfully mounting campaigns to build effective street and community resistance. But new fascist organizing, lead by more sophisticated and potentially dangerous fascist movements, started to emerge. In the days following the 9/11 attacks, the National Alliance started a campaign to build on white people's insecurities and fears. ARA participated in defense of Mosques and Arab centers. Struggles to fight the tightening of immigration laws, the rising number of cases of detentions and deportations of immigrants, and the general racist backlash, were all areas that ARA activists found themselves involved in. Yet the rapidly changing circumstances of 9/11 and the escalation of Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq made it difficult for much of the Left and progressive forces to get a stable footing. The US State was quickly moving to enact stauncher repression measures that were geared towards silencing protest with fear and intimidation. More concerning, they may potentially be launching a campaign of infiltration and encapsulation wherein the State may actually direct the activity and political trajectory of a group or movement by utilizing moles and dis-information. The authorities were now working overtime to curb outbreaks of militant action.

'Points of Unity', generally, ARA has and continues to be an anti-authoritarian arena for debate and action around the connectedness of various forms of oppression. This allows for an experimentation and self-activity essential to the development of a conscious movement outside of the control and direction of the State. Constructing organizations and movements at the grassroots can be instructive in both the difficulties and simultaneously the radical potentials of people in action.

And that is what we need. From a revolutionary perspective, we need movements that can challenge peoples notions of what is possible and then sketch out in our heads what its going to take to make our endeavors succeed. Is ARA such a movement? Is the work done by ARA building towards an actual radical opposition movement? Is that even the intention of ARA? After fourteen years what has ARA's contribution been? And what has been the contribution of anarchists within ARA? If we find in ARA the elements that are essential components of a movement capable of influencing the emergence of radical currents, is ARA up to the challenge of understanding and building on these elements.

These questions represent a kind of "ruler" that I think we size up ARA with, and provide a context for discussion. While I hope this article answers these questions, I am prepared to admit that it only scratches the surface and prompts more questions than it satisfies (but this isn't a bad thing). If ARA is to be relevant it's got to be constantly subjected to a critical assessment of its work, from outside and from within. And in regard to the broader discussion of where we revolutionary anarchists see organizing potentials and lessons to be learnt, then ARA may be as good a starting point then most anything our movement has been connected to.

To best access the impact ARA has had and what role it could play in the future, it could be helpful to look at its past and development. From starting as an organization of anti-racist Skin-head crews in the late 1980's, to remaking itself into a political

movement of nearly two thousand during the mid 1990's, and ending with the current period of the ARA movements life.

Fight the Real Enemy! Fight the Power!

ARA originally came out of the efforts of Minneapolis anti-racist skinheads to create an organization that could combat the presence of nazi skinheads in their city and its neighboring city, St. Paul. The Baldies, a multi-racial skinhead crew having members of black, white, Asian, and Native American origins, was fighting the Nazi skinhead group, the White Knights, and had set a code within the local punk and skinhead scenes: if Baldies came upon White Knights at shows, in the streets downtown, or wherever, the nazis were warned once. If Baldies came across the nazis again, then the nazis could expect to be attacked, or served some of what the Baldies called "Righteous Violence."

While the Baldies actions went a long way to limiting the presence and organizing efforts of nazis in the Twin Cities areas, the Baldies realized that a successful drive against the nazis would mean having to form a broader group that appealed to kids other than just Skins; ARA was that group. However, the attempt to make ARA into a group beyond the Baldies was met with limited success, and ARA remained predominantly skinhead.

