New Developments in Anarchist Studies

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Published by Punctum Books

lilley, pj and Jeff Shantz.
New Developments in Anarchist Studies.

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Radical Politics in a Conservative Capital: Anarchist Groups and Projects in Edmonton

Robert Hlatky

“It can be alienating to be a leftist in general when it is not accepted in an extremely conservative environment, so it’s important to have organizations and events to come together and realize we have power together. Also to see that we provide food, childcare, like all that stuff [at the anarchist bookfair], it’s not just a book, we’re creating a microcosm of what we’d like the world to be.”

—Thomas, interviewee

1 Submitted as presented to the January 2014 NAASN conference (so “current” dates included are from then.)
Introduction

Anarchist theories and practices have been taken up in a variety of different places around the world, though they are often understudied in local contexts. This lack of academic research on anarchism includes anarchist projects in Alberta, Canada. Most people in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, are unaware of the local anarchist organizations; nonetheless, there has been a considerable amount of anarchist activity in the city. In addition to individuals who identify with and advocate anarchism, there are anarchist groups, public events and numerous outlets for the production and distribution of anarchist literature in Edmonton. Except for this research project, there has not been an academic study of anarchism in Edmonton. Even at the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair there has been no literature specifically concerning anarchism in Edmonton. Additionally, the University of Alberta’s print and online libraries, as well as the Edmonton Public Library, do not have any material concerning anarchism in Edmonton.

At first anarchism in Alberta may seem surprising, as it is the most conservative province in Canada. The Government of Alberta has been consecutively ruled by a majority Progressive Conservative Party for over four decades. No other provincial government in the country has held such solid political dominance. Nonetheless, Edmonton can be viewed as an island of liberalism in Alberta, since the majority of non-conservative MLAs, and the only
non-conservative MP, represent the city.

This chapter will provide an overview of the history of the various anarchists groups in Edmonton, including their tactics and purposes. The research conducted for this chapter was originally undertaken for my Master of Arts degree in sociology at the University of Alberta. My thesis studied anarchist theorizing and organizing in Edmonton, in which I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with self-identified anarchists from the city. Considerable detail about many of the groups discussed in this chapter was provided by the interviewees, some of whom were founding members, while others were participants. For other groups, I have relied on document analysis of electronic material discussing their purpose and activities. Eight of the interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms\(^1\) to maintain anonymity, while two interviewees, Eugene Plawiuk and Malcolm Archibald, preferred to have their roles directly acknowledged.

**A Brief Historical Overview of Anarchism in Edmonton**

The first record of an anarchist visiting Edmonton was Peter Kropotkin in 1898 (Kropotkin, 1898). The railroad had recently been extended to Edmonton, which had been incorporated as a town earlier that decade. The first group in Edmonton which had a relationship with anarchism

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\(^1\) The interviewees’ pseudonyms are Thomas, Fabian Graves, Claire, Blaine, Phinneas Gage, Eric, Jake and Rob Caballero. They had the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms.
was The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW became active in Edmonton in 1912, when they supported striking sewer construction workers (Edmonton Public Library, n.d.). In an effort to halt the IWW, the police arrested the secretary of the Edmonton IWW, and charged him with vagrancy (Caragata, 1979), which was a tactic used against multiple Edmonton IWW members during that period (McCormack, 1991). During the 1913-1914 depression, the Edmonton IWW organized unskilled and transient workers, as well as held numerous marches and rallies that attracted approximately one thousand participants (Chubb, 2012; Schulze, 1990). In February 1914, after the Edmonton IWW had been agitating railroad workers to use direct action, the police “raided the IWW hall and evicted two hundred jobless men who had been living there” (McCormack, 1991, p. 111). The IWW in Edmonton and Calgary consisted mainly of Marxists and it appears that Canadian IWW members were unaware of the anarchist influences in their tactics and in the founding of the IWW (Chubb, 2012). The One Big Union (OBU) was organized after the IWW was banned in Canada under the War Measures Act. The OBU organized the Edmonton General Strike of 1919 in conjunction with the Winnipeg General Strike. The Edmonton General Strike lasted one month and largely brought local production to a standstill (Plawiuk, 1994).

In 1927, Emma Goldman spent more than a week in Edmonton. She presented over a dozen lectures on a variety of topics, including anarchism, to an array of
audiences, including University of Alberta (U of A) professors, Jewish groups, a women’s club and labor meetings (Goldman, 1931/1970). At one of her lectures she spoke to an audience of 1500 (Plawiuk, 2007). Even though Goldman was a radical, she was allowed to speak in Edmonton because she was critical of the Soviet Union (Moritz & Moritz, 2001).

The first anarchist groups that appeared in Edmonton formed during the early 1970s. Black Cat Press, an anarchist printer and publisher, and Erewhon Books, an anarchist bookstore, were the primary expressions of anarchism in the city. They made anarchist literature available in Edmonton and produced their own material about theory and local issues. During this time, local anarchists printed *News from Nowhere*, an anarchist paper printed by Black Cat Press, which was one of the first anarchist journals in Canada. The IWW in Edmonton was reformed in the early 1970s. With the expansion of neoliberal policies and cultural attitudes, local leftwing groups became largely inactive until the 1990s, in connection with student organizing and the development of the anti-globalization movement. During the early 2000s, as this chapter will describe, anarchism has become increasingly popular in Edmonton, with the development of various anarchist groups. Most of the anarchist projects discussed in this chapter are volunteer-based, subverting the wage system and promoting a community of anarchists and activists. Thomas’ quote, at the beginning of this chapter, is indicative of the role of prefiguration in anarchist prac-
tice, in which anarchists are setting up alternative social structures outside mainstream capitalist political and economic institutions.

The organizations discussed in this chapter have explicitly and implicitly practiced and promoted anarchist theory. The first section describes the various local anarchist groups, with the exception of the IWW which is included because of the influence of the Edmonton branch on local anarchists. The second section discusses groups and events which have anarchistic elements, though they are not necessarily explicitly motivated by anarchist theory. Both sections review each group or project chronologically. The dates recorded are as accurate as I could ascertain; however, some of the dates are estimations, as they have not been documented before.

