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Why Do Anarchists Burn Ballot Boxes?

ziq

October 2022

"Our ears are ringing from the desperate calls of parties and other political organizations for participation in the democratic election procedure. A small group of comrades, we were moved by their woeful vote begging and, armed with our determination, our desire for direct action and our sledgehammers, we participated in the democratic fiasco. Using all of the above, we smashed the system-of-delegates status quo that serves as the norm and formed our own terms of attack and sabotage, right inside the walls of their own little festival.

Thus, we claim responsibility for the invasion of the 33rd election center of Athens a few minutes before the polls closed, where we expropriated a ballot box. As we entered the premises, our eyes *anxiously* searched for the voting center's appointed police guards, but we discovered that while they were indeed present, they chose to play hide-and-seek with

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Retrieved on October 29, 2022 from
https://raddle.me/wiki/burning_ballot_boxes

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us (successfully, to be honest). As we departed, we left a gift to the living-dead party officials and the trash democratic volunteers of the electoral committee: A (stolen from the cops) tear gas grenade. A few seconds later, we surrendered the contents of the ballot box to the only fitting fate: Fire.

This action is a warm welcome to new prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and his party New Democracy, who have promised to end us. We're waiting for you...

SABOTAGE ELECTIONS

BURN THE BALLOTS

-Ballot-Stealing Arsonists”¹

From Algeria² to Greece³ to France⁴, there's a long tradition of anarchists burning ballot boxes and blocking polling stations because anarchists have a keen understanding of the way the act of voting, and the system of democracy more broadly is used to destroy our agency and rapidly shrink the range of acceptable discourse that is tolerated by the government in the public sphere.

When the act of casting a vote for a politician is offered up by the state as the only permissible form of resistance against its rule, voting has shown itself to be a clear and present danger to anyone who cares about anarchy or self-determination.

¹ “Ανάληψη ευθύνης για απαλλοτρίωση και εμπρησμό κάλπης”, *IndyMedia*, July 7, 2019, athens.indymedia.org/post/1598979.

² “Willful Disobedience Volume 5, number 1”. *The Anarchist Library*. Spring/Summer 2004, theanarchistlibrary.org/library/various-authors-willful-disobedience-volume-5-number-1#toc9

³ “Anarchists Storm Voting Centers, Steal One Ballot Box and Burn It in Exarchia Square, Athens.” *Protothema News*, July 7, 2019, en.protothema.gr/anarchists-storm-voting-centers-steal-one-ballot-box-burn-it-in-exarchia-square-athens-photos.

⁴ “Toulouse, France: Blocking of Polling Stations.” *Act for Freedom Now!*, April 24, 2022, actforfree.noblogs.org/post/2022/04/24/toulouse-france-blocking-of-polling-stations.

Voting is a cruel and vicious ritual whereupon the winning group of voters are able to force their party's agenda and the personalities of their leaders on everyone else for half a decade, and then safely ignore the needs of people outside their group, either because they were outvoted or chose not to vote at all (sometimes under the threat of imprisonment in countries where it's illegal to not cast a ballot).

We're always being told by our gracious and benevolent rulers and their high-paid propagandists that actions we take outside of the representative democracy system to resist their authority, no matter how milquetoast these actions are, no matter how minuscule of a threat these actions really pose to their power, are improper and illegal.

As far as government is concerned, voting is the only acceptable, legal avenue to social and economic change the populace can be allowed to exercise. And if we refuse to participate in the vote, we're told by members of the voting population that we don't have a right to criticize the government since we refrained from participating in selecting it and granting it our individual and collective power to use as it sees fit.

We live in a world where even peaceful protests are violently dispersed by the ruling party's enforcers for being "disruptive" and unsanctioned by the state. We witness graffiti artists and wheat-pasters get beat up and thrown in prison for putting non-state-sanctioned messages in public spaces, while billboard companies are given free reign to spread the grotesque messages of capitalists and candidates for public office far and wide.

Voicing dissent outside of the ever-shrinking lines demarcated by the state for engagement with the public, taking action that would undermine the government's ability to rule, or offering any kind of alternative to the democratic, statist, capitalist status quo has effectively been criminalized.

Both representative and direct democracy (like the Brexit vote in the UK) are used to force minorities to submit to the whims of

the majority, and by proxy, to the whims of the ruling class who control the majority through the intricate systems of propaganda they construct with their vast looted wealth.

Thanks to a perverse combination of the 24/7 media machine and meticulously-crafted marketing/brainwashing practices that have been long-proven to strongly influence all our thought processes and decisions, the desires of the voters and the desires of the people who rule them have been rendered virtually indistinguishable.

The voters do the bidding of their rulers more than any time in history - they hate and fear the things they're told to hate and fear, support and buy the things they're told to support and buy. Few of them are able to resist the constant stream of propaganda expertly manufactured to feed delicious dopamine to the human brain.

This monopoly on propaganda that government/capital has been granted by millions of hapless citizen-voters needs to be contested by anarchists just as much as their monopoly on violence, since their fine-tuned propaganda systems are a large part of how they legitimize and enable their violence and the wholesale transfer of wealth to the rich.

Every time an anarchist or a group of anarchists take it upon themselves to fight back at the system that crushes them by burning their neighborhood ballot box, a slurry of petulant rage immediately comes spewing out⁵ of all of the state's propaganda systems, and even from a lot of our fellow travelers, who feel the need to loudly denounce this form of direct action and the anarchists who practice it for (lightly grazing) the hallowed democracy-machine. Never mind that the machine's paint-job hasn't even been scratched thanks to its massive wall-to-wall bumper, the bootlickers in radical garb will still cry foul.