But the experience of the Baldies was not limited to Minneapolis alone. Across the Midwest, nazi activity was growing and anti-racist Skinheads were organizing in similar ways to what the Baldies had done. Soon, these different anti-racist skinhead crews were meeting up with each other and deciding to create a united organization of anti-racist skinhead crews. ARA as a name was adopted and a brief network of the crews was formed: the Syndicate.

ments, several ARA chapters have tried to draw more attention to the need for anti-patriarchal organizing and political prioritizing. The Chicago ARA group (which found its beginnings firmly rooted in clinic defense and exposing far-right ties to the anti-abortion movements) is one chapter that has tried to integrate a more serious womens' focus into its work. With a recent ARA conference held this past April, and the fact that several committed and longtime ARA activists are women and continue acting as "responsibles," ARA will be hosting a women's conference towards the end of summer to continue to elevate anti-patriarchal politics to the front of direct action, and anti-fascist, organizing.

But moving back to Seattle. It was at this time that several ARA affiliates re-grouped and started to organize, building off of their connections and history of direct action. Seattle was a moment that lit up peoples imaginations and many ARA groups that were still active threw themselves into the various mass protests. Seattle, Washington DC, Cincinnati, and Quebec City saw numerous ARA militants participating in the protests' planning and actions. While internal debates over anti-capitalism and ARA's adoption of this as a unifying politic continued, the majority of ARA supported the organizing and saw issues of "globalization" intrinsically connected to larger struggles around race, gender, and class inequality. Another point for ARA to organize around was the increased attraction the "anti-globalization" movement was having for far-right and neo-fascist groups. It was here that work by smaller ARA groups took shape. More theoretical works were developed to analyze ARA's activity and the emerging social movements – from advancements and tactics in State repression to the needs of social and more specifically, revolutionary left – to build on current battles with the State and resist co-option or destabilization, to the influence the new movement was having on other areas of struggle. Mass protest and the increased connectedness movements had with one another via internet and these

help because the local group would not deal with, and in effect would try and mute, the issues.

Attempts at mediation failed and ARA left its annual conference splintered and demoralized. Several local groups never regained momentum and others who outwardly appeared strong would themselves come crashing inwards. Most notable was the split in the ARA affiliated RASH UNITED (Red & Anarchist Skinheads) who split into East Coast and Midwest factions, and ultimately ceased all together (a Canadian RASH in Quebec continued but was more thoughtful and committed to group accountability than many of its American counterparts). Once again cases of sexism and un-accountability by a mostly male membership caused implosion.

While the next year did not see ARA groups stop their organizing, it was a rough year and introspection on the part of many in the movement slowed down outward perceptions of action. It was crucial for ARA to grapple with its limitations, and many comrades worked tirelessly to open up debate about what had happened and what needed to change: how groups formed or were “vested” into the ARA Net, structures and practice for resolution, rotating Network roles, and attempting to hold more gatherings where internal network life and issues involving its members could be discussed. ARA would remain a network of chapters united around the Points of Unity, but it was smaller and the level of discourse was more intense and productive than before. If ARA was to continue as a movement, then a higher commitment on the parts of its overall membership was required and a realization that a few words of who it was or some mechanical structural adjustments would not be adequate. Emphasizing political quality over membership numbers was what the movement needed.

Even current internal strategy planning and political discussions have been influenced by this introspection started a few years back. Drawing out experiences within ARA combined with developing theories of women in society and our move-

Like Minneapolis, Chicago had multi-racial crews. These ARA skins were generally left-wing sympathetic and in Chicago it was not uncommon to find some Skins warming to Black liberation/Nationalist ideas. And it was not just racist and nazi ideas that were confronted. The Chicago ARA crew banned the wearing of American flags patches on jackets on bomber jackets (a standard piece of the Skin attire). At this point in time this was a rather significant step in Skinhead circles. While many Skinheads could claim to be “anti-racist”, a vast majority also were ProAmS (Pro American Skins). It was generally unheard of to find whole crews of Skinheads rejecting patriotic trappings. Many ARA skins took their cue from the words of groups like Public Enemy, America was a racist nightmare and the Stars and Stripes a symbol for, “...a land that never gave a damn.”

