

Anarchy in Eugene

A Sleepy College Town Explodes

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The “Whiteaker” is Eugene, Oregon’s oldest and poorest neighborhood. Over the past few years some significant anarchy-type situations have developed in Eugene, especially in Whiteaker.

Icky’s Tea House, open from 1994 to 1997, was an anti-institution institution, a haven for the dispossessed and disaffected. Everything at Icky’s was mainly free, including a library, video night, food for the homeless, and bike repair.

After four years, this non-commercial refuge went under, succumbing to increasing pressure from the pigs and a nasty, liberal merchant. A May 1996 punk show benefit for Ted Kaczynski wasn’t exactly seen as a bid for acceptance by the straights. The fall of Icky’s (a “hotbed of anarchy” as the local media had it) was a bitter defeat for many in the neighborhood.

In June 1997, City Hall executed a Sunday morning stealth move in support of building a downtown parking garage. Two dozen trees got axed, tree-sitters were forced down by pepper spray, and just about everyone in the area, protesters or not, got maced as well.

While most protesters fled the area, a smaller group marched through the mall smashing out the windows of the much despised SYMANTEC computer corporation and ripping up parking meters.

A more successful fight, at this time, turned out to be something of a watershed. Business owners near Scobert Gardens, a small Whiteaker park, wanted it closed because of the presence of dopers and other undesirables. Many, including those associated with Icky’s Tea House, wanted it kept open.

Tore Down The Fences

A rough consensus was reached after public discussion: the park would be fenced off, ostensibly to allow foliage regrowth. After the city initially stated it would go along with the wishes of the neighborhood, the park was officially closed.

Response to this heavy-handedness was immediate: people hung “Free Scobert Park” banners in the trees, chalked slogans on the sidewalk, held sleep-ins, and tore down the fences night after night. The city and its police restored the barriers each morning, but soon gave up and the park remains open. Scobert was a lovely neighborhood victory.

February 1998 was the dawn of Eugene’s pirate radio Station, 98.5 Cascadia Free Radio, a project of many devoted activists, including several anarchists. Some of the more radical shows include The Anarchy Hour, The Ned Ludd hour, the No Comply Show and Revolutionary Nihilist among others.

Around this time, the Fall Creek tree-sits began, with many radical environmentalists and anarchists from Eugene, and elsewhere fighting a lumber company and the Forest Service to preserve some of the last remaining Oregon old growth. The tree-sitters face constant harassment from the authorities, but refuse to leave the forest.

In Summer 1998, there were two other impressive wins for the people of the Whiteaker. The first involved 25 old maples, lining three blocks in the heart of the area. The trees had been drastically damaged by the local power company a few years before to make room for heavy-duty power lines, and the city claimed the neighborhood's signature feature was now too damaged to remain. Popular response was immediate and the beautiful trees are still standing.

Last summer, an explicitly anarchist campaign began, one component of which was property damage. The tactic of sustained targeted vandalism has been a huge step forward and put anarchy on the map.

Predictably, this new stage of contestation was ignored by the media for several months. It was, however the number one topic of discussion in the Whiteaker.

Two of the main neighborhood targets were the Red Barn Grocery, whose owner had engaged in a devious bring-down-Icky's-Tea-House-campaign, and the Blair Island Cafe, an expensive, potentially gentrifying presence in Eugene's poorest district. Their intentions were clear: Drive out the poor; bring in the rich. The Red Barn Grocery, unfortunately, survives, but the Blair Island Cafe, scene of repeated property damage, closed down.

Visualize Industrial Collapse

All around Eugene, anarchists began targeting fast-food chains, yuppie gentrifiers, computer companies and other agents of exploitation. Billboards and walls were graffitied with Free Ted Kaczynski, Visualize Industrial Collapse, and Property is Theft and other antiauthoritarian slogans.

On a late night in August last year, following a concert by eco-radical musicians, TchKung!, the band pumped up so much energy in the audience that nearly all the concert-goers marched through downtown Eugene, blocking traffic, beating drums, and eating fire for an impromptu street parade. Anarchists urged the crowd to march to the Fifth Street Public Market, where a security guard had assaulted an activist trying to save trees from being cut to make way for a new Niketown store.

