

# Introduction

## Constructive Anarchy

Few social movements in North America have enjoyed as strong a revival in the twenty-first century as anarchism has experienced. In the years prior to the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protests of 1999, and especially following the success of those demonstrations, anarchism has re-emerged as a vibrant political force. In the past few years overwrought media coverage of anarchists has stirred memories of the moral panic over anarchism which marked the beginning of the twentieth century. As well, police assaults on anarchists during economic summits, including pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets and mass arrests, in addition to shootings and even killings, have suggested to the general public that anarchists are something to be feared. That view has been reinforced in mainstream media depictions of anarchists as “thugs” and “hooligans.” The lack of informed analysis of anarchist politics has meant that the actual practices and intentions of this major, and growing, contemporary movement remain obscured. Obscured in recent sensationalized accounts are the practical and constructive activities undertaken on a daily basis by anarchist organizers seeking a world free from exploitation, oppression and repression. Little attention has been given to ongoing organizing practices undertaken by anarchists as part of struggles in communities and workplaces. An examination of constructive anarchy—projects that provide examples of politics grounded in everyday resistance—offers insights into real world attempts to radically transform social relations in the here and now of everyday life. These projects also raise possibilities for broader social transformation in the twenty-first century.

Where there has been broader attention given to anarchist activities, beyond discussions within anarchist circles, most discussion and emphasis has been given to forms of counter-cultural or subcultural activity. Academic commentators have been preoccupied with unique cultural activities such as anarchist zines, so-called autonomous zones and infoshops, street parties and protests like Reclaim the Streets, sexual radicalism and anarchist art projects. Perhaps the activities that have received the most attention, have been the militant street demonstrations and acts of property destruction undertaken by “black bloc” anarchists during major protests against meetings of institutions of global capital, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Indeed these have often been inspiring undertakings, enlivening activist imaginations and raising transformative possibilities. At the same time, as a result of the disproportionate focus on such cultural manifestations, less poetic, and seemingly more mundane forms of anarchist activity and organizing, in particular organizing within

workplaces, have gone unnoticed, overlooked or unremarked upon. Yet real innovations have emerged in anarchist approaches to workplace organizing, particularly rank-and-file groups and networks and organizing among the unorganized (outside of union structures). Such efforts also pose compelling challenges to mainstream organizing approaches within contemporary labor movements, which privilege centralized, hierarchical and professional organizational structures and practices geared towards negotiation and compromise (even where such are disadvantageous) with employers.

Anarchist organizing draws upon and expands tendencies towards mutual aid and solidarity that are present in everyday life, informal workplace and community networks and relations, in order to develop a real world alternative both to capitalist and statist institutions and social relations as well as to authoritarian forms of organization based on the exceptionalism of political vanguards. In order to bring their ideas to life, anarchists create working examples. To borrow the syndicalist phrase, they are “forming the structure of the new world in the shell of the old.” *Constructive Anarchy* critically examines the possibilities and problems facing attempts to build radical community and workplace movements, which seek to pose effective challenges to capitalist forms of exploitation and control. The book also engages theoretical developments around these emerging political practices.

The text is organized to illustrate the development of the diversity of anarchist strategies and tactics and organizing practices over time and highlights anarchist involvement in non-anarchist workplace based movements, especially through analysis of anarchists and rank-and-file workplace organizing. Focus is placed on debates over organization within anarchist circles and theoretical attempts to understand anarchist practices as attempts to develop autonomy from authoritarian social relations via “infrastructures of resistance” in which self-determined community practices and values are opposed to processes of capitalist valorization.

### **Infrastructures of Resistance**

It is sometimes said that while anti-capitalist and alternative globalization movements are clear on what they do not want, they are less clear on what they do want (socialism, anarchism, specifics). Certainly, recent movements have not been as effective as some of their predecessors (labor in the 1910s and 1930s; the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s) in sustaining the sorts of practices—intellectual and material—that put into effect aspects of the alternative world activists and organizers seek. My colleague Alan Sears attributes this current inability to a decline in what he calls “infrastructures of dissent,” the organizations or institutions, such as union halls and working-class centers, that sustained communities of the poor and working-class through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Given the limited nature of dissent as the plaintive approach of a “loyal opposition,” I prefer the notion of “infrastructures of resistance” to speak to

the more transformative character of the change sought by radical movements. As anti-capitalist movements face possibilities of growth, as happened after Seattle in 1999, questions of organization and the relation of various activities to each other and to broader movements for social change can only become more urgent. Yet, the absence of durable organizations or institutions, formal or informal, rooted in working-class organizations and communities, makes for demoralization or a retreat into subculturalism, as has happened to many of the alternative globalization groups. We now face a pressing need to build “infrastructures of resistance” that might sustain not only activists and organizers, but especially the poor and working-class people who are being disastrously impacted by the current crisis.

