

ANARCHY

IN A

SMALL

POND

Small City Anarchy Workshop Questions

- 1. What are some unique challenges of being an anarchist in a smaller place?*
- 2. What can anarchists do in smaller places that can't be done in big cities?*
- 3. Can any of the 'challenges' be reframed or leveraged as advantages?*
- 4. How do we choose friends and enemies when there are less people around?*
- 5. What tactics can we develop that do not depend on large crowds and/or social movements?*
- 6. How can/should we relate to anarchists in bigger cities/centres? What kinds of regional relationships can we establish?*

Roadtrip Reflections

...reeko

In 2017, while visiting some family down in the U.S., a friend and I rented a car and drove across North Carolina and Virginia, visiting some anarchists we've made contact with over the years. Inspired by a friend who does this a lot, we developed a workshop we could facilitate in the communities we visited, which we found was a nice way to create a space for intentional and focused conversations, share experiences, and learn a lot about the places we were visiting. We wanted to have a discussion about both the challenges and advantages of anarchist projects and struggles in smaller cities and rural areas. What follows is a brief reflection on the encounters I had on that trip and some preliminary thoughts on how to advance anarchist ideas and practice in our local context.

Kingston is a city with a population of 120,000 located at the intersection of Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River and the Cataraqui River. Originally called Cataraqui, it is the traditional territory of the Huron, Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe peoples, and land both within and around the city continues to be very actively contested. It is the largest city for hundreds of kilometres in any direction, although it sits between the major cities of Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa, and along the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor, which is the most densely populated and heavily industrialized region of Canada. Kingston is primarily a government town, with the largest employers being the Canadian Forces Base, Royal Military College, Queen's University, and the Correctional Service of Canada which has its regional headquarters, staff college and six federal prisons in the area. A substantial tourist industry relies heavily on

Kingston's institutional history and Canadian nationalism, ranging from tours of the old Kingston Penitentiary to commemoration of John A. MacDonald, Canada's first Prime Minister who lived in Kingston and oversaw colonial expansion west, including the implementation of starvation policies against Natives and the infamous residential school system.

Despite this ugly picture, there has been a continuous anarchist presence in Kingston for the past several decades. We're lucky to have a handful of anarchist elders around who helped build this tradition and give us a sense of connectedness and possibility. Another major source of inspiration has been the struggles at Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory 60km west of town, which has been the site of militant land defense, highway shutdowns and rail blockades that anarchists have participated in since at least the Oka Crisis in 1990.

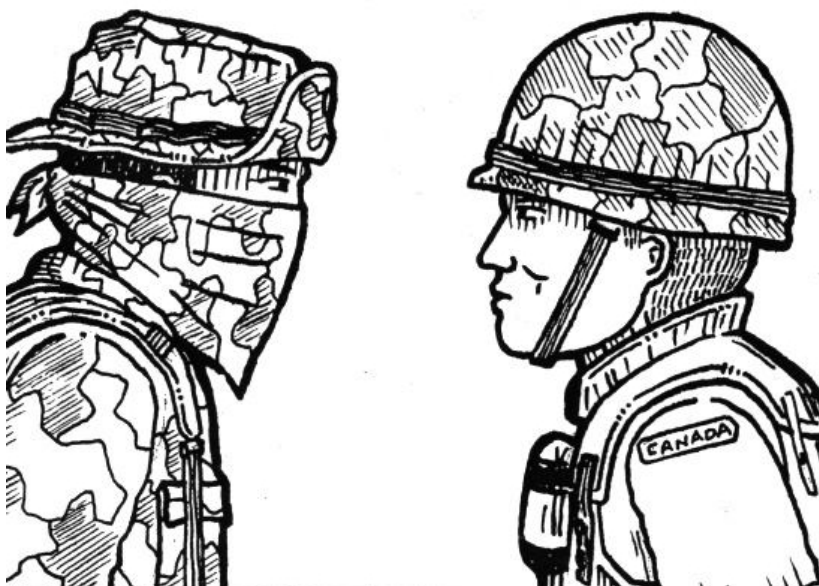


Illustration by Gord Hill

Still, the anarchist community can feel small and fragmented, and despite decent connections with scenes in Montreal and across Southern Ontario, we sometimes feel powerless and isolated. Where does this feeling come from? Those of us who become anarchists at a moment of heightened struggle (e.g. anti-globalization, Toronto G20, Quebec student strikes) can find ourselves chasing those crowds for a long time. Anarchists often rely on a strategy of intervention into leftist social movements. Of course this relies on there being an existing social movement, something that pops up in Kingston maybe every 10 or 15 years, so when we try to apply these tactics without a sensitivity to the local context, we end up either performing radicalism, waiting around for people to get pissed, creating leftist or 'progressive' campaigns ourselves, or getting grumpy and moving away.