**Anarchist Organizations, Collectives, Affinity Groups and Projects**

**Black Cat Press, 1972 - current**

Black Cat Press is a commercial printer and anarchist publisher in Edmonton, founded by Malcolm Archibald. Initially, Black Cat Press started as an IWW shop in the 1970s. It was originally a hobby for Malcolm, but in the early 1990s he decided to work full-time at the press. Black Cat Press employs several unionized staff members. The majority of its business is commercial printing, including printing for unions and non-profit organiza-
tions. Yet, it also publishes classical and contemporary anarchist theory as well as histories on anarchism and labor organizing. The main reason Malcolm started Black Cat Press was because there was not a local anarchist printer. Malcolm recollected:

I used to work in the underground press in the sixties and early seventies and it was always a problem getting our newspapers printed... Usually the commercial printers weren’t the worst ones; it was the left-wing printers that wanted to censor our paper. They wanted to read every line and make sure that it was politically correct from their point of view.

Other leftwing groups, including communists and social democrats, were unwelcoming to the influence of anarchism in the 1970s. From Malcolm’s perspective, it was important for anarchists to have their own literature published and available in the community. Black Cat Press temporarily stopped publishing in the early 1980s because there was declining interest in the subject matter. As Malcolm noted, unlike in the 1970s when there was a network of radical publishers, during the 1980s these publishers and bookstores were closing in Canada. They returned to publishing in the 2000s.

When Black Cat Press started, they sold a considerable amount of their material through mail-order, which is now done online. There are currently twenty-two books, including several short books, in the publications section on their website. The catalogue includes classical anarchist
Theorists, such as Peter Kropotkin, Michael Bakunin and Errico Malatesta. Malcolm has translated into English, for the first time, and published the three volumes of Nestor Makhno’s memoirs (2007; 2009; 2011), the leader of the Ukrainian anarchist military during the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Contemporary anarchist literature which they have published includes a book by Graham Purchase (2011), an Australian anarchist mainly interested in ecology, and two books by Arthur J. Miller (2012a; 2012b), an IWW member, on the maritime and mining industries. Malcolm has translated studies into English, including one on 20th century anarcho-syndicalism (Damier, 2009) and another on the Makhnovist movement (Azarov, 2008). Malcolm is currently working on translating a study of Kropotkin’s travels in Canada.

The Black Cat Press table has been set up at dozens of anarchist bookfairs across Canada. In an interview with AK Press, Malcolm commented that, “Nowadays with this network of bookfairs, if you publish something at least you’re going to reach some kind of an audience” (Zach, 2009). Black Cat Press has inspired many anarchists in the city, including many of the interviewees, who have been influenced by work published by the press.

**Industrial Workers of the World, Edmonton General Membership Branch, 1972 - early 1980s**

The Industrial Workers of World (IWW) was reformed in Edmonton in the summer of 1972 (Chubb, 2012). Unlike
the first Edmonton IWW in the 1910s, by the 1970s there were anarchist members, including Malcolm Archibald and Eugene Plawiuk. Chubb (2012) notes that, “The numbers in the branch were always small at this point, never exceeding more than a dozen” (p. 53). The IWW was mostly involved in solidarity and educational programs during this time. They printed IWW signs and supported labor strikes in the city (Chubb, 2012). Chubb notes that they “ran educational programs targeting unorganized workers and students” as well as hospitality workers (2012, p. 53). Malcolm iterated that anarchists in Edmonton have sought the IWW as the primary organization involved in action, even though the IWW is not an anarchist organization. This is because anarchists in Edmonton have not been able to sustain an anarchist group which practices anarchist actions in the community, besides printing and publishing anarchist literature, whereas the IWW reaches out to more than just the anarchist community. The IWW ended in the early 1980s because important core members moved away (Chubb, 2012).

**Erewhon Books, 1973 - 1984**

Erewhon Books was an anarchist bookstore in Edmonton which started in the early 1970s and was organized as a volunteer-run collective. Malcolm Archibald and Eugene Plawiuk were co-founders of Erewhon Books. It “ran for more than ten years and was the only gay- and- lesbian friendly bookstore in the city” (Chubb, 2012, p. 53). Eugene recalled that it started because there was not a book-
store in Edmonton which explicitly carried anarchist material. The only other leftwing bookstore in Edmonton was the Trotskyist Vanguard Books, but it was not sympathetic to anarchism.

Erewhon Books originally started as a literature table at the U of A campus once a week, although they soon secured a storefront in downtown Edmonton. As a bookstore it was initially open only on Saturdays, but expanded to running Thursdays to Sundays. Malcolm recalled that, “We absorbed more people into the collective and started to carry a wider range of material and kept it open more hours.” The bookstore was relocated approximately six times in Edmonton, mostly in the downtown area.

In order to join the bookstore collective, each member agreed to volunteer once a week at the bookstore and pay a collective fee which contributed to books and rent. There were typically six people in the collective and they did not have paid workers. They met once a week to decide what to order for the bookstore. Members could start their own section at the bookstore if they wanted. Malcolm noted that they “always had a big anarchist section but not everyone in the collective was an anarchist by any means.” Erewhon Books initially carried mostly pamphlets and newspapers, though it eventually expanded into being a more general left-wing bookstore, featuring recent literature and academic journals that were requested as well as self-produced material. The bookstore also silk-screened shirts, pressed buttons and printed posters.
Harold Barclay (2005), an anarchist theorist and University of Alberta Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, wrote about Erewhon Books in his autobiography. In the early 1980s Barclay frequently went to Erewhon; however,

Most of the time... there was only the store clerk to converse with... Many days there were no customers at all. At last, the collective which operated the store became tired of the operation and it folded. During its existence I found it one of the few places where I could go and spend time with those who considered themselves anarchists. (2005, p. 249)

Eugene recalled that, “We slowly declined as people moved away and people got less involved. The stock declined as well…” Eventually they were not able to generate a large enough return and at the end were offsetting the rent from personal income.

**Students Organized Resistance Movement, 1994 - 1998**

The Students Organized Resistance Movement (STORM) was a campus based group in Alberta which protested the growing neoliberal austerity cuts to social services, which they considered a basic human right (STORM, n.d.a). Their primary focus was on education and healthcare and they promoted bottom-up self-organization and collective action. Most of the information pertaining to STORM was obtained from their website, which states “STORM was active between 1994-1998 on the University of Al-
berta, Grant MacEwan College, University of Calgary, Mount Royal College, [and] Southern Alberta Institute for Technology campuses” (STORM, n.d.d, para. 3). Jake was a member and recollected that it was a political campus group which was largely tuition focused. STORM held meetings once a week at the U of A campus, which was open to the public. The decision-making process was based on voting where members presented motions, which could be seconded, amended or rejected.

