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Anarchists

continued from page 1

Most anarchists fall somewhere between these two extremes.

Reflecting this division within the anarchist community, Eugene anarchist activity is Janus-faced. Headline-grabbing violent protests counterbalance peaceful organizations and programs aimed at cultivating strong community ties.

Riots in the streets

The first direct-action protest that put Eugene anarchism in the spotlight was the vandalism of NikeTown Eugene in November 1998, when a handful of anarchists trashed the inside of the store.

The anarchist community had been developing in the Whiteaker area for a few years before the vandalism, and anarchists were beginning to make their presence known.

The NikeTown attack "was a step forward," Zerzan said. "It was beginning to be announced that something was going on."

In June 1999, an anarchist rally in downtown turned into a five-hour riot of vandalism, looting and defying police. Then came the World Trade Organization protest, when Eugene anarchists participated in the first of a worldwide series of massive protests against international institutions.

On April 24, 2000, about 100 protesters, many of them anarchists, took to the streets to protest the imprisonment of Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is on death row for killing a police officer. Last June, a re-enactment of the 1999 protest-turned-riot led to a large protest and the arrest of more than 60 people, including two anarchists who were convicted of arson.

Area anarchists say these protests are vital to their community because they bring attention to anarchist ideas, as well as help anarchists make connections with other activists.

"For a lot of people, it's the first time defying authority for a moral conviction," anarchist Marshall Kirkpatrick said. "Making that step is a real meaningful opportunity for some people. It's one thing for someone to have a philosophical opinion of the world, and it's another to put your safety on the line as many of us do."

Kirkpatrick and other anarchists expect more large-scale protests this year in Eugene and throughout the world.

"This movement is really going to be big, starting this year," Zerzan said. "It's just going to make Seattle and all that look pretty small."

Such massive protests have made their mark in the Eugene community, specifically in police

policy. Since the Eugene Police Department was caught off-guard by the June 1999 riot, the department and the Police Commission have analyzed and altered crowd-control tactics and use-of-force policies.

Within the Whiteaker neighborhood, anarchist slogans are often spray-painted on walls, and the EPD Public Safety station in the area has been vandalized numerous times. But police are hesitant to attribute these crimes to anarchists, stating that copycat vandals might be to blame.

"Anarchist stuff is really a non-issue," said EPD officer Richard Bremer, the Whiteaker Public Safety Station manager. "They're here. We co-exist, and everybody goes about their business."

But anarchists generally disagree, saying they are often targeted by police. Eugene anarchists have actively participated in the Independent Police Review Project, a community organization that area activists founded last summer as a forum for complaints about the EPD.

Free food, radical thought

Between protests, anarchists try to cultivate a community ambiance in the Whiteaker area through projects offering free food and radical thought. Eugene anarchism often takes on a social feel more than a revolutionary one.

Organizers of Eugene's version of Food Not Bombs cook and serve free, vegan meals at the Washington-Jefferson Park every day at 4 p.m., except Mondays. Food Not Bombs, a nationwide program, was founded in 1980 in Boston to protest hunger and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Until recently, one could see dozens of people every morning at West Third Avenue and Van Buren Street drinking coffee and socializing at an event dubbed "Café Anarquista." This activity has lagged recently because some organizers moved out of the area and because of bad weather. Though mostly non-confrontational, Café Anarquista organizers had a run-in with the EPD last summer when several people were ticketed for blocking the sidewalk.

At the same location, The Shamrock Info-Shop, which opened in December, is an anarchist hangout with a full kitchen and a library of radical literature.

"Its intent is to extend the amount of literature to the public," said Cheryl Reinhart, who owns the 60-year-old house where the Info-Shop is located. "It's a really important thing for our neighborhood because Whiteaker doesn't have one place to gather where people don't have to pay for something."

Reinhart, who doesn't consider herself an anarchist, hopes the Info-Shop will become the hub for another ongoing Whiteaker project called Free Skool, which is organized by various community members and offers grassroots clinics on topics ranging from wilderness survival to flu immunizations.

Also, the Subversive Pillow Theatre, an activist-organized weekly showing of radical films and videos, might move from the Grower's Market Building at 454 Willamette St. to the Info-Shop.

On the airwaves, Radio Free Cascadia broadcasts from the Whiteaker area, and television shows Cascadia Alive! and Anarchist Forum air on cable access.

Dreams of revolution

Despite all this activity, there is a sense of cynicism and hopelessness among many Eugene anarchists. Few anarchists expect to see a sweeping revolution in America during their lifetimes.

"There used to be more idealism and optimism," Zerzan said, describing the '60s activist movement when he was first introduced to radical thought. "Today, somebody will ask even the people willing to fight in the streets if they think they'll win, and they'll say 'no.'"

This cynicism is understandable. Every major American institution, from police to government, directly stands in the way of the anarchist cause.

Still, some anarchists, such as Zerzan, are optimistic that some type of change will occur.

"Who knows, maybe we won't get anywhere," Zerzan said. "But I think there's a worldwide movement starting, and we're going to see how bad people think things are, how badly they want freedom and health, life and authenticity."

There is also an understanding among many anarchists that a new form of protest is needed to accompany or replace the mass street protests the world has seen during the past two years.

"Unfortunately, police in this town and others have figured out how to stop street protests," said an area anarchist using the pseudonym Amanda West.

West said new tactics should be devised that would rally the larger community around the anarchist cause.

"Mass change isn't going to come from a bunch of black-clad kids in Whiteaker," she said. "I don't think the world is going to change tomorrow. Nobody knows what is going to happen, but I do have great hope that something will happen."

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