For those of us who want to stay here, who want to be relevant outside of the anarchist milieu, who don't want to wait, and who want to build a specifically anarchist practice, we have to come up with something different.



Our workshop outline was pretty simple. We introduced ourselves, described Kingston, and told two stories from our context: one about failure, and one about success.

We asked participants to brainstorm a list of challenges they encounter as anarchists in small places. Of course these vary from place to place, but some of the common ones raised include:

- *People always leaving for 'bigger and better' places*
- *Wealth and power is concentrated and centralized*
- *A high level of visibility/low level of anonymity*
- *Few anarchists/new people/unfulfilling social scene*
- *Lack of social movements/broader left*
- *Lack of anarchist infrastructure & NGO jobs*
- *Interpersonal conflict is intense and affects everyone*
- *You can't just 'show up', you have to organize*
- *Less racial and sexual diversity/more bigotry*

After completing a list of challenges, we created a list of advantages. Then, we asked if any of the challenges we had brainstormed earlier could be re-framed or leveraged as advantages. This strategy doesn't work for every challenge, of course, but it was pretty fruitful.

For example:

- *Folks leave, but they also come back. This creates an impetus for regional networking and resource-sharing, especially among smaller places with pockets of anarchists.*
- *A high concentration of wealth and power means that we can clearly identify our enemies. Kingston, for example, has a handful of families that own land, hold political office and run major businesses. It is relatively*

easy to map out local power structures and imagine where to apply pressure when we're struggling.

- *A high level of visibility for us means that our enemies are also highly visible. You might run into the mayor at the grocery store. Your landlord likes to go to the same pub as you. Someone specializes in learning all the names and faces of the local police force, making it very difficult for them to use plainclothes officers against us without bringing in cops from out of town. Everyone, especially our enemies who care about their public image, are more vulnerable to public shaming and direct intervention.*

- *A small number of anarchists might mean that the anarchists who stay do so because we care about the politics, and not as much the subculture. Ideally this would translate into a more solid and committed engagement with anarchist practice. Furthermore, a lack of an enclosed anarchist subculture will mean that most of us will have friendships and connections with folks outside the scene, which is both a place to spread our ideas and take the pulse of what others are thinking, giving us a reference point and feedback for whether what we do is resonating.*

- *In Kingston the left is weak and sometimes I'm thankful. It means that a relatively small amount of anarchist infrastructure and capacity translates into a lot of influence locally. It means our projects don't get recuperated and our anarchist ideas don't have to be watered down to keep our seat at some table controlled by others. Going it alone can be difficult and daunting, but it's also a great opportunity to set the tone and prove our politics. Some have argued that a weak left creates an impetus to work with liberals; I would argue that a*

weak left means more space to build anarchy.

- *Interpersonal conflict is more intense and destructive in small places, there's no getting around that. That said, there is more reason to resolve conflict or at least co-operate across difference and be less sectarian and absolute with our conflicts.*

- *I find that in Kingston we all long to just 'show up' to things organized by other anarchists. A lot of initiative is shared by a small number of people. That said, it does encourage anarchists in town to each take on learning new skills and taking initiative they might not otherwise take if there wasn't a need. Ideally, this builds up our collective capacity and decentralizes our anarchist networks, making us less susceptible to repression.*

Lately I've found it helpful to think about Kingston as a node in a regional anarchist network, and try to imagine what this node can offer to that network that doesn't exist elsewhere. People circulate through the network and that's a good thing. We have skills and resources and infrastructure that we can offer to others, and vice versa. For example, we don't have much of a culture of rowdy street demonstrations in Kingston – sometimes we pack a few cars and travel to Montreal for that – but we do have a lot of access to rural space for skill development, bonfire socials and camp-out gatherings. Or maybe we do want to build a capacity for street conflict, but in developing that capacity we choose tactics that are effective for the number of people we can reasonably expect to show up for an action called for by anarchists in Kingston. When I start conceptualizing our place as a node in a network, I actually see a lot of strength and capacity for co-operation. In building that network we also build our local capacity, whether it's to converge for

conferences/building projects/direct action, to support a comrade in trouble, to organize exchanges between towns, to time decentralized actions across geographical space, or to share ideas and texts to create regional conversations.

To be clear, I'm not claiming it's somehow better to live in a small place, or that the conditions are more ripe for anarchy. I'm not telling you not to move to Montreal. I'm simply asserting that it should be possible to develop an anarchist practice almost anywhere, with a proper sensitivity to local conditions, a shift in perspective, and the development of regional networks.

It's unfortunate how easy it is to fall into that boring script about small cities and towns being places where "nothing happens", where it's necessary to join forces with liberals who instrumentalize us for their ends, or retreat into social media activism as we fantasize about moving somewhere "real". The truth is, everyone I've talked to from any place - big or small - feels powerless and ineffective a lot of the time. I can relate to that feeling either as confirmation of the limits I place in my mind on what's possible, or as a sign that it's time to re-evaluate the current situation and try something new.