This group is included in this chapter because STORM’s resolution from both of the group’s conferences explicitly promoted anarchism. The statement from their first conference, held in 1994, noted that “STORM’s ultimate goal is to aid the construction of an anarcho-communist society” (STORM, n.d.a, para. 1). The following year their second conference reasserted their adherence to their original principles “with their emphasis on non-hierarchical structure and democratic decision-making as the basis for the movement’s organization...” (STORM, n.d.c, para. 4).

STORM held “[v]arious teach-ins designed to stimulate critical thinking” encouraging student activism and informing students about current events (STORM, n.d.d, para. 2). Their stance on collective action is that it is “inherently politicizing,” viewing it as giving voice to students (STORM, n.d.b). Their website chronicles various campaigns with which they were involved (STORM, n.d.d). In 1995, they helped deliver approximately 1200 eggs signed by students to Premier Ralph Klein, in re-
response to a comment he made about how students must be fine with budget cuts because they were not throwing eggs at the education minister. The premier called the protesters jackasses and subsequently apologized for his comment. In 1996, STORM helped Albertans travel to Parliament Hill to protest federal budget cuts to social services. One STORM member was arrested for participating in “a civil disobedience action that shut down the Indian Affairs’ ministry office... to protest meager funding for aboriginal students” (STORM, n.d.d, para. 2). In 1997, STORM participated in organizing rallies protesting the Alberta Growth Summit.

**Food Not Bombs, Edmonton chapter, circa 1998 - 2009**

The Edmonton chapter of Food Not Bombs (FNB) started in the late 1990s with the purpose of subverting the capitalist hegemony of a basic human need by providing free vegetarian meals. It was also explicitly protesting militarism and the budgetary allotment of funds towards the production of war and defense equipment instead of fighting hunger and poverty (FNB Edmonton Blog, n.d.). Posters printed by the Edmonton chapter read, “Food Not Bombs because poverty is violence and scarcity is a lie” (Edmonton Activist Literature, 2004a). FNB resists the wage system by recovering edible food that had been thrown out by businesses, including grocery stores, often still in original packaging, which is then cleaned and prepared, then served freely to people in a public space.
The first Food Not Bombs chapter started in 1980 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by anti-nuclear activists (Day, 2005). Richard Day (2005) asserts, “...FNB is a non-branded, decentralized network of autonomous chapters which function internally on a consensus basis” (p. 40). David Graeber (2009) observes that, “Food Not Bombs is not an organization. There is no overarching structure, no membership or annual meetings” (p. 236). It is an idea that food should be used by people who need it, noting that there is a “…shared commitment to egalitarian decision-making and a do-it-yourself (DIY) spirit” (Graeber, 2009, p. 236). Randall Amster (2009) argues that FNB is anarchistic in its structure and operation, being leaderless, spontaneous and opposing capitalist relations of propriety. In the mid 1990s chapters spread across the US and Canada (Graeber, 2009).

The Edmonton chapter sporadically provided food once a week for a decade, changing serving locations and kitchens several times. They have served food in downtown Edmonton, beside City Hall (Kirman, 1999), and in Old Strathcona (FNB Edmonton Blog, n.d.). Besides holding weekly food servings, they provided free food for various activist events and lectures, such as a teach-in on the struggle of Mumia Abu Jamal in 1999 (Plawiuk, n.d.) and the Tar Sands Realities and Resistance Conference in 2007 (Oil Sands Truth, 2007). Like other FNB chapters, The Edmonton FNB chapter has been harassed by the police (Butler & McHenry, 2000).

The majority of members of the Edmonton FNB
chapter were not explicitly anarchist. Nonetheless, both Eric and Jake participated in Food Not Bombs for about a year. Eric reflected, “It is very all over the place but very easy to jump in... we have taken carts of food and fed people.” Jake recalled that, “It did some good things with food servings at public settings at key places where the homeless are often at in the winter.” However, it did not sustain community involvement and Jake argued he eventually saw it as missionary and charity work, instead of political activity:

   It was able to push the envelope in some ways but at some point if you’re not drawing in people from the community that you are targeting, then you are just coming in as missionaries and at some point the main people that wanted to keep doing it ended up going into a center using their kitchens and getting absorbed into that structure and Food not Bombs stopped being what it was and basically came to be individuals helping out at a soup kitchen and lost its politics.

In 2011, the Edmonton FNB web blog announced that they were active again (FNB Edmonton Blog, 2011), yet this seems to be its last record of activity.

**Industrial Workers of the World, General Membership Branch, 1999 - current**

The Edmonton IWW General Membership Branch (GMB) was reorganized for the third time in 1999. According to Chubb (2012), they had approximately 50 act-
ive members by 2010, which at the time made “the Edmonton Branch of the IWW... the second largest in the world” (p. 2). The Edmonton IWW has a variety of functions, including educational outreach, organizing, solidarity and information and skill-sharing. All the interviewees are either currently or have in the past been members of the IWW, though several current members do not regularly attend branch meetings.

The Edmonton IWW has an educational function as it provides workshops and training for members and the general public. They encourage workers to engage in their own workplace struggles to gain greater control of decision-making. The Edmonton IWW helps organize workers’ struggles and labor actions as well as providing a considerable amount of solidarity support, often through members attending local labor pickets. The Edmonton IWW also has an information sharing function; as Blaine iterated, the IWW “also acts as a good clearing house of local activists and labor radicals and it allows a lot of networking to take place that otherwise wouldn’t happen.” Roles within the Edmonton IWW rotate, enabling members to learn how to participate in different roles within the IWW, as well as encouraging direct democracy and facilitating skill-sharing. The IWW offers the Train-the-Trainers program where members are trained to present and facilitate workshops.

Many of the IWW members view other labor unions as business unions, which are supporters of capitalism and the ruling class instead of protecting the interests of the
working-class. The IWW considers the working-class as the only productive class, where the managers and bosses are only concerned with maintaining profit margins and controlling and exploiting workers. Nonetheless, some of the interviewees who are active in the IWW are dual card holders, being members of other unions.