⁵ *PM Condemns Burning of Ballot Boxes. Papua New Guinea Post Courier, August 19, 2022, postcourier.com.pg/pm-condemns-burning-of-ballot-boxes*

lie that government keeps them safe from crime, disease, debt, litter and all those scary migrants across the sea, the ballot box that fuels the ruling class's entire base of power needs to burn.

Burning the ballot box is a fierce expression of anarchy. It's the loud proclamation that I will not be ruled by the government, the voting body, or anyone.

I will not exchange my agency or my autonomy for whatever favors a political party promises me for my support.

I will not put my well-being above the well-being of the government's blood-soaked targets, and thus drench my own hands in their innocent blood.

I will not voluntarily legitimize the system that takes everything from me and you and gives it to the ruling class, who then funnel their vast spoils into the propaganda machine, directing it to select the next geriatric rapist to sit in the big chair.

Crown, flag or ballot box - all instruments of oppression are thankfully flammable. You can call it harm reduction if you like. I just call it anarchy.

The ardent critics of direct action and adherents of democratic government who take up so much space in our discourse - the Chomsky, Bookchin and Graeber acolytes - are showing us they're unwilling to honestly confront the most pervasive, oppressive and deadly system of authority in history, as it continues to dig its hooks in, giving it more and more leverage to crush any dissent that bubbles up against Leviathan anywhere on the face of the planet.

Instead, they'll continue to cling to and enable the system with the excuse that it isn't *exactly* the same as 1930s-style fascism, so it's preferable to letting a Hitler superfan win the election and send them all to concentration camps (never mind all the migrants their fave politicians *actually* send to concentration camps everyday, that's on the migrants for not voting harder).

These proponents of the sanctity of the polling station demonstrate they're tools of the ruling class just as much as any of the hate-fueled Murdoch poison lining the newsstands and monopolizing the airwaves.

The left-wing voter will always have culpability for the system they willingly participate in upholding, especially when you take notice of just how many hours of their life they pour into sermonizing for their preferred party on Facebook, Reddit and Twitter.

Yes, I know, they totally swear they're only voting for "harm reduction" and aren't actually that big of a fan of the neoliberal they put in office, but somehow that doesn't stop them from working to shun and villainize the anarchists they rub shoulders with for not voting for their guy, even going as far as to accuse us of supporting fascism and of wanting trans / disabled / (insert other marginalized identity here) people to die because we refuse to participate in their little democracy fetish or buy into the notion that the government protects people.

Every time I hear them use the phrase "harm reduction", it honestly makes my skin crawl. The absolute fucking nerve of these people to conflate safe injection sites and needle exchanges (you know, *actual* harm reduction) with helping put career war crimi-

nals and sex pests like Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton in office. But I digress.

Self-proclaimed lesser-evilsts insist they only vote to get the *nice* tyrants elected, who promise they'll smile at the screaming brown kids as they snatch them from their parents arms and cram them into cages, but the honest voters will openly tell you what they're really concerned with when they vote is things that affect them more directly...

Both candidates will snatch kids, genocide indigenous people to take their land and water, bomb schools and hospitals, imprison entire generations of black people and drone-strike goat herders across the world to seize their oil, sure. But one of the candidates promises they'll give them a break on their student loan debt, or on their taxes, or on the price of health care, and that's what they really mean by harm reduction - their personal monetary benefit - the preservation of their own privilege.

Democrats are a wonderful people, truly. So moral and compassionate, reducing the harm done to their annual income. If only they'd be honest and call it what it is, instead of pretending they're voting for the politer murderous tyrant because it will supposedly keep x marginalized group safe from original-flavor fascism.

After the failed experiments of fascism and Marxism-Leninism in the 20th century, representative liberal democracy is the system that has proven to be the most successful at maintaining the joint tyranny of government/capital and to further the expansion of the police-prison-military industrial complex. It displaced the previous tyrannical systems because it was the best equipped to get the people (voters) on its side by promising them an (inconsequential) say in the direction of the empire via the ballot box.

So, the ballot box, being the tool from which the entire democracy-world-order is granted its legitimized power, is perhaps the most compelling target for attack of all. Together with the closely-related media/marketing behemoth, the ballot box

makes up the holy trinity that democratic government depends on.

Before the state can unleash its police and military arms on the dwindling number of people that haven't yet been co-opted by the system, it needs that ceremonial ballot box to legitimize the whole rotten affair and ensure the rest of the population won't bat an eyelid when any potential revolt is brutally put down and every last person is forced to submit to the government's power and cease any resistance to the horrors of state hegemony.

The ballot box serves to convince voters that the atrocities their government commits against them and citizens of other nations is being done with their full approval, so as to smother any potential resistance from people who might not have been so accepting of the state's misdeeds if they hadn't gotten to personally participate in putting their "team" in control of the state.

After another grueling election year that monopolizes every conversation they have, after smugly accusing every non-voter they encounter of wanting to genocide trans people (seriously, I have receipts), all the lesser-evilsts can shift to post-election mode and spend the next several years defending (or ignoring) every awful thing the government they voted for then does on their behalf, from massively increasing police funding to dropping thousands of bombs on some of the poorest people in the world.

Can't risk taking responsibility for their part in those rapidly-accumulating atrocities by actually admitting the guy they decided should rule the world because he promised them money and protection is a fucking monster.

When they find out their party of choice actually spends millions of their campaign donations funding the most reactionary, bigoted candidates from the other party to make their own candidates look more reasonable by comparison, they simply shrug and keep voting.

Since the voter is so ready and willing to exchange their agency and mine for the state's monopoly on violence, buying into the big