The success of ARA could be found in its being a truly organic product of a youth culture. Young people, in this example Skinheads, were creating a group that was explicitly anti-racist and sought to confront and shut out the nazi presence in the scenes specifically and the cities generally. ARA as an idea was made a pole to rally around and as an actual body of people it fought for “turf” and the establishment of a type of hegemony – lines were drawn and you had to choose where you stood. From putting on music shows, to producing zines and literature, to holding conferences where people could meet up and hang out while simultaneously trying to build an actual political project capable of fighting and winning.

However, ARA had many weaknesses’ that would lead to this initial incarnation having to be “reformed.” ARA was at this point predominantly male, and despite the growing political consciousness and understanding that ARA needed to be more than just a Skinhead group, the emphasis placed on physical confrontation and violence often breed a mentality where in the end, ARA was only about beating down the nazis. Larger political concerns became subordinate to the internal scene life.

Women in the ARA groups saw double standards. While emphasis was placed on combating the oppression of racism, sexism ran rampant. Several women would leave ARA to look for a politic that dealt more fundamentally with Patriarchy. Some left in plain disgust at the macho behavior of some ARA men. Other women decided to stay in the movement and challenge the behavior and attempt to integrate radical and feminist ideas into the core politics of ARA. The decision by these women to stay was based on the realization that there were few other organizations existing that were as radical and militant. ARA had managed to attract a number of dedicated and determined individuals and this encouraged the idea that it was possible to develop an anti-sexist vision.

ARA helped expand peoples understanding of politics and oppression but the sword is double edged, and the new political consciousness worked to illustrate the limitations of this first incarnation of ARA. ARA needed to grapple with its internal contradictions if it was to develop into the broad, militant anti-racist youth organization and movement it originally hoped to be.

The Choice of a New Generation

From '88 to '90 ARA had spread throughout the Midwest United States and was even seeing some West coast groups spring up. However, by 1991 the Minneapolis grouping represented the most consistent and in many ways the more diverse and politically engaged group, this was made possible in part by ARA's relationship with revolutionary anarchist groups like the RABL (Revolutionary Anarchist Bowling League). Despite the somewhat silly name, RABL had a rep for being extremely confrontational and solidly pro-class war anarchist. Some of the members of ARA and the Baldies were involved with RABL and hoped to bring anarchist politics into ARA's program.

tivists, including women, who felt some of the ARA locals were controlled by men who were interested in women for dating purposes more than as comrades.

It should be emphasized that at this time (1996–97), ARA had reached its pinnacle in membership, easily estimated at 1,500 supporting activists. The anti-Klan organizing and a number of anti-police brutality campaigns initiated by ARA groups had helped swell the ranks of ARA. But in 1998 at the ARA national conference several internal conflicts would put the fire to ARA and test its ability to cope with its own weakness'. A series of accounts from women of having been treated in abusive and demeaning ways, and one woman ARA activist having been sexual assaulted by a male involved in ARA, lead to a major split. Local ARA groups collapsed into different factions and individual members would sometimes side with particular split off factions in other cities, depending on who knew who. At the core of this was the fact that several women felt that their concerns and struggles against sexism were being ignored or undermined by their own male "comrades". Women were told to not bring their personal issues to the meetings and long standing cases of blatant male chauvinism were discounted as having been exaggerated by women to suit their private interests. ARA's movement structure had little in terms of a plan of resolution. ARA existed as a loose network centered around the POU, and mechanisms of accountability and action to solve internal disputes and problems of such high and sensitive degree were not present. A few activists intimately connected to the situation used this unfortunate truth to evade criticism. Though ARA was being affected as a whole, individuals directly involved (or who had sided with certain persons who were being accused of sexism and misconduct) would say that the matters were of local concern and that they were uninterested in Network involvement, despite several women contacting ARA groups and individuals in other cities asking for

ing existing positions, generating spontaneous organizing and/or the need to quickly reassess plans, the coming together of comrades and new groups of people, and polarizing the mass of the protesters against the police and government officials who would be spending time and money to allow the racists to rally. For anarchists, this atmosphere provided opportunities to speak and agitate for more radical positions and actions while simultaneously supporting steps being taken by folks from the communities who were operating outside of any political formation and sought to work in ways that directly went against government or community “leaderships” sanctioned plans and conduct. Out of these actions, connections and dialogue could be had about what the needs of the communities are, beyond these one time explosions of anti-racist action. For anarchists, an assessment of the confidence and abilities of our forces could be made. Anarchist revolutionaries wanted to spread and popularize ARA, but personal and group development was equally important. This process of developing a nuclei, or cadre, of fighters is an important point of militant, extra-legal activity.