The notion of “infrastructures of dissent” is drawn from the literature on social movements as developed by resource mobilization theorists such as Mayer Zald and John McCarthy (1990); it refers to the accumulated resources available to social movements in going beyond spontaneous expressions of protest to build sustained mobilization and dissent. Infrastructures of dissent often include the resources of mainstream or reformist groups, like non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or unions, which can be used by more radical groups for their own purposes. Within resource mobilization theories the term has been used almost exclusively to refer to formal organizations through which non-elites access institutions of authority and power, such as lobbying groups and registered charities. Resource mobilization explains movements as rational acts rather than irrational behavior, the charge often times leveled against anarchists. Emphasis is shifted to an understanding of the opportunities, costs and benefits perceived to derive from collective action, rather than to the psychological state of participants. Resource mobilization perspectives teach that developing movements for change require resources such as time, money and education. Resource mobilization theories, however, offer little help in understanding important cultural aspects of social movements. Focusing on institutional reforms and policy changes resource mobilization theorists are ill-suited to explain the personal meanings embodied in movements or the levels of sustained commitment which are able to mobilize despite “objective costs.” Additionally, such theories are almost exclusively concerned with social reforms rather than radical, let alone, revolutionary, social transformation.

Writers coming from anarchist and socialist movements, such as Howard Ehrlich and Alan Sears, have developed this notion in a more accessible, yet, radical, fashion. Sears (2007) adapts it to refer to a variety of practices by which movements develop their capacities to sustain common memories, build collective visions, voice alternatives, and engage in debate and analysis. As examples, he mentions left caucuses within unions and socialist party organizations. Indeed anarchist and socialist movements and ideas themselves were only possible and thrived within the specific contexts provided by infrastructures of resistance developed as the working-classes, poor and oppressed struggled for social justice, freedom and self-determination. Through struggle and the pressing realities of meeting material, cultural personal and social needs and desires, people and their communities developed infrastructures of resistance to sustain themselves and

provide the necessary supports to sustain ongoing struggles and the inspiration of the new world they sought to make. As Sears (2007) notes: “The projects of rebuilding the infrastructure of dissent and revitalizing socialism are integrally connected.” The same is true for anarchist movements in the present context. Yet discussions around strategies and the prospects for radical social transformation, within anarchist circles, have largely ignored the question of constructing infrastructures of resistance.

While sociological discussions of social movements often emphasize formal political organizations, I would argue that more priority should be given to social institutions, informal as well as formal, based on addressing the needs of poor and working-class communities. These contemporary infrastructures of resistance might include community centers, housing and shelter, food shares, transportation, community media, free schools, bookstores, cafes, taverns and clubs.

Large-scale civil non-cooperation and/or militant confrontation with the state and capital obviously require previous successes in organization and experience. Thus, as Ehrlich (1996b) notes, these are necessarily the outward, and dramatic, manifestations of ongoing experiments in overcoming authoritarian societies. Directing his discussion at anarchists, he encourages them to first develop alternative institutions. These are the building blocks of what he refers to as the transfer culture, an approximation of the new society within the context of the old (Ehrlich 1996a). Within them organizers might try to meet the basic demands of building sustainable communities. Infrastructures of resistance, operating in the shadows of the dominant institutions, provide frameworks for the radical re-organization of social relations in a miniature, pre-insurrectionary form. They are the rudimentary infrastructures of alternative ways of being, of alternative futures in the present. Building these infrastructures is decidedly not a millenarian project in which hopes for liberation or freedom are deferred or projected into some imagined future. Rather than utopian longings, these infrastructures of resistance, or transfer cultures, express real world practices in which utopian desires—the hopes and dreams of sections of the grassroots mobilizations behind Obama, for example—can be given life in the here and now. At the present time, as Sears notes, these infrastructures of resistance are quite weak, their development having been cut short by the political counter-offensive following September 11, 2001. Much work needs to be done to re-build these infrastructures if movements for social change are to raise real alternatives to capitalist exploitation and neoliberal governance.

Libertarian socialists and anarchists have always emphasized people’s capacities for spontaneous organization, but they also recognize that what appears to be “spontaneous” develops from an often extensive groundwork of pre-existing radical practices. Without such pre-existing practices and relationships, people are left to patch things together in the heat of social upheaval or to defer to previously organized and disciplined vanguards. Pre-existing infrastructures, or what anarchists sometimes call transfer cultures, are necessary components of popular, participatory and liberatory social re-organization. A liberatory social transformation requires experiences of active involvement in radical change, prior

to any insurrection, and the development of prior structures for constructing a new society within the shell of the old society.