If you're reading this and you live in a small place, my advice would be this: get to know your terrain, establish some roots, build core groups of solid anarchists, be good to each other, find the elders, connect with others across the region, avoid pointless sectarian conflict, refuse to water down your ideas, reflect and learn from your efforts, and keep trying shit until something feels like it's working.

Why Live in a Smaller Place?

...rabbit

A lot of people writing about anarchism in their town/city/hamlet don't address locale as a strategic choice. And for many, it isn't. Some of us are tied to family, work, bail conditions, whatever. Some of us can't afford to travel. Some of us simply can't imagine being happy away from the place where we grew up. But for many anarchists who I've known, location is absolutely a choice. You hear that loud and clear living in a small town when friend after friend jumps ship to live in a big city where the so-called real action is.

I live in a small city of about 120,000 people where I would guess there are about 30-40 active, self-described anarchists who do not always (or even often) work all together on the same project. One point that many (like honestly I would guess at least 25/30) of them hold in common is that they did not grow up in this town but came here later in life for other reasons, either from other cities or from even smaller places in the surrounding region.

What that tells me is that living here is, for most of us, a choice. I'm not going to suggest that it's always a strategic choice for the good of the anarchist project. Inertia is a powerful thing and I would guess a lot of us are here because we haven't left, or here for less anarchy-related aspects of life that we value - school, work, a partner, nice green space, whatever. But some of us want to live anarchist lives, and make at least some of our life choices in terms of what will allow us to make greater contributions to anarchist struggle. I'm trying to be one of those people, and I'm living here. So here is my absolutely incomplete list of reasons why living and

struggling in a smaller place has the potential to be strategic, worthwhile, revolutionary.

1. Friendship.

This might sound funny when I just got done complaining about how many people leave and how few of us there are. But the people who are still here and still doing shit after a few years are really, really here. It feels possible, somehow, to talk in terms of longer-term projects, to ask “what should we do” and have the answer refer to more than next month. We’ve made it this far, and most people who I know here are into putting down roots and sticking with one place for the long haul.

2. Air to breathe.

A lot of smaller places, mine included, give you proximity to open, green spaces and fresh air in a way that the middle of a city is hard-pressed to do. I think this means that a higher proportion of people here have an appreciation for life and the land we live on. Even the reddest anarchists I’ve met here seem to have some sense of a connection to land and non-human life. I think this leads to better politics in general when it comes to colonialism, nature and the earth.

3. Time to think.

In the larger, more fast-paced city that I lived in before this there were actions going on several times a week. There was always somewhere to be and something to do. There were always a ton of people around and somehow, still, way too many tasks for each of us to do. Here when one action gets done there is rarely another one right around the corner, and we have time to reflect, consider, and plan our next steps strategically and intentionally. We can also make medium-term plans and stick to them without 100 urgent things coming up in the interim.

4. Conflict resolution.

This isn't perfect and there's definitely still drama here, but in general people have to think seriously before they start shit with each other and think seriously again about how long they'd like to draw it out for. There's only a few of us and if we care about struggle and community we can't afford endless fractures over minute political and personal differences. We have to choose which differences should be rift-producing and which should not.

5. Dialogue across difference.

It's not really possible to live a life here where you exist primarily alongside folks who share your specific politics or tendency. That might sound like a bad thing, but I think sharing space regularly with people who I respect but also differ from forces me to find greater clarity in my politics so that I can articulate them to those who don't already agree. It also means we actually get the opportunity to change each others' minds. Certainly some differences are still dealbreakers, but I have a sense of which things are my sticking points and which are simply subtle differences of emphasis or tactical choice. This holds true for anarchists of different stripes from me as well as for folks who don't self-identify as anarchists but share some of my hopes and dreams.

6. Impact.

We're big fish in a small pond and in general (although not always) the town takes notice when shit goes down. We can see when we're making an enemy nervous because he's posting about it on the local reddit or he knows your boss's aunt. We can hear it when our actions have created a buzz among our neighbours and can see who they resonate with and who they piss off. Over time

we can tell when people's minds have been changed, or when something that once seemed normal now seems controversial. If we're doing well, people who are not at all our comrades will know that our positions and desires exist and will take sides accordingly.

7. The personal touch.

Our enemies (developers, politicians, cops, screws, fascists, whatever) have names and addresses, often they are right around the corner, and often it's possible to find them through the rumor mill, through gossip-y local media, or through poorly-guarded small-town public records.

8. A shittier security apparatus.

Even though my town in particular has a large number of cops per capita for its size, surveillance is still pretty low-level compared to some bigger centres. Less cameras, way less beat cops, less funding for investigations, less training for dealing with "protest" situations. Although this is offset somewhat by the fact that it's also much harder to hide in a place where everybody knows your name and something about your politics, it's still easier to get away with some specific kinds of things.

