

punk & politics

by Greg Pason

Hardcore punk and politics have had an up and down relationship, but separating the two is nearly impossible. The energy and angst of punk and hardcore tend to bring out the best and worst of bands, and “non-political” bands tend to be “non-political” in name only.

For me, the punk and hardcore movement were and are interchangeable. Homelessness in my late teens (the mid-80s), drew me to the North Jersey and NYC hardcore scene – a scene filled with youth in similar situations. I became politically active and socially aware around issues of police brutality, racism and housing issues. As a young skinhead, I organized with others to fight back against racism and support Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice and helped to found Red and Anarchist Skinheads (RASH).

Years of involvement in music -- whether starting short-lived bands or booking shows or festivals -- has merged my political work and activity within the hardcore punk “scene,” a scene that I’m happy my son is now part of.

Dual Power & DIY Punk

The libertarian-socialist idea of “dual power” calls for building “a new society within the shell of the old.” Every DIY space, band-organized show, fanzine and pirate radio show follows that ethic. This applies to other music scenes but has been a big part of the DIY punk movement. The idea is not just to set up an independent space for music but a community space where issues can be addressed and skills can be learned -- a space where community can practice solidarity. A DIY Punk motto is “Fix Shit Up.” Thousands of young people have learned about building community, addressing problems without the involvement of the state or police, and sharing resources and building relationships in punk collectives and events.

Rock Against Racism – Punk for Punk/Against

I’d like to focus on projects I’ve been working on in the last 15 years -- a series of projects that allowed bands and movement organizations to coordinate activities and promote left ideas.

Rock Against Racism followed the lead of the many Rock Against Racism events held in the US and UK in the 80s. These events were mostly set up to combat racism in the scene and righting groups attending events an recruiting membership at shows. In 2003, we had our first Punk Against Racism show in Hoboken, New Jersey, overlooking lower Manhattan. This was the first since 9/11. After months of red tape and negotiations with Hoboken, we were able to pull it together. It was the beginning of a few Rock Against Racism events, bringing together left and anti-racist activists at the punk scene.



Starting in 2005 the Punk for/Punk against series started. This was a series of punk shows in New Jersey, which focused on issues (for or against) where bands played, DIY grassroots organizations tables were set up, and a safe political space was created. Events included Punk Against Racism, Punk for Economic Justice, Punk Against Xenophobia. We created an ongoing space for political bands and DIY organizations to meet, table, socialize and share ideas. It also serves as a way for Anglo and Latino punk scenes to play the same bill -- something that did not happen often enough.

One of our best events was a Punk for Economy show where we screened a documentary film on political prisoner and SPUSA ally, Farouk Abdel Muhti. A screening in the basement of a punk club filled with 70-year-old Palestinian activists and 20+ punks was hosted by SP member Sharin Chiorazzio, who recently passed away.

These were the first events my son Trevor started to at-

tend. Punk for Punk Against continues to this day with the support of solid venues willing to donate space.



ABC-No-Rio

A space I've been involved in over the last 20 years is ABC-No-Rio. ABC is a former squat that has been transformed into a community center. Volunteer collectives run it and the punk/hardcore collective is just one of those formations. All shows are all-ages, alcohol-free (this just applies to the punk/hc shows, not other events in the space). Racism, sexism and homophobia are not tolerated. ABC has served as an alternative to misogynistic clubs, and provides a safe space for all-age shows where political and punk are interchangeable.

ABC-No-Rio was borne in the early 80s as an art space set up in an abandoned building. Over the next 10 years, various art collectives were created, and battles with the city, real estate developers, and police continued.

The first punk shows started in the early 90s, and they continue to this day. All shows are run by a punk/hardcore collective which operates on consensus and are all volunteer-run. All shows are structured with 1/3 of the

proceeds going to the space to cover insurance and 2/3 of the proceeds going to the bands. The building also includes a screen-printing lab, dark room, computer lab and zine library.

My involvement in ABC started in 1994 when I was active in RASH and Love & Rage (an anarchist collective in New York City). I got back involved (as an "old timer") as my son became interested in punk. ABC also serves as a community center and info space. SPUSA member, Jerry Levy, performed "Marx in Soho" this winter as a fundraiser for Occupy Sandy.

As part of the ABC collective, I've also been part of organizing the free summer fest "Punk Island." Make Music New York, a non-profit in New York City, has been working with the ABC-No-Rio punk/hardcore collective to bring a large free concert to NYC every summer. I've worked as a co-stage manager over the last two years and will continue the project this year. The event will have seven stages of approximately 100 bands. Last year, my stage -- DIY Punk! -- included tabling from the SPUSA, Earth First!, Milk not Jails, IWW, and many others on Governor's Island. This year's event is scheduled for Staten Island on June 22nd.

Many similar projects happen across the US. Young activists and older-scene vets work to build safe spaces and support each other while building our little part of the "new society in the shell of the old."