Various alternative institutions, whether free schools, squats, union working groups or alternative media, form networks as means for developing alternative social infrastructures. Where free schools join up with worker cooperatives, union flying squads and collective social centers, alternative social infrastructures become visible at least at the community level. Contemporary projects are still quite new. None have approached the scale that would suggest they pose practical alternatives, except perhaps in the case of new media activities and Internet networks. Yet all are putting together the building blocks that might promote practical alternatives extending well beyond the projects from which they originated.

## Possibilities

Of course each community, neighborhood or region will have specific issues that have to be addressed right away. People will decide what their needs are. Specific contexts provide specific challenges. I can illustrate this from my own experiences in efforts to build infrastructures of resistance in Toronto.

At first glance, Toronto provides a not particularly supportive context for the development and growth of anarchist movements. As for much of English Canada, progressive political movements in Toronto are dominated by the reformist and statist social democratic left nationalism of the NDP and labor unions. Extra-parliamentary movements are, and have been for most of Canada's history, Marxist-socialist in orientation and the contemporary radical organizations and movements usually explicitly identify as Marxist, Leninist or Trotskyist. Indeed anarchism historically has been a minority, often marginalized, tendency in much of English Canada. Even so-called revolutionary socialist groups, such as the International Socialists and the New Socialist Group, call for "critical support" of the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP). As will be shown in following chapters, unions have been closely aligned to the NDP, providing it with material resources, labor and campaign support.

Working-class struggles have been constrained within a framework of bargaining, negotiation and compromise with states and capital through the union movement and NDP. Even the most recent wave of working-class mobilization, the Ontario "Days of Action," rotating city-wide strikes against the former provincial government, was restricted within symbolic shows of strength designed to make the conservative government vulnerable to the NDP in electoral terms. Movements that emerged within the "Days of Action" to push more militant alternatives were silenced, chastised, disciplined and, even, physically restrained by protest marshals.

Movements that call for and actively organize to challenge capitalist political, economic and legal structures are rare. Anarchists often find themselves standing alone in confrontations with government, landlords or employers. This is a context in which labor leaders within specific "progressive" unions (like the Canadian

Auto Workers) and the provincial labor federation (the Ontario Federation of Labour) have openly condemned anarchists in the press and even discussed cracking down on anarchists with conservative politicians. Similarly anarchists have been dismissed as troublemakers by NDP spokespeople and supporters as well as by members of extra-parliamentary socialist groups alike.

At the same time anarchists have been successful in building trust within community and labor movements on the basis of a willingness to defend militant positions towards addressing exploitation and oppression and in maintaining principled approaches to politics and a willingness to act in solidarity with community-based groups, rather than approach them as recruitment grounds. By providing real world examples of militant practice and principled approaches to organizing, anarchists have begun to offer a pole of attraction for working-class and poor people seeking social change but frustrated with the complacency and timidity of unions and the NDP and mainstream social reform movements.

In order to direct our limited resources most effectively, anarchists decided to focus on a few primary areas of community struggle such as anti-racism and anti-fascism, anti-poverty struggles, and workplace organizing. Regarding the first area, they are involved not in street scraps with fascists, but in trying to work against the U.S./Canada border enforcement, and in stopping the increased detention of migrants. Their anti-poverty work in several neighborhoods has strengthened tenants' unions and other community-based organizations, as well as organizing unemployed and non-unionized workers—while also contributing to campaigns aimed at winning what they realize to be very limited demands from the state, such as the Raise the Rates campaign to improve social assistance spearheaded by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP).

It is in labor struggles that alternative globalization organizers might contribute to some interesting developments, doing things that are quite atypical for many North American anti-globalization organizations and unions alike. Indeed the goal of developing anti-capitalist perspectives within unions and other workplace organizations is one that contemporary alternative globalization activists have generally neglected. While many Left groups have focused their energies on running opposition slates in union elections or forming opposition caucuses, much work needs to be done in developing rank-and-file organization and militance. Those of us who are union members take the position that regardless of the union leadership, until we build a militant and mobilized rank-and-file movement, across locals and workplaces, the real power of organized labor will remain unrealized.

A few of the efforts I have been involved in include flying squads—rapid-response networks of union members prepared to take direct solidarity actions in support of non-union members in poor and working-class communities (see Shantz 2005). In Toronto, a flying squad was formed to coordinate strike support and help build workers' self-organization and solidarity among employed and unemployed workers, unionized and non-unionized. The flying squad is autonomous from all official union structures and is open to rank-and-file workers or workers in unorganized workplaces or who are unemployed. The flying squad

supports direct action against bosses of all types. In a Canadian context, flying squads have offered crucial support to direct actions around immigration defense, tenant protection, squatters rights, and welfare support by mobilizing sizeable numbers of rank-and-file unionists who are prepared for actions without regard to legality. Not limited in their scope of activity by specific collective agreements or workplaces, flying squads mobilize for community as well as workplace defense. By deploying flying squads workers in Ontario alone have successfully worked to stop deportations, halt evictions, helped win strikes and win social assistance for people that had been denied. Based on these examples, workers in Peterborough and Montreal have recently taken part in developing flying squad networks in their cities. The Precarious Workers Network coalescing in Montreal, and initiated by anarchists, is primarily organizing among unorganized and unemployed workers.