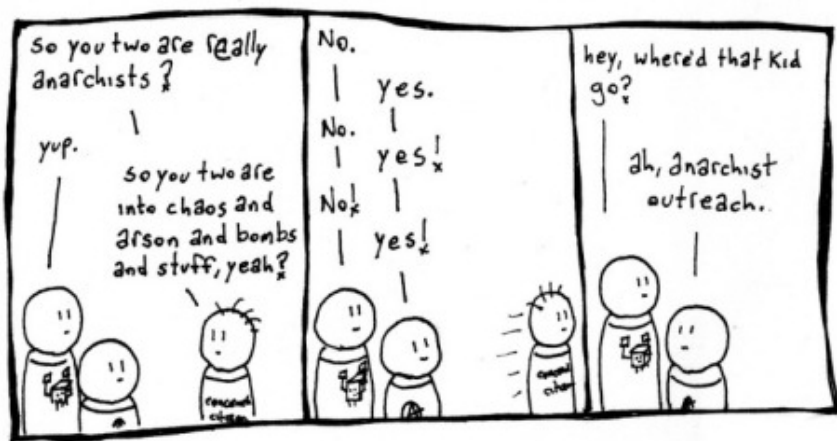
9. A knowable terrain.

There's less going on, so it's easier to learn about the ins and outs and the who's who of a place like this. We can make a list of local slumlords that fits on one page. We can walk by the three boneheads' houses every day. We can keep track of the various development projects that are on the go. We can remember who all came out to our last action and make sure to follow up with them and invite them back. We can see and hear about what moves our enemies are making and what impact they're having on non-anarchists around us and plan our

interventions accordingly. This makes it easier to plan actions now, but also might make it easier to one day build autonomy in a place, which might make it easier to start making anarchy happen.

10. Contact with the outside world.

Anarchists can't be as insular here as they can elsewhere. If you want to or need to work, go dancing, work out, study, talk to passers-by, or really do anything that involves more than you and your three best friends, you're going to have to talk to "regular" people. That means building relationships that keep you in touch with what most of the world is actually like and what most people are thinking about. It means learning how to make your perspectives intelligible to outsiders sometimes. It means considering the roots of our politics more often and being able to answer fundamental questions like 'why no cops,' 'what's capitalism,' or 'what's anarchy,' which means interrogating our basic principles on the regular and building more solid politics as we go. It also means relationships that can lead to support from unlikely places when things go badly.



From the Super-Happy Anarcho Fun Pages

I'm not saying move here now, because I think ultimately most of us will do better moving less and fighting more in places that we know well. But, if you're thinking about putting down roots in a place outside of the metropolis, or if you're considering strategically where to live your life, keep us in mind. Maybe bigger isn't always better. If you're sticking it out in the big city, maybe some of these points will also help in thinking about your neighbourhood, or about a particular social world that you could or do inhabit.

At the very least, remember when you're networking and when you're considering who to be in touch with in your area, that there might be folks hanging out in places in between you and the next closest megacity who are worth building power with. Question your internal map of the region you live in and which places you think of as non-places, or as only places to drive through or visit on a camping trip. There might be more going on out there than you think.



Anarchism in the Middle of Nowhere

Interview with Christine from Prince Edward County

From Embers is a podcast and radio show in Kingston.

FE: How would you like to introduce yourself, how would you describe yourself?

Christine: I'm an older anarchist that works in the County. I worked in public libraries, and violence against women work, and I raised my kids here.

If somebody had never been here what would you tell them about the place that you live?

It's really beautiful geographically. It's like a little island south of Belleville, and I live in the very south end, on the shore. We've lived here for almost 20 years. When we bought our house it was inexpensive, and now it's really expensive to live here.

How would you describe your personal politics?

I'm an anarchist. Two of my three kids are anarchists. One of them's almost there. And for many years we were I guess we would say Socialists, Marxists, you know, but basically how I look at anarchism is like that but without the government. So that's often how I will describe it to people who have no idea what it would be. It's anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, freedom-seeking and pro-mutual aid and all of those things.

What are some of the projects that you've done here in the County?

We've done actually a lot of things that probably wouldn't

have been considered anarchist projects, even when our kids were young. We homeschooled two of our three kids. That actually came about because I also taught for a bit and I didn't like how things worked in schools. I don't think they're the best place for kids - public schools, private schools, whatever, where there's not a freedom to learn what they want and to be supported in that. So we did what's called unschooling and yet our children are all incredibly well spoken and can read and write and really turned out to be amazing people. During that time we also held art camps here, our kids always had friends over, they were involved in theatre, and a lot of community-based things that didn't really cost money, because we also didn't have a lot of money. So i guess those are not necessarily anarchist projects but they're anarchistic in that there's freedom there, and we really believed in that.