The IWW Preamble advocates abolishing the wage system and capitalism as well as proposing, in classical Marxist language, that the “working-class and the employing class have nothing in common” (IWW, n.d.a, para. 1). The IWW is anti-political, rejecting the effectiveness of state politics. The Edmonton IWW, along with many other branches, has numerous anarchist members, though the IWW is not an anarchist organization. The IWW, as Chubb (2012) has asserted, though not explicitly anarchist, is ideologically within the anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Many of the interviewees took the position that even though the IWW is not an anarchist organization, it embodies many anarchist principles and tactics. Eric commented that, “The IWW is not an anarchist organization but the way we organize, in my feeling, is anarchist. The structure we created is anarchist.” The Edmonton IWW reflects anarchist principles because it is self-organized and non-hierarchical, where workers control the decision-making. It also practices direct action and direct democracy. Many of the interviewees strongly identified with the idea of workplace democracy, where rank-and-file workers drive the decision-making of the structure and function of their work. As Phinneas Gage commen-
We organize workers on the job to gain a sense of empowerment and a greater share of control over the work that they do and a greater share of the wealth they create. Some of that is in the rank-and-file of other unions and some of that is in non-unionized workplaces.

To join the IWW, each member has to belong to the working-class, agree to the IWW Preamble and pay monthly dues. The working-class is not defined as a socioeconomic measure but instead as a relationship to the means of production; therefore, membership is not based on the amount of income but whether one is a worker and not an employer or boss. Individuals cannot join the IWW if they employ people or have hiring and firing managerial responsibilities. Dues are minimal and are based on a scale of income.

The Edmonton IWW holds monthly general meetings, which discusses the various events they are organizing and supporting, reports from officers and delegates, and the business of running the branch. Three committees usually meet once a month for organizing, solidarity and propaganda. Organizationally, the IWW largely operates on Robert’s Rules of Order, though the Edmonton branch operates on a modified version called Rusty’s Rules. GMB meetings are between one and two hours. A chair and recording secretary are elected each meeting and minutes are recorded. There are annual elections from the
rank-and-file membership for secretary positions which run specific tasks within the Edmonton branch, which are all volunteer-based. Many branch members, including many of the interviewees, have served as different secretaries. There are currently six secretary positions, designated for: the branch, finances, communication, organizing, propaganda and literature. Many smaller IWW branches do not have as many secretarial positions. Delegates are also elected to handle membership dues payments.

The Edmonton IWW is a social movement organization which has sustained itself through a constituency, from attracting a group of people, which are not necessarily anarchist, including participants in the labor, student and activist movements. It has maintained membership by creating a collective identity, mainly around direct democracy and solidarity. The IWW will likely maintain its presence in Edmonton.

**Student Workers Action Group, circa 2001 - 2012**

The Student Workers Action Group (SWAG) was a U of A campus group which aimed to strengthen the solidarity between students and workers. SWAG viewed students as part of the working class and “encourage[d] students to examine their situations as workers and be more assertive about their rights in the workplace” (APIRG, 2006, p. 4). According to a newspaper article, “SWAG was created to advocate accessible, democratic education and working
environments...” (Olson, 2001, Nov. 8, p.1). There were several anarchist members. Membership was open to the general public if they agreed on basic issues “like bottom-up democratic organization” and dissatisfaction with current economic affairs (SWAG, 2008, para. 1). During the early 2000s, the original aim of SWAG was anarchistic, though when it was reorganized in the late 2000s it was more Marxist oriented, without explicitly anarchist members.

SWAG protested issues concerning university politics as well as supporting local protests. One of the interviewees recalled that SWAG protested tuition increases and supported the 2002 strike at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton. They also worked on an unsuccessful campaign against privatizing janitorial services on campus. In 2001, SWAG opposed student tuition increases and unsuccessfully lobbied the Student Union (SU) to oppose the hikes. SWAG also worked on a successful campaign for a progressive SU presidential candidate, who was a member of SWAG. In the summer of 2012, I attended a SWAG solidarity march and information rally for the Quebec student strike, which marched from the U of A to the legislature, which was followed by a variety of speakers. However, it appears that SWAG has not been active in the past year.

**Anarchist Reading Circle, circa 2000 - 2004**

The Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle was a group of
individuals who read and discussed anarchist literature. According to their website, “Topics include[d] anarchist theory and practice as well as discussions of current events from an anarchist perspective” (Anarchist Reading Circle, n.d.). The Anarchist Reading Circle was open to the public and met once a week. There were approximately six core participants, though there were often more people who would attend. Blaine commented that, “It was just a reading circle but it allowed the growth of many activists and anarchists in Edmonton. For myself, it was an early introduction to the works of anarchism.” It helped anarchists become familiar with different movements and struggles and contributed to shaping the collective identity of the local anarchist community.

The reading circle mostly read chapters from books dealing with academic analyses of the anarchist movement in different places. They also read works by the workers’ European autonomous movement and by situationists. The main Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle website, which is no longer available, included pirated material which allowed the participants to read in advance the material being discussed. This was important because not everyone could afford to repeatedly purchase books.

Members of the Anarchist Reading Circle also organized the first Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair in 2002 and offered a book table there. One interviewee reflected that he had hoped the reading circle would have overlapped with more organizing dimensions, such as bringing in
speakers whose work the reading circle could read in advance. One of the reasons he became disinterested in the reading circle was because it became just a book club. Another interviewee noted that the Anarchist Reading Circle was loosely organized, which became a problem at times. Meeting so frequently made it difficult to sustain participation, particularly if participants were working full-time. A lot of the people who attended the reading circle were students or partially employed, providing more time to read the chapter and attend the weekly discussion. Around 2002, the Anarchist Reading Circle intended to develop into the Edmonton Anarchist Free School, though this never materialized. The reading circle gradually declined to under six core people and soon ended.

**Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, 2002 - 2013**

The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair is the largest anarchist event in Alberta and is a meeting place for anarchists, leftists, activists, radical environmentalists and other interested people. The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair started two years after the first Canadian bookfair in Montreal and was the largest anarchist event in Western Canada for most of the first decade of the 21st century, attracting over one thousand people. All the interviewees have in some way been involved in the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. Some have been instrumental in organizing it, whereas others have helped by facilitating workshops, tabling, cooking food, posting flyers or handling media coverage.
Anarchist bookfairs typically consist of left-wing book publishers and bookstores, anarchist and activist information tables, various vendors, a keynote speaker, workshops and entertainment, such as live music or dances. There are two main spaces, one where the tables are located and the other where lectures and workshops occur. The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair has always provided free vegan food and free daycare with a certified childcare worker. All the keynote speakers have published books or articles and are either academics or anarchist organizers.

Blaine recalled the original purpose of the bookfair was to create an anarchist meeting space and a way to increase rapport between anarchists in Edmonton and elsewhere in Canada, “build[ing] a community across the Prairies with other people with different ideas. It was this idea of making Edmonton’s [anarchist] community more open to the world and less insular.” Thomas’ quote at the beginning of this chapter refers to the quality of prefiguration of the bookfair: “it’s not just a book, we’re creating a microcosm of what we’d like the world to be.” Over three days the bookfair offers free food, free daycare, free education (lectures and workshops), free entertainment (musicians and dances), free literature (usually pamphlets) and free space for conversation. The bookfair operates on a volunteer basis, underpinning the need to provide the social provisions of life without an incentive for profit.

The bookfair is as much a political event as a social
event. Politically, it promotes a common framework and collective action strategies. The bookfair also encourages people to be educated and critical of authority as well as fostering political and anarchist theory. The bookfair generally has grassroots groups which coalesce around it, such as the Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle, Occupy Edmonton and the Free School. Socially, the bookfair is a culture-building event where people interact with others who have similar interests, while others are introduced to radical ideas for the first time. Since 2004, the Edmonton bookfair has hosted numerous parties and dances, which are a significant part of the social aspect of the bookfair, as well as music nights, described as “An evening of music fused with revolutionary politics” (Redmonton-Radical Edmonton Network, 2009, para. 2)—with various genres, including folk, punk, hip-hop and metal.

The first Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, organized by people in the Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle with help from Anti-Capitalist Edmonton, occurred in December 2002. The first year of organizing the bookfair was on an ad hoc basis. The second bookfair was organized by Anti-Capitalist Edmonton. The third Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair in 2005 was organized by a new group of people, who have continued to organize it, with a series of member changes, until 2012.

The organizing process of the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair has changed several times. For the past several bookfairs there has been a core group of about five organizers, in addition to people helping out on the periphery.
The collective organizing the bookfair originally ran on a modified consensus decision-making model, changing to a voting based process several years ago. Blaine argued that, “Theoretically we had meetings that ran on consensus but a lot of the real decision-making wasn’t taking place in meetings.” In effect, various people took care of different aspects, such as individuals taking over the kitchen, the finances, outreach to vendors or media, often making decisions prior to communicating with the collective. By 2008, there was a new group of people involved, including some of the interviewees. Several interviewees recalled that after the 2010 bookfair, the collective and volunteers who assisted in the past voted to switch to a voting decision-making process where motions could only pass with a 75% majority. Several organizers commented that there was conflict in the decision-making, demonstrated by the transition from consensus to voting, with both models causing burn out over time. There were also complaints about people showing up with suggestions but not actually helping when the bookfair was happening.

During the past several years, the minimum price to run the Edmonton model of the bookfair has been $4000. The most expensive aspect is renting the hall; originally it only cost a few hundred dollars but now it is approximately two thousand dollars for the weekend. The Edmonton Bookfair offers travel subsidies for vendors and the keynote speaker, as well as providing free food, which many other bookfairs do not offer. The Edmonton book-
fair has received financial support from various anarchist and activist sources.

All the interviewees involved in organizing the bookfair expressed uncertainty and doubt that the Edmonton bookfair would happen in 2014. The main bookfair collective members have said they are taking a step back from organizing the bookfair. There is a new group of people who organized the 2013 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. The 2013 bookfair has changed the Edmonton model to make it more affordable. Instead of three days, it was held over two days. They have changed venues, removed a keynote speaker and likely reduced travel subsidies. The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair was not held in 2014.²

**Workers’ Power Study Group, circa 2003 - 2005**

Workers’ Power was an informal study group and was affiliated with the Edmonton IWW. Eugene Plawiuk organized the study group. It met once a month and was a social evening with eight to fifteen participants meeting at various members’ homes. According to one of their announcements, “Workers Power will reflect on the limitations of ‘historical’ Anarchism and Marxism to develop a revolutionary critique of daily life and a political practice to apply to the current crisis of capitalism” (A-Infos, 2004, para. 5). Eugene recalled the attitude of the meetings was “bring your books, bring your ideas; let’s dis-

² Editor’s note: However, the Bookfair did return in 2015.
cuss it. How does it apply today? Is it still relevant? ... Has something changed?” They would occasionally have a potluck or watch a movie followed by a discussion. Blaine’s participation in Workers’ Power was his first introduction to council communism, which is very critical of the labor establishment and business unions, influencing a lot of the members’ perspectives regarding solidarity unionism. Eugene explained that “Workers’ Power was an attempt to integrate anarchism with left communism.” The readings were mainly focused on left communist, council communist and anti-parliamentary communist perspectives. These branches of communism in many ways compliment anarchist theory because they are anti-imperialist and oppose running in elections, instead supporting organizing and mobilizing from below.

**Black Books Distribution 2003-2013**

Blaine started Black Books Distribution as a hobby to sell books at small events, including anarchist bookfairs and activist events. He started it after he had helped order and table books for the first Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. One of Blaine’s major reasons for starting Black Books was because most bookstores in Edmonton do not carry anarchist material. Blaine asserted that, “It was something that I could promote anarchism with and also to promote reading literature that I believed in.” Black Books carried books on a variety of issues including anarchist theory and history, labor organizing and history, LGBT rights and various issues from a leftwing perspective. Blaine
had an arrangement with Earth’s General Store where Black Books stocked several bookshelves. Blaine remarked that he enjoyed running the Black Books in the 2000s but he is now phasing it out, citing that it is becoming difficult to sell books and he no longer has enough time. Additionally, during the past decade more outlets for anarchist literature have become available, particularly online sources, making anarchist literature more accessible.