In my previous union I helped to form an anti-poverty working group. The union gave the working group (whose members came from outside as well as inside the union) an office, phone line and other resources, providing a useful space for union members and community members to come together to organize and discuss political strategies more broadly. The working group acts beyond the expectations of traditional unionism to assist people (members and non-members) experiencing problems with collection agencies, landlords, bosses and police and to help anyone having difficulties with welfare or other government bureaucracies. Assistance is offered for anything from filling out government forms properly to taking direct action against an employer or landlord who is ripping someone off. Those affected decide the best approach to deal with their situation, and the working group helps with resources and people to get it done. Recognizing that “established channels” rarely work in favor of poor people, the working group is committed to taking whatever action is necessary to get people what they need. It is a recognition, expressed by the union’s membership, that union resources are working-class community resources, part of an infrastructure of resistance, rather than simply bargaining resources.

In a context with little historical understanding of anarchism and a Left willing to dismiss or even attack anarchists, organizers in Toronto have been remarkably successful at making anarchism relevant within a range of movements and community groups. These are simply initial, limited examples from first hand involvement. Community centers, food shares, child care, shelters and housing are other projects being developed. These efforts provide important lessons that are worth exploring in some detail. Thus, they provide the basis for the discussion within *Constructive Anarchy*.

## Reflections

Anarchists need to be prepared not just intellectually but organizationally for radical struggles and transformation. As Sears (2008, 8) notes, historically

these infrastructures of resistance “cultivated collective capacities for memory (reflections on past experiences and struggles), analysis (discussion and debate about theory and change), communication (outside of official or commercial media channels) and action (networks of formal and informal solidarity.” Infrastructures of resistance serve as means by which people can sustain radical social change before, during and after insurrectionary periods. They provide sustenance and support in the present and provide contexts for the development of meaningful solidarity.

As a child growing up in a union family I can remember many occasions in which members came together to share good times, discussion, play, and friendship—parties at the union hall, picnics, sports clubs and more. These events provided spaces in which members and their families could benefit culturally and materially from a shared community and culture, from mutual aid in practice. By the time I went to work in the plant and became a member of the local myself, most of these activities and spaces were things of the past. My fellow workers on the line were finding support and solidarity not within the shared spaces of the local, but often, instead, in born-again religions and reactionary clubs.

Indeed this is perhaps one of the lessons to be learned from the successful organizing done by the Right in the 1980s and 1990s. In times of need and crisis, the evangelical churches provided institutional support and emotional defense against capitalist alienation (though not necessarily in ways that the Left should emulate). Many evangelical communities provide food, clothing and shelter for members. Many can mobilize hundreds to build a house for someone in their community. The Left has been less active in developing these infrastructural capacities, though these are things we could be doing in our own neighborhoods. Too much time has been spent building ideological sects with greater connection to the social conditions of 1917 than the social conditions operating outside their door.

Infrastructures of resistance encourage people to create alternative social spaces within which liberatory institutions, practices and relationships can be nurtured. They include the beginnings of economic and political self-management through the creation of institutions which can encourage a broader social transformation while also providing some of the conditions for personal and collective sustenance and growth in the present. This is about changing the world, not by taking control of the state, but by creating opportunities for people to develop their personal and collective power. Infrastructures of resistance create or sustain situations in which specific communities build economic and social systems that operate, as much as possible, as working alternatives to the dominant state capitalist structures. They are organized around alternative institutions that offer at least a starting point for meeting community needs such as food, housing, communications, energy, transportation, child care, education and so on. These institutions are autonomous from, and indeed opposed to, dominant relations and institutions of the state and capital. They may also contest “official” organs of the working-class such as

bureaucratic unions or political parties. In the short-term, these institutions contest official structures with an eye towards, in the longer term, replacing them.

## Constructive Anarchy

Since the early-1990s anarchist politics have enjoyed renewed popularity among people seeking a future of alternative social arrangements free from the hierarchies, authoritarianism, violence and ecological destruction marking global capitalism. Contemporary anarchists maintain a commitment to historic anarchist goals of creating a society without government, state and private ownership of means of production in which people associate voluntarily. Indeed, the definition of anarchism presented at recent anarchist gatherings highlights the inclusiveness of its conception of liberty.

**Anarchy:** A self governed society in which people organize themselves from the bottom up on an egalitarian basis; decisions made by those affected by them; direct democratic control of our workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, towns and bio-regions with coordination between differing groups as needed. A world where women and men are free and equal and all of us have power over our own lives, bodies and sexuality; where we cherish and live in balance with the earth and value diversity of cultures, races and sexual orientations; where we work and live together cooperatively. (Active Resistance 1998, n.p.)