Many people marched with the anarchists attacking car lots, government vehicles and yuppie businesses, until they reached the Nike town construction site; There they shredded the fence, and dispersed as the police arrived. Nobody was arrested.

Another step forward was a protest at the local Nike outlet in October 1998. What began as a standard-issue demo aimed at abusive child-labor practices and other corporate misdeeds of Nike, ended up far more serious. A dozen masked anarchists entered the store and trashed it.

Demonstrators set off firecrackers, smashed pumpkins, destroyed displays and pitched merchandise over a balcony into a fountain two stories below. All involved evaded arrest, and news of the Nike Riot, as it was dubbed, spread far and wide.

In November, a SWAT team raided the home of the parents of a 15-year-old anarchist, who was accused of being at the turbulent Nike scene. The cops occupied the house for seven hours while holding the couple on the floor at gunpoint, and removing a roomful of personal property.

The local newspaper suppressed the story of this outrageous Gestapo-style raid almost as totally as they had the ongoing damage to various businesses, banks, and a police substation.

Two days after the raid, a cable public access program, Cascadia Alive, presented a panel discussion on the topic of violent tactics. (Besides the Nike action, October was the month of the \$12 million arson of a Vail, Colorado ski resort by the Earth Liberation Front.) The participants generally favored violent property destruction and expressed dissatisfaction with tamer, less effective means.

Endorsing Illegal Tactics

The show featured a segment that has become notorious: A masked member of the Black Army Faction, a hardcore anarchist group, read a statement vigorously endorsing illegal and subversive tactics. According to a reporter, the show has become required study for federal investigators, especially after the Vail arson and the \$500,000 torching of the US Forest Industries headquarters in Medford, Oregon in December.

1998 ended with the vandalizing, for the third time in three months, of a van belonging to Whiteaker resident and Eugene Police Department employee, Todd Schneider (better known as the neighborhood police snitch and wolf in sheep's clothing).

A few so-called anarchists held a candlelight vigil in support of liberal family-man Schneider, horrified by the damage and the "Die Pig" graffiti on his vehicle. These anarchists were embarrassed, however, to learn that Schneider had, three years before, publicly defended a fellow pig who shot two unarmed people to death within a six month period.

In early 1999, *The Black-Clad Messenger*, a periodical appeared devoted to attacking the industrial/authoritarian system, protest-as-usual lameness and other forms of pseudo-opposition, and even civilization itself. Along with this publication, the new, no-holds-barred, anarchist (dis)organization Anarchist Action Collective has done a great deal of tabling at community events to present anarchist analysis and perspectives.

This past winter, after months of the anarchy offensive, mainstream media began to comment on it. The daily *Register Guard* and talk radio were abuzz with the story of anarchy in Eugene. Recently, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter spent five days in town recently exploring the movement and more media attention is in the cards, unavoidably.

Meanwhile, the heat has increased, and two people have been arrested on felony charges stemming from the Nike action. Here, as elsewhere, an increasingly militarized police presence harasses, intimidates and assaults people it considers a threat to work-and-pay slavery.

More and more folks see themselves as anarchists. It is becoming obvious that anarchy is the only alternative and opposition to the devouring system that ravages the individual, society and the biosphere. Liberalism, leftism and various single-issue approaches are still with us, but a worsening reality exposes their severe limitations as it evokes a deeper indictment of what envelops us.

Anarchy—and certainly not just in Eugene—increasingly poses a vision of life that is not based on money, technology, mass-production, or mass-consumption. More and more, anarchy is primitivist or it is nothing, just as it is militant or it is nothing—a vision clearly distinct from what we must end.

Area Reports (sidebar)

Whether you're building giant puppets or fighting puppets of the state, we want to hear about what's happening in your area to build communities of resistance. Tactics and strategies vary broadly from community to community, and we need to know what is working and what isn't. Radical opposition seems more reasonable with each new war and official scandal. Let's move on it!

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