

Anarchism and Elections

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

Workers Solidarity Movement

July 2017

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1. What is Electoralism and WSM Participation

1. When we talk of electoralism we mean those methods that seek change through putting forward individuals for representative forms of government under class rule, i.e. parliaments and town or regional councils.
2. We have two fundamental issues with these institutions:
 1. They exist in order to manage capitalism through the state in a way that minimises conflict between the capitalist class and dampens conflict between that class and the rest of society.
 2. They are constructed so that representatives cannot be mandated by those who elect them or recalled as soon as they break such mandates. This is by design, these methods of 2 rule are intended to be unaccountable so that those in them can make decisions in favour of the capitalist class that may be at odds with the wishes of those who elected them.
3. For these reasons we do not run candidates for election, and in almost every circumstance we do not advocate people vote. The only exceptions being the rare occasions where an election is in effect a referendum in a hyper-polarised society, one example being the 1994 election in South Africa that was deeply connected to the movement to end apartheid.
4. Referendums are different in that the people get to directly vote on an issue, thus making the decision themselves. While fundamentally different this is not to say referendums do not have their own problems including:
 1. The question to be voted on is generally formulated by politicians and may well be worded to exclude best options.
 2. They still take place in class society and within the constitutional limits imposed by that society. This means they can only be about redividing the small share of the cake given to the working classes rather than seizing the bakery.
 3. In many countries including Ireland referendums can only be called by politicians and needed referenda can thus be delayed for years and even decades.

2. Opposition to Electoralism

1. We generally won't run high profile 'spoil your vote' campaigns as while these can have an educational aspect they also tend to create unnecessary hostility with other groups and individuals on the left who engage in electoralism. For that reason we are unlikely to engage in active mass outreach around the anarchist criticism of electoralism while campaigning is in progress, holding off until polls close or before such campaigns are really underway.
2. Our focus is generally on:
 1. Showing electoralism to be a carefully constructed mechanism for managing capitalism and minimising dissent.

2. Showing that participation in electoralism de-radicalises organisations and individuals over time. Electoralism restores faith in the system, fosters a culture of 'Someone Else Will Do It', and incentivises political opportunism.
3. Arguing that the decision to abstain far from being apathetic can be based on an understanding of how the system really works which is far more accurate than left electoralism.
4. Contrasting electoralism with systems of real democracy that give people a direct say in governance.

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*Passed by National Conference, July 2017. This paper sits under the State & Democracy paper.
Have a look at that to understand contexts that are not repeated here.*

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