In bringing these visions to life anarchists have marked the urban landscapes of North America with a variety of living examples of what I identify as infrastructures of resistance. Directing their energies to the enormous tasks of transforming everyday life through alternative social arrangements and organizations they refuse to wait either for elite-initiated reforms or for future “post-revolutionary” utopias. In order to bring their ideas to life anarchists develop working examples of future worlds or “futures in the present.” It is through the living examples of these futures in the present, the infrastructures of resistance, that they attempt to “form the structure of the new world in the shell of the old” to borrow the famous phrase of the revolutionary union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). These actually existing utopias provide everyday instances of what Foucault termed “heterotopias.” Their politico-theoretical expressions, both in theoretical articulations and in practice, serve as starting points for a reconsideration of anarchist politics. Together the infrastructures of resistance form the frameworks of a constructive anarchy, moving anarchism away from stereotypical notions of chaos, disorder and disorganization often mistakenly attributed to anarchism.

Contemporary anarchism offers a mid-range movement organized somewhere between the levels of everyday life, to which it is closest, and insurrection. Rooted in the former they seek to move towards the latter. Anarchists look to the aspects of people’s daily lives that both suggest life without rule by external authorities

and which might provide a foundation for anarchist social relations more broadly. This commitment forms a strong and persistent current within diverse anarchist theories. This perspective expresses what might be called a constructive anarchy or an anarchy of everyday life, at once conservative (preserving relations of mutual aid, solidarity and self-determination) and revolutionary (seeking to transform social relations and end statist and capitalist domination). Constructive anarchy is not a singular theoretical position. Anarchists of various outlooks and perspectives can be, and are, constructive anarchists. Rather constructive anarchy might best be described as an orientation to the world and to acting in the world. It is an approach to struggle that emphasizes practical engagement and involvement in community and workplace struggles. Constructive anarchy is about developing ways in which people enable themselves to take control of their lives and participate meaningfully in the decision-making processes that affect them, whether education, housing, work or food. Anarchists note that changes in the structure of work, notably so-called lean production, flexibilization and the institutionalization of precarious labor, have stolen people's time away from the family along with the time that might otherwise be devoted to activities in the community (Ward and Goodway 2003, 107). In response people must find ways to escape the capitalist law of value, to pursue their own values rather than to produce value for capital. This is the real significance of anarchist do-it-ourselves (DIO) activity and the reason that I would suggest such activities have radical, if overlooked implications for anti-capitalist struggles.

For Paul Goodman, an American anarchist whose writings influenced the 1960s New Left and counterculture, anarchist futures-present serve as necessary acts of "drawing the line" against the authoritarian and oppressive forces in society. Anarchism, in Goodman's view, was never oriented only towards some glorious future; it involved also the preservation of past freedoms and previous libertarian traditions of social interaction. "A free society cannot be the substitution of a 'new order' for the old order; it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of the social life" (Marshall 1993, 598). Utopian thinking will always be important, Goodman argued, in order to open the imagination to new social possibilities, but the contemporary anarchist would also need to be a conservator of society's benevolent tendencies.

The basis for constructive anarchism can be located, in part, in already existing social relationships, even if these relationships are largely dominated and obscured by the exploitative society in which they operate. Colin Ward suggests that anarchism, "far from being a speculative vision of a future society ... is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society" (Ward 1973, 11). As anarchists have long indicated, the examples of viable anarchism are almost endless. These could include almost any form of organization, from a volunteer fire brigade to the postal service, as long as it is not hierarchically imposed by some external authority (Graeber 2004). Even more, as many recent anarchist writings suggest, the potential for resistance might be

found anywhere in everyday life. If power is exercised everywhere, it might give rise to resistance everywhere. Present-day anarchists like to suggest that a glance across the landscape of contemporary society reveals many groupings which are anarchist in practice if not in ideology.

Examples include the leaderless small groups developed by radical feminists, coops, clinics, learning networks, media collectives, direct action organizations; the spontaneous groupings that occur in response to disasters, strikes, revolutions and emergencies; community-controlled day-care centers; neighborhood groups; tenant and workplace organizing; and so on. (Ehrlich, Ehrlich, DeLeon, and Morris 1996, 18)

While these are obviously not strictly anarchist groups, they often operate to provide examples of mutual aid and non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian modes of living which carry the memory of anarchy within them. Often the practices are essential for people's day-to-day survival under the crisis states of capitalism. Ward notes that "the only thing that makes life possible for millions in the United States are its non-capitalist elements. ... Huge areas of life in the United States, and everywhere else, are built around voluntary and mutual aid organisations" (Ward and Goodway 2003, 105). If, as anarchist labor organizer Sam Dolgoff suggests, society is "a vast interlocking network of cooperative labour" (1990, 5) then anarchists should realize the promise of cooperation on a social scale and work to ensure that mutual aid and solidarity overtake authoritarianism and exploitation which seek to direct cooperative labor as means of statist capitalism.