And then since then we also did other things like we have a Food Not Bombs, and I find that's a really good entry point for people because everybody loves food and the Food Not Bombs philosophy isn't a charity model. People who come to Food Not Bombs also cook with us and eat with us, we all eat together. It's really about just coming together in community.



The other project that is actually online but that i'm really happy with is a mutual aid page. I specifically called it mutual aid because I wanted to tie it to Kropotkin and the whole idea of mutual aid so that people would look that up and understand what it means and it's just opened up this amazing thing. There's like 700 people in our community on this page and it's basically give, take, borrow or lend. People are constantly giving things away but also saying for example "you know I'd really like to get some honey and I don't know how to extract it. Does anybody know how to do that" And then somebody would go over and show them how. It's just amazing. At the beginning it was really weird because people have such a money mind, like we're so tied to money that people would be putting things on and they'd say "oh and I'm willing to pay." We'd have to remind them that there was no money there, and it didn't even have to be reciprocal - you don't have to give something back, it's just about building community with each other. So I'm really happy about that.

Last summer I opened a little bookstore or infoshop called 'Diggers' that has a lot of radical left books, anarchist books, feminist books and also used books. People are welcome to come and they don't have to buy books they can just come and have tea or read zines. We have lots of zines.

What does a typical Food Not Bombs day look like here in Prince Edward County?

It's very different I think than a lot of others because we don't have the population. At first I was just basically calling it Food Not Bombs and showing up with food. But

basically we connect with each other, there's maybe three or four of us so it's a very small crew, and we salvage some food or we cook at each other's houses, or we cook at our own houses and we all come together for the serving. In the summer it's at the park in town and in the other months we fundraise to rent the town hall in Picton and we eat out of there. We do other things too like a Really Really Free Market and game nights and that kind of thing. We always have a literature table, that's like a really key thing at Food Not Bombs is to have literature there about anarchism and feminism and also just about things that would be helpful to the community like where they can get free legal aid or dentistry for their kids, those kind of things.

What kind of community would you say is coming out to eat the food?

There's a bit of a mix. Actually I think that that's what's great. There will be people who come that are seniors who really probably do have access to food but they also like the company. We get a lot of families with little kids that run around. And also a lot of my friends just come.

You said you distribute books and zines at Food Not Bombs, you also have a book and zine shop out there in the summer. What draws you so much to literature? What do you think that lends?

Our whole family were always into reading. My dad and mom who were basically working class, my dad worked at GM and my mom was a cashier, even though they weren't super educated they were always into books. I always loved books. I worked at the library for ten years and I write. I find that anarchists really like to read and there's just so much interest in history and so many

points of view to argue and talk about and discuss. I also love the idea of zines because not everybody can afford to do books and lots of people have good ideas who might not otherwise have a chance to print something. so that's why.

You've done a bit of writing here also, do you want to talk about that a bit?

Four other people and myself have started a thing called The Torch. I was actually putting out things on my own for a while but I'm really interested in collaborating. I'm really trying to do projects that don't replicate how things normally work in hierarchical systems and frankly it's challenging because we are raised all our lives to have certain people at the top and other people following. We don't publish as regularly as we'd like, it's about just trying to get everybody together to have time because we all work. We write pieces and then we look at each others' pieces, we share them and talk about what we think is strong and weak and just try to improve our writing and also respect each others points of view, although it is an anarchist publication so those are the kind of things we talk about.

What are some of the topics covered in The Torch?

Well I tend to write a lot of anti-capitalist things. I'm very interested in getting people to do things that are different, so I focus on alternatives to capitalism. One of our writers is a farm worker and she also owns land that she farms and so she has a real interest in the environment so she writes a lot about that kind of thing. One of our comrades is a mom, a single mom, and has had poverty issues so she can speak very well about first hand experience of poverty. One is the son of one of the

other women. We all write about things that we're most interested in. One of the people likes to write book reviews because she likes to read books.

Recently one of the writers wrote a really excellent piece on the Picton Town Hall because there's a lot of gentrification in the County. I know that's kind of a supposedly urban term but it applies to almost any tourist town i would think. You think of Niagara on the Lake or whatever. So the situation here is just terrible as far as that goes, there's a housing crisis, there's seasonal work because we're a tourist place, servers and young people have no place to live and they're having to like live in Belleville an hour away and then there's no transportaion. It's a mess, and I can only see it getting worse honestly unless something happens.

One of the developers in town has bought this big hotel and he has shown interest in buying the Picton Town Hall and the County was thinking of actually putting it up for sale but a lot of us galvanized our energies and got them to at least hold off until they get a request for proposals, so she wrote a really good piece on that.



So you talked about the 3-4 people who help you with Food Not Bombs, and the 3-4 who also write for The Torch. Are they the same people?

