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Anti-election activities in Montreal and Quebec City

VOTEZ BIEN, VOTEZ RIEN!

Jaggi Singh

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MONTREAL, November, 22, 2000 — In just five short days, like sheep to slaughter, millions of so-called citizens of the Canadian state will be heading to the polls to exercise their “right” to choose the men and women who will invariably screw them over for the next 3–5 years. Elections Canada, ever mindful of increasing voter apathy, especially among youth, has been running ads in a desperate bid to reverse the consistent trend of low voter turnouts. Meanwhile, cities and towns across Canaduh are replete with glad-handing politicians, tedious media coverage, excessive election advertising, not to mention the increasing level of hot air that, despite the cold weather, is about as welcome as a kick to the groin.

Beyond the mainstream drivel about elections, diverse and spontaneous anti-electoral and pro-democracy efforts have arisen in Quebec, building on previous abstention campaigns during elections and referendums. The anti-election efforts, while autonomous, share several common themes: the belief that genuine democracy resides in extra-parliamentary organi-

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zations and collectives that positively reflect values of mutual aid, solidarity and self-activity; the idea that electoral politics, as well as parliamentary democracy, are sham processes that only serve to reinforce prevailing power structures; and the confidence that encouraging effective resistance and revolt to capitalism and the state is invariably more valuable than some “x” on a ballot every couple of years. One organized anti-election effort is occurring in Quebec City, where two local anarchist groups — le Groupe anarchiste Emile-Henri and le Collectif libertaire le Maquis — are sponsoring an abstention campaign. On election night, they are holding an anti-election party at the appropriately named “Sacrilege” bar on St-Jean Street near Vieux Quebec (across from a church).

The campaign includes a publicly displayed and signed declaration in favour of real democracy and against parliamentary elections, as well as a poster depicting a naive “Foghorn Leghorn” caricature obliviously voting into a ballot box that is really a KFC bucket bearing the image of Colonel Sanders. The poster is accompanied by the caption: “Don’t be the turkey of the farce ...” [“Ne soyez pas le dindon de la farce.”]. The poster can be viewed at <montreal.indymedia.org>. Some activists at Laval University in Quebec City are planning street theatre on election day. Actors, blindfolded and gagged, will be robotically placing ballots into a box in a futile and never-ending circle.

The posters and theatre in Quebec City are not the only anti-election agitprop that has appeared in the past weeks. Election signs on the major highway between Quebec City and Montreal (a 2–3 hour stretch) have been systematically covered with graffiti. Posters have also in Montreal reading “Elections are useless.” Another depicts a ferris wheel with logos of the major political parties in Quebec. The latter poster can be viewed at <montreal.indymedia.org>.

A relatively new anarchist publication in Montreal, “Le Trouble”, has also dedicated space in its recent issue to anti-election

articles and images. A photo of an electric chair is accompanied by the caption: “Yes, democratic institutions are reformable ... with new chairs in parliament! Against elections and for electrons!” An editorial, with the title “Vote well, don’t vote” [Votez bien, votez rien!], advocates “acting” instead of “electing” [“agir au lieu d’elire”] and ends with the rhyming declaration, “to the social question, no electoral solution” [“A la question sociale, pas de solution electorale!”].

A lesser known local endeavor is the Montreal chapter of the Edible Ballot Society (EBS), part of a larger initiative in the Canadian state. The EBS originates in the province of Alberta, home to major dinosaur remains, as well as real living fossils in the form of right-wing wingnuts like Premier Ralph Klein and Stockwell Pray, the leader of the Canadian Reform Alliance Party (CRAP).

Perhaps in reaction to the particularly wretched kind of politician produced locally, several EBS activists in Alberta ate their ballots at advance polls, and intend to engage in more ballot destruction on election day. The EBS motto is: “Don’t vote, it just encourages them!” Chapters exist across Canaduh.

Montreal EBS efforts have been modest, including a sticker and postering campaign. The poster is accompanied by the slogan, “Never mind the ballots!” The overall EBS webpage is at: <edibleballot.tao.ca> The efforts in Quebec and Canaduh resemble recent anti-electoral and pro-democracy efforts in the U\$A and elsewhere. The “Anarchists Against Voting” website <www.infoshop.org> and the “Direct Democracy, not Election Hypocrisy” effort <www.directdemocracynow.org> provide more detailed information. All of the anti-election/pro-democracy efforts in Quebec are distinctly hostile to political parties, even the marginal ones like the Marijuana Party (aka the “Bloc Pot”). Local anarchists have been known to taunt the merry-marijuana crowd with the words, “If you want to smoke pot, don’t change the government, change the world.”

However, some local anti-election activists have confessed certain sympathy for a newly formed Montreal-based political party called the Parti Populaire des Putes (the People's Prostitutes' Party). The PPP is comprised of sex workers and former sex-workers that organized this summer against a campaign by businesspeople and right-wing residents targeting drug users, street workers and homeless people in Montreal's Centre-Sud neighborhood. The neighbourhood, in Montreal's east-end, is slowly being gentrified.

The PPP's campaign slogan provides some insight into their view of parliamentary democracy: "Vote for the PPP, and elect a REAL whore to Parliament."

Like the members of the PPP, the individuals and groups involved in anti-electoral efforts in Quebec are actively involved in local grassroots campaigns, groups and collectives. They are activists and organizers working against poverty, police brutality, ecocide, racism, sexism, prisons and capitalist globalization, while promoting solidarity efforts and alternative forms of organization and social change.

Many of the anti-election activists will be involved in a community squat project in Montreal that will be publicly revealed in December, as well as organizing against the Summit of the Americas meeting in Quebec City next April. More info on these issues will be forthcoming in the coming weeks and months.