A crucial element in contemporary constructive anarchy is the process of "social insertion" or the involvement of anarchists in popular social movements and the daily struggles of the oppressed and working-classes. This may include work in neighborhood committees, landless tenant movements or rank-and-file union organizing. In these activities anarchists do not set themselves up as an activist group or subcultural enclave but contribute to the day-to-day building of popular movements. Collective responsibility within the organization is viewed as a means to sustain work during periods of declining mobilization and to provide a proactive approach to struggle rather than the reactive response to injustice that marks some activist groups. Constructive anarchists maintain that the crucial issue facing the contemporary anarchist movements is not primarily winning an ideological battle among the anti-capitalist activists. Instead the most pressing challenge facing anarchists is how to ensure that principles of anarchist organizing that are already present within movements of the working-classes and oppressed—direct action, mutual aid, collective decision-making, horizontal networks—are developed and maintained as the predominant practices of the social movements.

## The Path Ahead

The anarchist future in the present is based upon ongoing experiments in social arrangements, in attempting to address the usual dilemma of maintaining both individual freedoms and social equality (Ehrlich 1996b). These projects make up what the anarchist sociologist Howard Ehrlich calls “anarchist transfer cultures.” Anarchism highlights the voluntary cooperation and largely non-violent sociopolitical activities that widely characterize social life, as opposed to the state which is understood as the major source of violence in the world.

As a movement, anarchism has only partially realized its aims on a large scale for brief periods at times of social upheaval, but it has gone a long way in creating alternative institutions and transforming the everyday life of many individuals. It has a whole range of strategies to expand human freedom right here and now. As a result, it has an immediate and considerable relevance to contemporary problems as well as to future well-being. It provides a third and largely untried path to personal and social freedom beyond the domain of the tired social models of State-orchestrated capitalism or socialism. (Marshall 1993, 639)

One overdue project for sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists and activists alike is working towards an ecology of infrastructures of resistance in the contemporary period. What types exist? How do they thrive? The present work is intended as a beginning to such a project. The cases explored in this book offer a glimpse into what is actually involved in anarchist organizing. They allow the reader to see what anarchists are actually doing, beyond both the hype of mainstream media reports and the abstraction of much recent academic anarchist theorizing.

*Constructive Anarchy* provides in-depth analyses of anarchist involvement in a range of projects developed over the last decade offering detailed discussion of the varied organizational practices, strategies and tactics produced by contemporary anarchists over an extended period of time. Because a key issue of concern relates to the construction and maintenance of sustained anarchist organizational practices—against common notions that anarchism is about disorganization—this approach allows for a close and critical examination of the diverse attempts made by anarchists to bring their political ideas to life through engagement with workplace and community movements. Examining practices over the period of a decade the analysis provides an understanding of how specific tactics, strategies and practices have been developed, transformed, revised or discarded and under what contextual circumstances. In this way I am able to track the evolution of anarchist practices within specific projects or organizations rather than simply naming practices as is common in the recent writings on anarchist movements. For example, one of the interesting aspects of recent anarchist organizing, and one that has gone unnoticed or unreported, even by anarchist commentators, is the emergence of class struggle or anarchist communist perspectives from

within projects that begin life as cultural or subcultural in character, such as TAO Communications or the Anarchist Free Skool. Previous analyses, focusing only on the origins of such projects, or emphasizing their subcultural character, have not been able to recognize or comment upon such shifts.

The first chapter provides a discussion of “class struggle anarchism” and forms of organizational practices undertaken by anarchists. This chapter examines some of the pressing debates over organizing in which anarchists are engaged, highlighting various anarchist projects and organizational approaches which sustain people in the present while working towards broader social transformation. While much of contemporary anarchism, and recent studies of anarchism, emphasize “anti-organizationalism” anarchists have typically engaged in a range of organizational practices, often times within the context of broader working-class movements and organizations. Rather than a politics of demand, dissent or identity, geared largely towards the making of claims upon capital or the state (or supra-state bodies like the United Nations), anarchy emphasizes other priorities such as autonomy and self-determination. This discussion will help to contextualize analyses of movement organization and the practices, strategies and tactics that have marked various anti-statist movements that have emerged in the era of capitalist globalization.

I then turn, in Chapter 2, to the case studies of specific anarchist projects, beginning with an analysis of TAO Communications and anarchist media. Recognizing the limitations of shorter term street actions and protests and the need to build more durable organizations, many anarchists have shifted their energies towards attempts to build alternative “institutions” such as media centers. This chapter looks at the communications practices, both online and material, of TAO Communications an anarchist media venue based in a media collective with participants across the globe. TAO highlights anarchist commitments to gift economies and knowledge sharing.