Well actually no, interestingly. Basically two of them do go to both groups. A lot of people who come to Food Not Bombs are not anarchists at all but they are progressive and community-minded people, generally there are a lot of artists here and they are usually not the well off artists but the artists that are just doing smaller things. One of them who is a good friend, I think her point in life is just to make festivals happen and make people have fun and she always comes. We have like a crew page online so it varies - I just put out a call or somebody else puts out a call and just says you know the meal is tomorrow who is coming for setup, who is coming to clean, who is coming to strike, who is going to bring what, that kind of thing.

So it sounds like whether or not they're actually self-described anarchists you've got maybe six other people helping out with these projects. So how did you meet those people? How did you find people to do projects with?

Because I homeschooled my kids a lot of people in the County got to know us because it seemed like everything we did was sort of fringe. We homeschooled, we're vegan, we gave up well paying jobs to come and live in the country, that kind of thing. My kids were involved in the community theatre when they were young. My son was the only punk that ever went to that highschool, him and his girlfriend. Actually funny story - he wouldn't stand for the national anthem which was like a huge deal at that high school. Then I worked at the public library as an outreach worker so obviously I would know lots of people. My job there wasn't just outreach but I also did

special events, so I organized marches, even if they didn't have to do with the library, but I could get the word out through that. I did a lot of things for women's issues, we did Take Back The Night events, those kind of things.

You gave a workshop recently at an anarchist bookfair, did you call it organizing in smaller places?

I called it small town organizing, I think I just stole that off a zine title of somebody else who did it in Grand Rapids. It was small town and also smaller centres I guess. But we have a really small town! As you mentioned I have a shop, but it's at my house in the garage basically. It's fixed up but still. People come in there and they're just like amazed. I had these two people who were out biking and they came from Montreal, and they had no idea and they were just biking down in South Bay and they came in and I went out there. I usually let people browse for a while before I bother going out because I don't want to be hovering. I went in there and I said "Hi how are you?" And the guy says "Oh wow when i go back to Montreal they will not believe that I just rode my bike up to this place, I go into this little bookstore and it's this really radical bookstore in the middle of nowhere!"

What would you say are some of the biggest differences between being an anarchist somewhere like Prince Edward County and being an anarchist in a bigger city?

Obviously in a big city your're going to find a lot of other people. You have a bigger circle and I think that you can in some ways isolate yourself from so-called regular people, because you can just be with your own kind all the time. Whereas here you really, and I find that hard,

you really have to make an effort to maybe not be as judgy or be more willing to not choose sides sometimes because you also have to live with these people. You know I don't really want, even though I'm sure this actually does happen, to have people cross the street when they see me because they either think I'm too radical or they just don't want to discuss politics or whatever. Not that I do that all the time. So it makes it difficult and sometimes you do have to choose sides because you really feel it's important and then you will have made that division so in that way it's more difficult.

On the other hand a small community is also very supportive. Sometimes I am absolutely amazed at someone who I mistook for someone who would be like super conservative and not understand my point of view at all is actually really open to it, so it maybe makes you get to really know people more and kind of expand the base. A lot of people will not self identify as anarchists, but when you ask them, like I've actually said "So do you believe in capitalism? Do you think this is a good thing?" and they're like no, and I'm like "What do you think about government controlling everything we do?" "Oh no that's not good," so like you're pretty much an anarchist because those are pretty much the two main things. I might add something like "Would you like to be free enough to really pursue things that you feel you've missed out on because you didn't have opportunity or didn't have money" and they're like "Ooooh yeah." And these are all anarchist themes.

What are some of the things that you've found most challenging about organizing in such a small place?

Well if you do some things that are really unpopular you could possibly have trouble at your employment or

elsewhere. I had that happen with regards to a Sir John A Macdonald statue that was put up and I used to write a lot of letters to the editor. Interestingly a lot of people would say wow I totally thought that but I was afraid to actually say it. So I guess that's the hardest thing is you do lose friends sometimes, like people you thought were really your friend but your politics for some reason scare them which is silly because they know me, they know what I do, they know where I live, they've known my kids, you know. But they just don't want to be associated or whatever. So that's probably the hardest thing.

What is the most awesome thing about organizing in a smaller place?

The fact that for the same reason, because people do know you, you can change people's minds who you thought you would never influence in any way. Because you're forced together by social things that go on. You might just go to an event and you just strike up a conversation at the local pub or whatever, whereas if you were in the city you might never run into that person at a pub, you might just go to pubs where you know all of the other people are going to be anarchists. So sometimes you like meet somebody at the Legion or something and you start talking about their role in the war and you know Nazis or whatever, and next thing you know you're telling them to read Mark Bray's book about antifa and they're like "Oh yeah, I'll remember that." It's really interesting how people will come together in a small town.

Of all of your projects, it sounds like there are many, which do you think has been the most successful in that regard? What has helped you sort of break in in that way?