**Thoughtcrime Ink, 2006 - current**

On their website, Thoughtcrime Ink (n.d.a) describes themselves as “a non-profit anarchist collective that raises funds for anarchist education projects, mainly through printing, publishing, and solidarity packages.” Co-founded by Fabian Graves in 2006, and based in Edmonton, Thoughtcrime Ink is a registered non-profit organization and a volunteer-based collective. They sell merchandise with a revolutionary sentiment and donate the profits to various anarchist projects. Thoughtcrime Ink originally started by producing and selling t-shirts, buttons and patches, but it has gradually changed its activities to printing essays and pamphlets and publishing books. The literature they print focuses mainly on classical and contemporary anarchist theory and grassroots labor organizing. Fabian reflected, “Thoughtcrime has made class-struggle literature easier to find and some stuff wouldn’t exist without us. I’m proud of that.” All of Thoughtcrime’s literature is printed at Black Cat Press
though they are separate groups which independently select what they print. There is an arrangement between the two groups wherein Thoughtcrime tables for Black Cat at anarchist bookfairs outside of Alberta.

Thoughtcrime Ink operates on a voting decision-making process when consensus is not met. Currently there are seven members. There are also people who volunteer on the periphery, such as binding pamphlets and tabling at events. Rob Caballero argued there is a performative quality of participating in anarchist groups, such as Thoughtcrime, expressing his participation was instrumental for becoming involved in the anarchist movement because it associated him with anarchist events and issues.

Thoughtcrime Ink has posted a Frequently Asked Questions page on their website where they address the critique that by selling merchandise they are capitalizing on anarchism and are therefore promoting capitalism. Specifically, the first question is, “What is an ‘anti-capitalist’ organization doing selling apparel, anyway?” (Thoughtcrime, n.d.b, para. 1). Part of their answer states, “[w]e think eschewing profit for personal gain and using all the money we make for community projects is one way to be anti-capitalist in practice, to divert money from ‘the system’ into an alternative social economy” (Thoughtcrime, n.d.b, para. 1). This refers to promoting prefigurative politics where community groups replace capitalist relationships. Essentially Thoughtcrime resists generating private profit by volunteering and by donating
their profits to anarchist groups. Their only paid worker is the web designer.

The collective meets several times a year to decide which upcoming events or groups they will donate to. The website notes their criteria for funding groups is that they “maintain oppositional stances to corporations and state [and] are doing radical work that needs to be done for healthy, connected communities...” (Thoughtcrime, n.d.b, para. 7). A 2008 blog post on their website notes they originally wanted to raise $5000 for the Edmonton bookfair, but eventually decided to donate their profit and some of their merchandise to multiple anarchist projects, including six Canadian anarchist bookfairs. Thoughtcrime also donated $1500 to the interviewers of Anarchism: A Documentary Film who interviewed 101 anarchists from around the world (Anarchism: a Documentary, 2011). They have also donated to speakers who have lectured in Edmonton.

In the past, Thoughtcrime Ink tabled fifteen events in one year, during which Fabian estimated they talked to 2000 people. He considered this important, where people see that anarchists are rational and perhaps persuasive. However, Thoughtcrime does not table nearly as much now, focusing mainly at anarchist bookfairs as well as some leftwing conferences. Thoughtcrime has tabled at the majority of the bookfairs in Canada, as well as at bookfairs in the US and in Europe.

Thoughtcrime mainly sells pamphlets, some by clas-
sical anarchists like Kropotkin, Malatesta, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, which are often essays or a section of a book. This type of material is no longer protected by copyright and can be freely distributed. They also print material from individuals and groups that have given consent for it to be reproduced. Books they have published include a collection of essays by Wayne Price (2010) about anarchism and reformism, as well as the study of state capitalism in the USSR by Aufheben Collective (2013). Works by the writers of the Recomposition Blog have also been published. Rob noted that a goal for Thoughtcrime is to produce literature about current events, publishing “more contemporary pamphlets especially about things that are happening... where we have material that you can disseminate because you want to insert it into social movements.”

Thoughtcrime also sells t-shirts, with 35 designs available on their website, but they are phasing out this form of merchandise. Their clothing is “sweatshop-free,” though they recognize any worker in the capitalist system is exploited. Thoughtcrime has also released several musical CDs, which are no longer available on their website. Thoughtcrime also offers “Infoshop in a box” which is an assortment of anarchist material which can include shirts and other merchandise that can be tabled at events. This is particularly useful “if you live in a smaller centre where radical literature might be harder to get ahold [sic] of” (Thoughtcrime Ink, n.d.b, para. 2).
Edmonton Anarchist Black Cross, circa 2007 - 2010

The first Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) groups originated in the early 20th century as an alternative structure to the Red Cross, formed during the Russian Revolution and Civil War to supply aid to Russian anarchists (Anarchist Black Cross Federation, 2011). During the 1980s autonomous ABC groups formed in North America. The ABC in Edmonton operated in the late 2000s with the purpose of supporting political prisoners and opposing the prison system. Its ultimate aim was to dismantle the prison system, though it defended current legal rights to prevent the further erosion of freedoms by ruling elites (ABC Edmonton, 2010a). Their website asserts that prisons are not rehabilitative but instead maintain class and race privilege while reinforcing state power. The organization of the Edmonton ABC was non-hierarchical and based on consensus with membership open to the general public. They organized educational events about the prison system and supported prisoners “morally, financially and legally” (ABC Edmonton, 2010a, para. 2). They also organized a letter writing campaign for anarchist prisoners, supplying postcards, stamps and contact information.

ABC Edmonton cooperatively worked with other groups, participating in events and organizing their own events. In September 2008 when the Olympic Spirit Train arrived in the city they supported a protest with various First Nations groups against the Olympic Games and the Tar Sands (Anti-Olympics Archive, 2011). On August 10,
2008, the ABC organized a Prison Justice Day event in Edmonton, offering workshops, screening two films, arranging a benefit show (Prison Justice, n.d.). The following year for Prisoner Justice Day, the Edmonton ABC and the Edmonton John Howard Society organized a protest at the Alberta Legislature (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2009). As a way to support female prisoners, ABC Edmonton received a $670 grant from APIRG for the Books Behind Bars campaign, which purchased “books for the library at the Edmonton Institution for Women” (ABC Edmonton, 2010b). ABC Edmonton also partnered with the U of A’s Community Service Learning (CSL) in 2008, which connects student with voluntary community groups (Community Service Learning, n.d.). ABC Edmonton appears to have become inactive after 2010.