The experiences of many anarchists involved in the construction of explicitly anarchist free spaces or autonomous zones, has convinced many of the need to break out of the social isolation that often exists within subcultural counter-cultural projects such as infoshops or free schools. Thus the next three chapters focus on the involvement of anarchists in broader community-based projects and coalitions. Chapter 3 examines anarchist participation in the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), a direct action anti-poverty organization that is, in many ways, organized along anarchist lines and which shares much in common with anarchist activism. OCAP has inspired similar groups in Vancouver (The Anti-Poverty Committee), London (the London Coalition Against Poverty) and elsewhere.

Chapter 4 examines the work of rank-and-file anarchists within mainstream unions. While such efforts have been largely overlooked, it is in rank-and-file labor struggles that contemporary anarchist communists have really been innovators, doing things that are quite atypical for many North American anarchist organizations. Unlike Left groups that have focused their energies on running opposition slates in union elections or forming opposition caucuses, anarchist unionists work to develop rank-and-file organization and militance. Much interest

and discussion has been generated by anarchist contributions to the re-emergence of union flying squads. Flying squads—rapid-response networks of workers that can be mobilized for strike support, demonstrations, direct action and working-class defense of immigrants, poor people, and unemployed workers—present a potentially significant development in revitalizing organized labor activism and rank-and-file militancy.

Of the issues to have emerged within the alternative globalization movement, perhaps the one most influenced by anarchism is the issue of borders and migration. Anarchists have long insisted that the rhetoric of globalization, with notions of the decline of the nation-state or the free movement across borders, should be made a reality. For anarchists, globalization is meaningless if it does not involve the end of nation-states and the elimination of national borders. Genuine globalization should include the actually free, unfettered movement of working-class and poor people in the absence of borders. It should aid people not capital. Chapter 5 addresses border control and the construction of “Fortress North America” and anarchist responses within No One Is Illegal movements. It discusses anarchist strategies and tactics and the development of a “new underground railroad” as anarchist try to confront and challenge tightening borders and expanding security initiatives.

A significant part of contemporary anarchist infrastructures are the “Autonomous Zones,” or more simply “A-Zones.” A-Zones are community centers based upon anarchist principles, often providing meals, clothing and shelter for those in need. These sites, sometimes but not always squats, provide gathering places for exploring and learning about anti-authoritarian histories and traditions. Self-education is an important aspect of anarchist politics and A-Zones offer important as sites of re-skilling. DIY and participatory democracy are important precisely because they encourage the processes of learning and independence necessary for self-determined communities. Chapter 6 examines the Anarchist Free Skool (AFS), a project begun in the multi-ethnic Kensington Market neighborhood in Toronto. The Free Skool provided a venue for long-time anarchists, novices and non-anarchists alike to come together and share ideas about anti-authoritarian social relations. An ambitious project the Free Skool which offered a variety of classes on diverse issues from film production and shiatsu to alternative economics and social analyses of violence against women. Anarchist participants in the Free Skool understood education as a political act and sought to challenge disempowering habits and broaden our awareness of alternatives to the inequalities of a capitalist society by expanding and deepening their knowledge of themselves and the world around them, sharing skills and providing an opportunity for community members at large to come together and explore alternatives. The Free Skool provided an important community resource and served as an organizing center in struggles to defend poor and homeless people facing criminalization and poor-bashing in the neighborhood.

Having explored the actual projects initiated by anarchists, and the everyday problems they encounter, the final section of the text develops some of the key themes, concerns and debates within contemporary anarchy. Chapter 7 outlines a

constructive anarchist re-thinking of revolution. It situates anarchist infrastructures of resistance as necessary developments if movements are to sustain themselves and develop greater challenges to state and capitalist authority. This chapter engages various anarchist projects and organizational approaches through the notion of “anarchist transfer cultures,” which sustain people in the present while working towards broader social transformation. The self-valorizing activities undertaken by anarchists can pose significant challenges to statist and capitalist relations. Without them people are unable to develop self-determined movements for radical social change.

The concluding chapter presents the contours of constructive anarchy as expressed historically as well as within contemporary anarchist organizing. Anarchist organizing draws upon and expands tendencies towards mutual aid and solidarity that are present in everyday life, in order to develop a real world alternative both to capitalist and statist institutions and social relations as well as to authoritarian forms of communism based on the exceptionalism of political vanguards.

## The Approach

The present work offers an engaged ethnography or analytical memoir based in action oriented research. It pursues a novel form of sociological writing reflecting on direct experiences in a critical and analytical way. It offers a close reading of everyday organizing practices of anarchists “on the ground,” providing observations and insights that might not otherwise be available. This direct engagement with contemporary anarchist organizing should be of interest to both anarchists and students of social movements alike.