I think the store, amazingly. Even though it's only been this past summer, mostly because I'm comfortable because it's in my own space and it's very social. People like books and they come in and chat and just have like a lot of time to relax and not feel pressured. I'm in the country, it's really beautiful down here. I'm really looking forward to doing lots of special events this summer. We had discussion nights and I didn't think anybody would come and six or seven people came and we had a really good chat. We had Cindy Milstein come from far away - I've really admired her work and books that she's written and she came to this tiny little place, and she's a very well known writer. We had like fifteen people there in November and there's no heat in the store! So we had the heaters on in there all day and we served chili and we had a free meal and it was awesome, so i guess I'd say for now the store.



Do you relate at all to anarchists outside of Prince Edward County?

Yes, thankfully! So obviously my kids are anarchists and they live in Toronto, so there's a circle there. I've gotten to know people over the years in Detroit because I took IWW 101 training there, so people come up from the States and then we'd get connected online or whatever.

The ones in Peterborough helped me start Food Not Bombs and then of course in Kingston meeting you guys. I met a lot of people through the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair which I've been going to for quite a long time, maybe 7 years or something like that. When I first discovered that I was just in heaven because I felt very alone and my kids had moved away. The bookfair is how I got to actually know a lot of people from Kingston because I met them there and then we had that connection. I've met some from Kitchener. I just stay in touch online and thankfully the Kingston people can come and were there for the opening of Diggers which really meant a lot to me to have other anarchists come that day. It just really meant a lot to me that they took the time to come out and support my tiny little project. It's a very small store!

Where do you see it all headed? Best case scenario, how would this community be different in 5-10 years?

I would really like to see the working class start to control the town more. If there were more things like co-op housing and co-op food production and all that you wouldn't have this huge disparity between people who have and have not. I would like to see the end of limousines driving around to wineries. But you know, it's how do you make that happen? It would be great if I thought that you could just get rid of all of them by like torching them or whatever. I just feel like there have to be other ways that we can get those kind of things.

Could people still come here and look at nice things?

Yes!! yes!! I love to travel, I like to go to new places. Sometimes people here will have this kind of hate on for tourists and then they hate them but at the same time

they need them for the economy, but people coming doesn't mean you have to provide ridiculous experiences. The area is so phenomenally beautiful, like beaches and we have tons of nice areas.

You could have a worker-owned restaurant and you could grow food and you could have wine even - I have nothing against wine, I drink wine. You could have a winery that was owned by a bunch of people that are into wine and want to work the grapes and not have to hire migrant workers which is another whole thing here.

People will say we have to get migrant workers because no one else will work, but they are offering jobs that are like seven days a week in any kind of weather for absolute minimum wage so like yeah, sign me up, right? Who wants to do that? So instead they exploit people who come from places where they are really desperate and yeah... Sorry it's another issue, but yeah i think we could definitely still have tourists and we would welcome them and I do! People come here that come to the shop and they're from all over and I'm interested in where they're from and what they're up to and a lot of those people really don't care about fancy stuff. They want a nice place and nice people and good food and I think people would come here just for that, that's what would be so different about it.



Report-back from May Day in Kingston

Anonymous submission to *www.north-shore.info*

“Oh wow, we’re just, like, taking up the street,” I hear the thirty-something guy behind me exclaim to his friend as we take off. “Holy shit this is awesome,” his friend replies. Slightly more experienced folks from the crowd move instinctively to the side and back to stop traffic as we move out of the park and onto the road, heading towards Kingston’s main commercial street. The sun is shining for May Day for the first time in recent memory and we had a larger-than-usual crowd of around 200 lining up for free hamburgers and veggie dogs at our annual pre-march barbecue.

The group that has chosen to take the street is about 75 people, based on my cursory glance backwards. Normally I’d do a better count but it was my turn to take the front this year and our banner is surprisingly heavy and unwieldy. It’s a decent turnout for Kingston, but really not much larger than last year’s march, which took place in a lightning storm of epic proportions. It’s a different crowd than what we got in the rain though – less usual suspects and more kids and people I don’t recognize. People are making good use of the sidewalk chalk that we’ve given them, writing various slogans on streets, sidewalks and buildings as we move. There are children drawing circled A’s in intersections and a guy I’ve never seen before writing “banks suck” at every bank as we pass by.

