

Do Anarchists Vote in State Elections?

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It obviously depends on the individual anarchist whether or not they choose to participate in the political process, but I'm writing this piece to point out that the act of voting in state elections stands in direct contradiction with anarchy. If an anarchist chooses to vote, that action has nothing to do with furthering anarchy or anarchist principles. No anarchist worth their salt would pressure other anarchists into voting for their favorite politician.

I'm always staggered by the absurdity of anarchists stumping for politicians... Every time election season is approaching, certain self-proclaimed anarchists flood anarchist spaces on social media to shame us into voting. They always make dramatic moralist claims like "If you don't vote for this politician, their opponent will put my life in danger. If you don't support this "progressive" ruler, you obviously don't care about (insert marginalized group) and are no comrade of mine!"

Voting for a political candidate in a representative democracy is a direct legitimization of their authority - over you and everyone in your community. It's like inviting them to rule you. By voting, you're declaring your support for the system and appointing a politician to act as your political representative for however many years their term lasts for. That politician now speaks for you, makes your decisions for you, acts in your name.

By supporting a politician, you're declaring your approval for whatever actions that ruler then takes during their reign in power. The more power the position has, the more harm they'll be able to do. If you're voting for a president of a nation state, for example, you can bet they'll make decisions that will cause death and suffering for countless people.

There is no way to vote for change under capitalism. The system in a neoliberal capitalist state only exists to serve the elite wealthy classes. To enable them to horde more and more wealth by exploiting your labor and to protect that wealth from you. Socialists who think they can reform the state from within are not anarchists, even if they claim to be. A lot of democratic socialists will claim to be anarchists to get you to support their candidate. They'll insist lots of anarchists have joined their organization. They'll sometimes even claim their candidate will fight for anarchy if they get elected.

Democratic socialists accept the state as a legitimate vector for change and believe it can be made to work for the people if we just elect the right sort of politicians; typically "progressive" liberals that support some friendlier policies and promise to use their power to advocate for social justice.

Anarchists, on the other hand, reject all authority as illegitimate and don't accept being ruled by anyone; no matter how "progressive" the prospective ruler professes to be. Anyone telling you they're an anarchist while trying to get you to choose a "better" ruler, or a "lesser" evil is either lying to you or to themselves.

Putting nicer liberals in positions of power might seem like a good idea on first inspection, but it ignores the simple reality that all power corrupts. All throughout history, no system of rulers and obeyers has made us freer. Every single power hierarchy has rapidly descended into tyranny. Giving a person power and expecting them to not use it to cement even more power for themselves is as foolish as Charlie Brown trying to kick the football while Lucy holds it. Power is an addictive drug and people that possess it can no longer be trusted to serve your interests when those interests now completely contradict with their own. The powerful have very little in common with the powerless.

Trying to "fix" hierarchies so they appear, on the surface, to be less brutally unjust, can actually hurt anarchy, because it convinces radicals to compromise and settle-for and grow complacent by accepting a supposedly kinder ruler.

How this typically plays out:

The ruler the radicals helped elect is quickly corrupted by the system that has granted them so much power that their ego is in overdrive. As the "voice of the people", the ruler is convinced they can do no wrong and that their actions are in service of "the greater good" or "the revolution".

The people who promoted and voted for the ruler, after eagerly celebrating their success, will spend the next several years working hard to justify to their egos the increasingly horrible things the ruler then inevitably does while in office.

They'll now spend their energy smugly explaining to everyone who will listen that the ruler's oppressive actions are in their best interests ultimately. That the ruler is simply thinking ahead; playing 3D chess, that compromises have to be made to aid the *revolution*. That reform takes *time*. That they can't be expected to not take money from lobbyists or deport immigrants or imprison poor people or wage war overseas because "that's how the system works". They have to work within the confines of the system now, so they are able to one day do good; when they have enough power to accomplish it!

The "progressive" politician will soon be indistinguishable from every other politician shilling their way up the hierarchy, and their radical supporters will have abandoned every radical inclination they ever had to justify supporting their "team". Empty revolutionary rhetoric will have replaced anarchist methods like direct action and mutual aid, and words like "socialism", "progressive" and "revolution" that were used in the political campaign will have been stripped of all their value and meaning, convincing everyone that socialism is just more of the same and not worth fighting for in the future.

The wonderful thing is, the people that stumped so fervently; shaming everyone into voting for their shiny new ruler will never have to accept any culpability for their part in bringing the ruler to power. The whole point of democracy is to shift responsibility from the individual to the intangible and indomitable **system**. The institutions of democracy work hard to convince the individual they have no right to self-determination beyond casting a vote for the system's pre-approved **ruler A** or pre-approved **ruler B**.

See, only the system can provide for you, citizen. Trust in the system. The system is great. Don't fight the system. You can't defeat the system. Just ask the system for freedom and maybe you'll be granted some - If the system is feeling generous anyway. Vote for ruler B today!

Anarchists! Pull yourselves together. Capitalism and statism simply cannot be voted away. As Emma Goldman famously said:

If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal.

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