*Constructive Anarchy* represents a do-it-yourself anarchist history, a record of events and lessons learned, provided from an anarchist perspective, offering a critical reflection on substantial examples of anarchist practice as they have developed and changed over time as anarchists strive to make effective contributions to radical social change. Anarchists have often had a difficult time documenting their own histories. This is, on some level, understandable for a movement oriented towards direct action and rebellion against states and capital. On one hand there is hardly enough time to keep up with the day-to-day work of organizing, nevermind writing histories. On the other hand, there is the constant pressure of dealing with repression and criminalization. Unfortunately, this means that many lessons have been forgotten and new generations of anarchists find themselves re-inventing the wheel or drifting in to repeated debates and controversies without benefit of the insights gained through previous trial and error.

One of the problems encountered in trying to develop an understanding of contemporary anarchy is that anarchist practices within specific contexts and over specific periods of time are absent from the literature in any meaningful or detailed way. There exist fine introductions to anarchism, such as those by Sean

Sheehan and Ruth Kinna. On the other hand, there is a real absence in the literature of more detailed analyses of the strategies, tactics, projects and perspectives of contemporary anarchist movements “on the ground.” Recent accounts of contemporary anarchism by social scientists such as David Graeber and Richard Day seem more concerned with anarchism as a metaphor for anti-globalization politics more broadly, addressing actual anarchist movements only in general and abstract terms. Thus Day’s recent book, which is subtitled “Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements,” gives only a dozen pages in an introductory chapter to a discussion of real world anarchist projects. In each case these projects are dealt with in only general terms such that a grassroots movement like the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty is reduced to one of its activities, direct action casework, as an archetypal movement tactic.

Recent discussions of anarchism have tended to go in one of two directions. The first is to engage in heavy theoretical analysis, often pursuing an engagement between anarchism and recent developments in philosophy, especially various expressions of post-structuralism. The second is a focus on sensational, dramatic, symbolic or ephemeral aspects of anarchist practice. Whether this takes the shape of uncritical celebration (within anarchism) or contemptuous dismissal (usually but not always outside anarchism) such an approach usually tends not to reflect day to day grounded practices. What is missing is how people act in everyday longer term settings. What I present here demonstrates the range of serious and grounded practices rooted in anarchist organizing: practices that may draw on previous traditions and practices but also innovate and experiment. My selection of a range of projects allows the reader to compare groups that express elements of a more subcultural character with anarchist involvement in more heterogeneous community-based coalitions that organize more broadly around issues such as poverty and work.

It is necessary to examine the various ways in which activists have responded, and are responding, to changing conditions and the innovations they are constructing in terms of movement organizations and repertoires of action, as well as their development of values and ideas, strategies and tactics. In attempting to re-think social movements in the current context we might turn to overlooked or under-appreciated tactics, practices and forms of organizing that have been central to recent movement development and which pose important challenges to conventional thinking about politics. Taken together these aspects of movement practice express a striving for autonomy and self-determination rather than a politics of dissent or demand.

*Constructive Anarchy* provides the most extensive and detailed study of contemporary anarchist infrastructures in English-speaking North America. In order to appreciate the varied and evolving practices of anarchists engaged in ongoing social struggles I focus on diverse organizational practices ranging from direct actions, involvement in community groups, rank-and-file union work as well as the construction of more durable institutions such as free schools. I discuss groups that use community centers as bases to organize within specific neighborhoods with organizations such as TAO Communications, which do much of their work in cyberspace. My selection of case studies allows me to compare

groups that are geared primarily towards anarchist and radical subcultures with anarchist involvement in more heterogeneous community-based coalitions that organize more broadly around issues such as poverty, migration and borders and work. In developing this work I make use of a rich variety of materials, including personal movement archives consisting of hundreds of pamphlets and articles produced by anarchists themselves. I also access other sources, such as blogs and websites, in which anarchist knowledge is produced and distributed.

Anarchism is not a singular movement or theory. A look at the varied histories of anarchism reveals a rich diversity of perspectives and practices. Anarchism is probably best described as a multi-tendency movement of movements. It is not my intention within this project to document or detail all of the various tendencies and expressions of anarchism. Neither is the intention to analyze one theoretical version of anarchism. Criticisms and debates are directly addressed. For the most part, different tendencies within anarchism co-exist in complex, if sometimes strained, relationships of mutual engagement. Anarchist movements, which have come to public prominence since the Seattle demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in 1999, represent an important, if misunderstood, development in contemporary political theory and practice. It is expected that this book will be of great interest to students of social movements and political and social theory, especially those interested in sociology political studies, communications and social justice. At the same time it is my great hope that this work will be especially useful for activists and those directly involved in community advocacy—indeed anyone interested in learning from important contemporary projects to challenge neoliberal capital and effect positive social change.