The ability of a movement like ARA to resist the emergence of a centralized, top-down structure where there would be a minority determining the politics and the strategy, would be found though the widest possible discussion and planning within the various ARA circles, and stressing the collective process. It happened on more than one occasion that one person would form an ARA group and would attempt to exercise ownership over it. Others who would come into the group would feel as if their opinions and work were subordinate to a few who may have greater economic resources or social influence. As with any growing movement, the result was an attraction of individuals who sought to use the movement for their own ends, rather than making ARA the property of the whole of the membership. These groups did not last long within ARA, but they had the effect of alienating many new and enthused ac-

While keeping the militancy and uncompromising attitude that ARA had been built on, anarchists in ARA made efforts to address the weakness that had run through ARA earlier. Attention to Queer struggles, Patriarchy, imbalance of power between whites and people of color, were all issues thrown to the fore now.

ARA Minneapolis was trying to turn itself into a popular, anti-authoritarian direct action group. Institutionalized oppressions of class society were given as much priority to thought and action as the continued struggle against nazi organizing. From police brutality to anti-war activity to actions to defend abortion clinics, ARA was a much more dynamic organization and this aided in its recruitment of new militants.

ARA had ceased to be a group centered around Skinhead culture, and while the limited potential of ARA’s first wave had been overcome, problems would still plague the group. Understanding class, gender, sexual definition and internal sexism would continue to be a challenge for ARA. By 1993, ARA in Minneapolis had reached a stage where after an extremely intense and inwardly focused grappling with group and individual identity, ARA almost totally fell apart and for the next year ARA remained dormant. It was now in Canada that ARA would find its strength.

On the Prowl and in the Streets

Toronto ARA was formed in 1992 as a response to a rise in nazi activity in the city. Arson, vandalism, and physical attacks were being carried out by fascists. Made up of anti-prison activists, native/indigenous organizers, anti-racists, anarchists, and kids from the local punk and skinhead scenes, ARA went to work to challenge and shutdown the fascists.

At this point the main organization of fascists in Toronto was the Heritage Front (HF). Founded by long time neo-nazi

and KKK organizers, the HF was attempting to bring the different nazi tendencies together under its banner. The most well known of these fascist groups was the pre-Matt Hale COTC (Church of the Creator) which served as the “muscle” to the HF’s political rhetoric.

Through the work done by ARA in the States and its promotion in the radical anti-imperialist press, Love and Rage’s newspaper, and the punk scenes many publications (in particular magazines like *MRR* and *Profane Existence*), ARA as a name and model seemed to be the best avenue for organizing a grass roots, militant, and independent anti-racist project.

Like previous ARA organizing, emphasis was put on creating a visible culture through music shows, literature, and mass in your face demonstrations. ARA Toronto was having organizing meetings of over a hundred and their demos were in the several of hundreds. Toronto ARA quickly became a successful campaign and it’s establishment in youth scenes and areas of Toronto like Kennington Market made it impossible for fascists to carry out their activity openly. ARA proceeded to go after the HF leadership and held “outings”, instead of organizing boring demos with speakers talking to the wind, ARA mobilized to march on the homes and hangouts of the nazis.

While previous incarnations of ARA had envisioned themselves moving towards a broad youth oriented style of organizing, it was Toronto ARA which really illustrated the potentials for ARA to do just that. The support and interest ARA created in less than a year’s time was seen when an anti-HF demo in downtown Toronto in January of 1993 drew over 500 anti-racists who were going to prevent HF members from marching through the streets. The ARA contingent was attacked by police on horse back, with some ARA members being arrested for assaulting police.