**Workers’ Solidarity Alliance, 2010 - 2011**

The Edmonton chapter of the Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA) was short lived. Many of the members were anarchists in the Edmonton IWW who wanted an explicitly anarchist organization. After joining the WSA, which requires affordable membership dues, members were added to an email list service which networks information. It is up to local WSA members to organize local meetings under their own direction. The Edmonton chapter of the WSA held meetings for the purpose of organization-building and reaching common points of agreement. Blaine recalled that, “In our local group we tried to build more of a coherent local theoretical background. We did a
lot of reading together; a lot of discussion.”

The WSA started in the US in 1984 and is anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and anti-statist (Workers Solidarity Alliance, n.d.). The “WSA is not a union but an organization of activists” (Workers Solidarity Alliance, n.d., para 18). Some of the interviewees were disappointed with the Edmonton WSA, specifically with the lack of defined roles for members and the lack of meeting procedures. Blaine recalled that they were impressed by the efforts of the WSA in the US but locally they were not inspired and most of the members eventually left the organization, which ended the meetings in Edmonton, though some are still members.

**The Free Thinkers Market, 2012 - current**

The Free Thinkers Market was initially a monthly anarchist market based in Edmonton, which started in 2012. It is free for people to vend and attend, and includes a variety of vendors, mostly an assortment of local artists and craftspeople. According to their website, their purpose is to “[s]upport local artists and help build a community outside of the system” (Free Thinkers Market, n.d., para. 1). People are producing their own products, including jewelry, paintings, food and clothing, which encourages creativity and independence of workers. The Free Thinkers Market has been held in bars as well as several other venues, including a cafe which allowed the market to be open to all ages. The market usually offers some free vegan
food. They encourage bartering and other “alternative methods of exchange” (Free Thinkers Market, n.d., para. 2). A poster for the market notes they offer “great art, handmade goods, live music and open mic, books and zines, crystals and stones, bold brews, treats, sweets, buttons and trinkets” (Free Thinkers Market, 2013). In 2014, the Free Thinkers Market was held less frequently.

**Anarchistic Groups in Edmonton**

**Direct Action Groups**

There are a number of groups in Edmonton, many short-lived, which have had an implicit relationship with anarchism. The most prominent of these groups is the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), which was active in Edmonton in the early 1990s. ALF is a leaderless movement which started in the early 1970s in the UK. Unlike every other group discussed in this chapter, ALF is the only group which has committed criminal acts of protest, including property destruction and arson. ALF activists in Edmonton committed two actions causing property damage over $100,000, targeting sources of animal cruelty (Animal Liberation Front, n.d.). Other actions included activists rescuing 29 cats from a research lab at the U of A, in June 1992 (Animal Liberation Front, n.d.).

Reclaim the Streets (RTS) and Anti-Racist Action are two anarchistic affinity groups that have organized direct actions in Edmonton. Besides ALF, both groups use more
confrontational tactics than other local anarchist groups. There has been at least one RTS event, held in Edmonton on August 25, 2000 (Edmonton Activist Literature, 2004b). RTS coordinates unpermitted street parties, incorporating elements of the anarchist, environmental and rave movements. RTS originated in the UK in the 1990s by activists in the anti-roads movement, protesting the detrimental effects of the privatization of urban space and the heavy reliance on automobiles (Graeber, 2009). RTS is a non-branded and non-hierarchical action which has autonomously operated in multiple urban centres (Day, 2005).

Anti-Racist Action originated in the US in the late 1980s, coordinating direct actions against racism and oppression (Anti-Racist Action Network, 2009). There was an Anti-Racist Action event protesting a white supremacist demonstration in Edmonton in March 2012. It took only a few minutes for the white power rally, with a few dozen fascist supporters, to be disrupted by 300 anti-racist activists and anarchists (Libcom, 2012). The Edmonton police protected the white supremacists, separating them from the anti-racist protesters, causing the police to be criticized in the Edmonton anarchist community for protecting fascists. There were also Anti-Racist Action inspired events in Edmonton in the early 1990s, protesting a local white supremacist gang (Anti-Racist Action Network, 2009).
Affinity Groups, Study Groups and Coalitions

Other Edmonton groups involved in anarchistic tactics were the Radical Cheerleaders and the Free School. The Radical Cheerleaders operated in the late 1990s and was regrouped about a decade later. The Radical Cheerleaders “aren’t practising for the next sporting event. You’re more likely to see them in front of the legislature or marching down the streets with fellow protesters” (Edmonton Journal, Sept. 7, 2007, para. 3). They attended protests, often dressed in red and black, and chanted revolutionary slogans for the purpose of building morale amongst protesters. In the early 1970s there was a Free University, organized by students at the U of A. Eugene Plawiuk was a participant in it and recalled that it was involved in the local radical anti-war movement and offered classes in revolutionary struggle. There was talk of starting an Anarchist Free School in the early 2000s but this never materialized. The Free School was organized in the mid-2000s and has had various group readings and discussions, although it used a Marxist instead of an anarchist framework, yet they hosted a workshop at the 2012 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair.

The People’s Action Network (PAN) in Edmonton was a coalition group which was involved in the early anti-neoliberal globalization movement, operating in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was involved with organizing solidarity protests in Edmonton against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, coinciding with the protests
in Quebec City in 2001. PAN Edmonton offered teach-ins about various issues concerning globalization. It was one of the first activist groups in Edmonton which formally ran on the consensus model of decision-making. One PAN Edmonton protest marched to the Alberta legislature with approximately 200 people and then featured speakers from community groups, musical performances and a play (K-line, 2001). Two of the interviewees were members of PAN Edmonton, though their experiences were generally negative. One interviewee’s impression was that many of the members were activists from the university who favored academic language which alienated people from working-class backgrounds.

The Edmonton Coalition Against War and Racism (ECAWAR), which started in 2003, is an activist group which has had anarchist participants, though today it is influenced more by the Communist Party and by liberalism. One interviewee was a founding member of the coalition and another interviewee was also active in the group. ECAWAR organized the largest anti-war protests in Edmonton opposing the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, also protesting militarism and war profiteering (ECAWAR, n.d.). The group has held various solidarity demonstrations for issues in the Middle East, including the Occupations of Palestine and Lebanon as well as the importance of avoiding military intervention in Iran and Syria.