This event is a bit of a slog to organize, and it forces us to take on roles that we might not choose to take if we lived in a bigger city. I’ve often wished that somebody else, some left-wing activist type maybe, would come out

of the woodwork and stage a takeover of our organizing collective so that my friends and I could just show up at the march and have some fun. Maybe we'd even try to escalate it a little bit by Kingston standards, progress from chalk to spraypaint perhaps, or add in some kind of action component like an office takeover or a banner drop. But nobody ever steps up to organize the thing, and I'm too glad it exists to let it go. It does feel a bit boring for all of us in the collective in the leadup, and even the event itself can feel a little ritualistic, like we're doing the same thing every year. May Day is the one time each year in this town, though, where people reliably take the streets (not the sidewalks or a public square) with a message that I can get behind. It's also the one event I'm involved in that reliably brings out strangers and folks who are new to showing up for a radical event. We joke about how there's a new wingnut every year, and that's true, but there is also clearly someone each year who is pushing their comfort zone just by being here. There are also people who I see every year at this event but don't see much of otherwise. I find it inspiring that we organize this event offline, choosing instead to get out and plaster the town with posters on poles and flyers in mailboxes, and I think we actually get more new people because of it rather than less. I hate Facebook so that aspect brings me a smile every year.

I'm not against ritual if it has a point. It feels right somehow, as the spring emerges each year, to come together with a bunch of other people who share a distaste for the way the world works and do something that we're not supposed to do, no matter how small or inconsequential that transgression is. "Real" holidays are bound up with religious connotations and forced togetherness with biological family and other people who, no matter how much I love them, I did not choose.

May Day, though, is all ours. We get to call in sick and take the streets and mark another year of whatever kind of struggle we've chosen to engage in. Sure there are lots of people here who I don't share much with politically, who I would not call close comrades and who at other moments I might find myself in conflict with. And sure, sometimes its depressing to think of how little we've accomplished since the last time we walked down this road. But all the same, for those of us who want to live our lives in some kind of community of struggle, it's nice to build in our own holidays, our own rituals, our own ways to mark the passing of time and to give ourselves excuses to gather.

Half way through the march things almost get interesting as a local Indigenous organizer takes the mic while the rest of us hold an intersection. Passers-by in this busy part of town pause to gawk as she speaks about pipeline politics, traditional ways of life and allyship. Two unreasonably angry trolls emerge to hurl the usual troll-y insults. Glimpsing the word "freedom" on our banner one guy screams "Does freedom mean the freedom to be stupid? Huh? To block a public road?" They're not the most original, but one of them walks right into the crowd and a few people look visibly tense. The speaker continues on, though, and the trolls, not knowing what else to say, just stand in the middle of the crowd flailing their arms, hoping perhaps that their pathetic presence will somehow intimidate us or persuade us that our actions are, as they point out, "moronic." One lady fronts like she's going to pick a fight with the speaker but predictably scurries away up the street when nobody steps off the sidewalk to back her up. We move on.

After a few such stops and about a 40-minute march, we end at another park. This area of waterfront is slated for a huge wave of development and we invite people to

leave messages about how they feel about that as they disperse. A bunch of them move to do that and we hang around, listening to a bit more of our playlist and chatting with some of the attendees as they hang messages on the fence of a falling-down “heritage” building that might soon become a luxury residential building.

The cops didn’t show up this year, for the third year in a row, in what we think is an intentional strategy to not engage unless somebody calls them. We promote the shit out of this event with posters all over the city and they clearly know that it’s happening. I’m pretty sure that a good part of why they don’t come anymore is that the march itself has never been confrontational with anybody but them, so if they don’t come they can safely assume that it will be peaceful. Of course I have feelings about that, about how reliably smooth and pleasant this protest is. Of course I’d love it if a crowd this large and this diverse would instead pick some kind of a fight, or target some symbol of power for destruction. But nobody is standing up to move it in that direction, and I don’t want to for a couple of reasons. It doesn’t seem strategic for my own life to break more laws when I’m so publicly associated with the event, and if I don’t organize it then I know it won’t happen at all. It also doesn’t seem like the rest of the crowd shares my friends’ and my desire for something more. For a lot of folks it’s enough right now to walk on the road, to push back cars, to yell at people, to draw some impermanent message on a building. That was me at one point too so I don’t want to deny them that opportunity or diminish how great it can feel to do those things when they feel rare and special. Instead I’d rather remind myself that those transgressions are fun and real, and that it’s no more or less ritualistic than breaking the same windows every year anyway. If the

march gets more creative next year that would be great, but if it doesn't I still appreciate it as an annual touchstone for those who attend. I also see how it changes in more subtle ways from year to year depending on what else is going on in terms of local struggle. I do worry about boredom, but mostly I trust that we can let the event grow and change as the context does without giving up the sense of tradition that it brings.

When we get home, we unload our barbecue stuff and banners and have some friends over for leftover burgers and to watch twitter feeds and riot porn from other cities. Another annual small town ritual, and I don't feel bad about it at all. We chat about plans for actions and events coming up, and somebody proposes an ambitious project idea that we all agree to talk about next week. I send some appreciative text messages to a few people who stepped up to block streets or speak on the mic today, and then I go to bed happy. I'm feeling pretty pumped about the day and how it went, but I can't pretend I'm not also feeling relieved that the organizing for it is over for another year. Another May Day in Kingston down, and a pretty successful one at that.