Despite the attack, ARA found the demo an overall success. The demo sought to shut down the nazi march and it did that, but it went further and showed ARA as an organization unin-

to meet up with sympathetic groups, and boldly stating that the aim of it’s counter-protesting was to “shut down” the rallies, ARA established itself as the group that rolled out to force the racists to take flight.

In particular, there was a massive riot that erupted when the Robb Klan faction came under attack from Black residents and ARA’ers in Ann Arbor. Police attacked the crowd using tear gas. Several Klansmen and fascists were wounded by protesters. Six years later, that riot is still talked about in Ann Arbor, partly due to continued legal issues brought on by the subsequent arrest of dozens of anti-racists charged with inciting and participating in mob action and assault. The arrests came two months after the Ann Arbor action, when at another Klan rally in Kalazamoo, Michigan, police using both video tape and statements made by “peace” marshals, identified several activists. The “peace” marshals, whose ranks were comprised of mostly older male Trade Unionists, had seen their influence and authority at the Ann Arbor rally ignored and undermined – they had been unable to prevent anti-Klan protesters from (un)peacefully taking matters into their own hands. While Ann Arbor was seen as a victory for anti-racists, the later arrests seriously demoralized many ARA’ers and showed that ARA was not completely ready for the repercussions of its activity. Many arrested activists felt let down and un-supported. The combination of high legal costs and the potential of lengthy jail time left many activists feeling alone and insufficiently supported. Even more, without a solid political understanding of how these actions were part of a broader strategy, it is easy to see how the stress could make some question the relevance of what ARA was doing. There were cases of activists asking why they were risking so much for a few hours of street fighting. This is a real concern that should not be discounted.

Many radicals in ARA could point to the significance of the mass action: sharpening political differences and solidify-

been foreseen. In ARA, there had long been debate about expanding our role and focus beyond the most basic anti-racist organizing. Many saw ARA as a grassroots direct action, anti-racist, anti-nazi, and for many ARA'ers, anti-cop movement. But explicit anti-capitalism was never taken up as a whole. Within several individual chapters this would have been probable, mostly in the anarchist dominated groups in Minneapolis, Detroit (two cities that also had L&R members as active ARA organizers) and Chicago. But within ARA, there were tendencies that saw adopting more explicit politics as potentially detrimental to ARA. Seattle helped to turn this around.

But this gets too far ahead, it is important to first outline the pre-Seattle ARA period and raise what events were fueling its growth and significance.

Throughout the Midwestern United States, Klan groups were on the offensive and holding blatantly provocative mass rallies that could attract hundreds of supporters. The Klan and assorted neo-Nazi allies were pinpointing cities that were faced with tinderbox-like racial tension. Fights around affirmative action, welfare, police brutality, housing, continued school desegregation practice, or any struggle that brought about conflicts that poised people of color against the interests of White Supremacy in either its institutionalized form or autonomous actions by White citizens, the Klan would use as an opportunity to polarize the debate and saw their numbers and influence grow. Klan groups, like the one lead by longtime KKK member and neo-Nazi Tom Robb, became seen as fighters for White "rights."

From Cincinnati, Ohio to Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Klan started holding its demos but the effect was that thousands of counter demonstrators came out to vent their disapproval and hatred of the racists. In some of these cities the smoldering racial tension that had long been present was about to be ignited. It was this counter-organizing that became the main thrust of the ARA Network. Doing pre-rally agitating, trying

interested in playing the games of established liberal "anti-racist" and left groups. ARA knew that direct action was a more powerful force than lobbying for State action or selling papers – two things which will never stop racist and fascist organizing.