Alternatives to Capitalism and Anti-Capitalist Edmonton (ACE) are two discussion groups which were influ-
enced by anarchist theory. Alternatives to Capitalism was a leftwing study and discussion group which met once a week for approximately one year. It was originally a group which discussed books, but it became more of a general discussion group. Blaine was a member and recalled that they would “read and discuss alternatives to capitalism, influenced by anarchist thought.” They also tried having a dinner once a month at somebody’s house. Blaine argued that Alternatives to Capitalism came out of the anti-globalization movement of the early 2000s and was full of hope but lacked “...a real vision aside from a wistful desire for a new society.” ACE started in 2002 and continued for a couple of years and was “concerned with a number of issues, including international trade agreements, legal rights, and community selfsufficiency [sic]” (APIRG, 2006, p. 3). Jake was a member of ACE and recollected that it educated members about anti-capitalist politics, mostly through readings. ACE helped organize the first and second Edmonton Anarchist Bookfairs. Jake argued that there “comes a point where you should use the reading to engage the community and that wasn’t happening.”

**Occupy Edmonton, 2011 - current**

Occupy Edmonton was organized approximately one month after the mobilization of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). OWS is based on anarchist principles, including non-hierarchical social relationships, prefigurative politics and rejection of the legitimacy of current political and
legal institutions (Graeber, 2011). Occupy Edmonton had its first public event on October 15, 2011, which was planned as a day for solidarity for the Occupy movement, in which 1500 cities participated internationally (Occupy Edmonton, 2012b). Occupy Edmonton (2012a) supports “direct action and participatory frameworks” and has bi-weekly general assemblies. It is a consensus based organization and is a leaderless movement. Rob Caballero was involved in Occupy Edmonton for its first year. Eric and Jake were also involved in Occupy Edmonton for a short time.

After Occupy Edmonton’s first march through the downtown core, they marched to Melcor Park and set up an Occupy encampment for 42 days. The encampment temporarily created common property in a privately owned park, resisting the capitalist appropriation of land while targeting Melcor Developments, which is involved in the real estate industry. Rob Caballero asserted, “Occupy was a space that was temporarily liberated from the mediation of security, the state, landlords and bosses; it was a free open space.” Rob was very enthused with the rapid development of Occupy Edmonton: “One day there wasn’t anybody in the park and then the next day there were 200 people talking about political ideas that are in some ways radical. It was something really worth supporting.” Eric argued that Occupy Edmonton raised important issues including anti-capitalism, anti-oppression and autonomy, as well as creating self-identified anarchists or people who organize along anarchist principles.
Occupy Edmonton’s encampment received and ignored several notices of eviction by Melcor. Occupy Edmonton established a police committee to meet with the police and at one point two detectives threatened several participants with criminal charges if they remained in Occupy, although no one was charged. This was seen as a way to individualize blame and falsely portray the notion that several leaders were responsible for Occupy Edmonton. Rob Caballero recalled that the media had a narrative about the danger of having people in the park at night. Occupy Edmonton framed their response as their presence making the area safer. Rob related his own experience, saying “I used to live in the neighbourhood and... [Melcor Park] is so dark and empty... but now that there are people here it’s a really good community space.” The encampment was raided by the police shortly after 4 AM on November 25, 2011, as approximately 45 officers dislodged nine people from the park, arresting three people who refused to leave.

Rob Caballero asserted that the encampment was a difficult project for people, since many of the participants did not have previous experience in political activity. People entered a communal living situation with some similar values, such as fairness and social justice, “but very different strategies and notions of proper political activity.” Rob felt like he ended up struggling with liberal and state tendencies within Occupy Edmonton, asserting “there’re a lot of people involved that are trying to tone it down that come from very specific liberal perspectives.”
Occupy Edmonton (2012b) participated in 100 actions during their first year of operation. During and after the encampment, Occupy Edmonton worked on various campaigns, such as protesting federal funding cuts, a proposed oil pipeline and the continuation of Guantanamo Bay prison. They also had an Occupy U of A march where there were suggestions that there would be a new Occupy camp on campus; however, the police did not allow the protesters on campus grounds (Williamson, 2012, Feb. 2). In the summer of 2012, Occupy Edmonton held solidarity protests for the Quebec Student Strikes and supported weekly “casserole nights” in May and June 2012, an activity which started in Montreal where protesters used pots and pans during their marches. Occupy Edmonton has also engaged in banner drops and guerilla art. Occupy Edmonton has become a general coalition group providing support and organizing protests for a variety of causes that members support. They continue to hold weekly general assemblies and have recently started a food cooperative.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has chronicled the various Edmonton groups and projects that have implicitly or explicitly practiced and promoted anarchism. Many of the local anarchist groups described in this chapter have not been documented before. There is an anarchist community in the city which fosters an anarchist collective identity and shared solidarity. Events such as the anarchist bookfair,
anarchist study groups and grassroots organizations practicing anarchist principles, have contributed to generating an anarchist collective identity in Edmonton.

Anarchist social movement organizations and tactics are often modular, meaning they can be “easily transported to many locales and situations, rather than being tied to local communities and rituals” (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 4). Modular tactics used by anarchist projects in Edmonton include the Anarchist Bookfair, the Anarchist Reading Circle, the Anarchist Black Cross, Food Not Bombs, Reclaim the Streets, Radical Cheerleaders and the Occupy movement. These groups have autonomously operated in many North American cities and can be easily replicated in new places. These groups can also be considered banners, which are “a convenient label for a certain goal or type of political activity” which may operate in networks that communicate with other autonomous groups using the same name or tactics (Gordon, 2008, p. 15). The Edmonton anarchists have been active in creating anarchist projects, though often short-lived, to promote and practice their political beliefs and will likely continue to impact the social and cultural terrain in the city.

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New Developments in Anarchist Studies

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History of Anarchist Projects in Edmonton | 243

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History of Anarchist Projects in Edmonton

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248 | New Developments in Anarchist Studies

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▲Artwork by Beehive Design Collective, see pg.357