The success, and draw towards, ARA's work would soon catch the attention of larger political Left groups. Organizations like the IS (International Socialist) tried to enter into ARA, but after a period of a couple months were voted out by a 2/3 majority. However, ARA now a known force and center for militant youths and activists would be sought out more and more for joint actions and Left groups would try and place themselves into a position of "leadership" within ARA, this especially with the formation of the ARA Network in 1995.

We Go Where They Go

In 1995 several different groups came together to discuss creating a united front of various independent anti-racist forces. ARA had reemerged in Minneapolis and met with members of the MAFNet (Midwest Antifascist Network), an ARA-type group that contained several Left tendencies from anarchists to smaller Marxist groups like the Trotskyist League to older SDS veterans.

After much debate, the new body would be called the Anti-Racist Action Network, and would be held together by the 'Points of Unity' (POU). Any individual could participate in a chapter so long as they agreed to the POU (although, different chapters could have additional political points of unity, reflecting the specific groups political orientation. This would later cause trouble where one groups POU would be taken as the Networks). Strategically, it brought in a larger mass of people and could be a vehicle for taking direct action and democratic left ideas of organizing to a higher level. The new ARA Net was also genuine in its not being a front for any one political group.

Utilizing internal discussion bulletins, national meetings, having a delegate system to facilitate decision making between the different chapters, ARA Net represented something new and fresh. And it also was an overwhelmingly anti-authoritarian organization. A sizable segment of the membership identified as anarchist and were now in a position to argue for anarchist models of organizing. There was no other movement that was currently existing that saw anarchists in a position to define avenues of action.

Anarchists involved with Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation worked within ARA to keep the organizations structure and aims transparent and participatory. Love and Rage, as an organization, viewed ARA as a potential mass movement (e.g.: SDS), where politics could be raised and debated and where through practice and constant analysis win people to more and more radical positions. The relationship between the different political tendencies was often rocky, and there was constant debate around the setting up of different committees and how much influence they would have. Other issues of contention were the ability of organizations to join ARA en masse. ARA Net was set up on a chapter basis, and each chapter was made up of individuals. No organization could just join ARA Net. Chapters could have its members coming from any tendency, but a specific organization could hold no sway beyond the number of chapters their members were apart of. And even then each chapter was allowed only two votes. This made it difficult for Left sects to highjack ARA for opportunistic interests.

The next several years saw hundreds of activists join up with ARA. Network annual conferences could easily see 500 in attendance and conference weekends would be a mix of both decision making plenary and educational workshops with topics ranging from anti-Prison work to Colonialism to State repression to developments in the Far Right movements.

But the life's blood of ARA remained its action in the streets. The following years from '96 to '98 provided ARA militants the greatest chance of demonstrating the politics of the movement on a much more mass level. But this period would also emerge as the most difficult period in ARA's life. From accountability, to the need for a more coherent analysis of race, class and gender, these issues along with the ever present need to struggle against sexism, patriarchy and internal power imbalances would come to dominate the movement unlike at any time previously. Internal conflicts would split ARA at the seams and it would take the pulse of the new protest movements erupting in Seattle '99 to give help ARA a new focus and energy.

Let the Battle Begin

Newspapers were scrambling for info on the new street militants and their ideology of anarchism, debate started to rage in the radical press. The Black Bloc was seen by some as misled youth, interested only in adventurism. Sometimes the Black Bloc was condemned outright and treated as criminal – an attitude that rolled in from the established Left. During riots, liberal and leftists do-gooders actually tried to defend capitalist property from the anarchists. In several instances, avowed 'pacifists' have attacked the Black Bloc in an effort to protect places like the Gap and Starbucks.

The actions by the Black Bloc and anarchists turned traditional politics on its head... ARA groups quickly defended the Seattle Black Bloc, seeing a similarity in tactics and motivation -- also in the way that militant anti-fascism had suffered from the denunciations by the established left and liberal reformists.

The Seattle events had an immense effect on the ARA movement. ARA, like many groups, was taken by surprise when the Battle of Seattle erupted. The profound change the demonstrations had on political discourse and life itself could hardly have