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Anarchists Against Democracy
In Their Own Words

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Anarchists Against Democracy

In Their Own Words

Various Authors

is the very one that serves as a basic principle for every one who extolls better social conditions.

— The Law of Love and the Law of Violence (unsigned epigraph) (1908)

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> the counting of heads but in the freedom of men's hearts. "There is but one power,' said Godwin, 'to which I can yield a heart-fell obedience, the decision of my own understanding, the dictate of my own conscience.' And Proudhon was thinking of democracies as well as of the Emperor Napoleon III when he proudly declared: 'Whoever puts his hand on me to govern me is a usurper and a tyrant; I declare him my enemy!'
>
> In reality the ideal of anarchism, far from being democracy carried to its logical end, is much nearer to aristocracy universalized and purified. The spiral of history here has turned full circle, and where aristocracy — at its highest point in the Rabelaisian vision of the Abbey of Theleme — called for the freedom of noble men, anarchism has always declared the nobility of free men. In the ultimate vision of anarchy these free men stand godlike and kingly, a generation of princes.

— Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements (1962)

Leo Tolstoy

> When, among a hundred men one man dominates ninety-nine, it is iniquity, it is despotism; when ten dominate ninety, it is injustice; it is oligarchy; when fifty-one dominate forty-nine (and this only theoretically, for, in reality, among these fifty-one there are ten or twelve masters), then it is justice, then it is liberty.
>
> Could one imagine anything more ridiculous, more absurd, then this reasoning? However, this

George Woodcock

> The extreme concern for the sovereignty of individual choice not only dominates anarchist ideas of revolutionary tactics and of the future structure of society; it also explains the anarchist rejection of democracy as well as autocracy. No conception of anarchism is farther from the truth than that which regards it as an extreme form of democracy.
>
> Democracy advocates the sovereignty of the people. Anarchism advocates the sovereignty of the person. This means that automatically the anarchists deny many of the forms and viewpoints of democracy. Parliamentary institutions are rejected because they mean that the individual abdicates his sovereignty by handing it over to a representative; once he has done this, decisions may be reached in his name over which he has no longer any control. This is why anarchists regard voting as an act that betrays freedom, both symbolically and actually. 'Universal Suffrage is the Counter-Revolution,' cried Proudhon, and none of his successors has contradicted him.
>
> But the anarchist opposition to democracy goes deeper than a dispute over forms. It involves a rejection of the idea of the people as an entity distinct from the individuals who compose it; it also involves a denial of popular government. On this point Wilde spoke for the anarchists when he said: 'There is no necessity to separate the monarchy from the mob; all authority is equally bad.' Particularly, the anarchist rejects the right of the majority to inflict its will on the minority. Right lies not in numbers, but in reason; justice is found not in

This collection highlights how anarchists have consistently articulated a critical stance on democracy, a perspective shared despite disagreements on other issues. We're not presenting these as definitive refutations or to end discussion, but as a challenge to the notion of a democratic anarchism, and a call for deeper engagement with the anarchist tradition. — *Raddle Collective*

Errico Malatesta

> We are not democrats for, among other reasons, democracy sooner or later leads to war and dictatorship. Just as we are not supporters of dictatorships, among other things, because dictatorship arouses a desire for democracy, provokes a return to democracy, and thus tends to perpetuate a vicious circle in which human society oscillates between open and brutal tyranny and a lying freedom.
>
> So, we declare war on dictatorship and war on democracy. […]
>
> 'Government of the people' no, because this presupposes what could never happen – complete unanimity of will of all the individuals that make up the people. It would be closer to the truth to say, 'government of the majority of the people.' This implies a minority that must either rebel or submit to the will of others.
>
> But it is never the case that the representatives of the majority of people are all of the same mind on all questions; it is therefore necessary to have recourse again to the majority system and thus we will get closer still to the truth with 'government

of the majority of the elected by the majority of the electors.'

Which is already beginning to bear a strong resemblance to minority government.

And if one then takes into account the way in which elections are held, how the political parties and parliamentary groupings are formed and how laws are drawn up and voted and applied, it is easy to understand what has already been proved by universal historical experience: even in the most democratic of democracies it is always a small minority that rules and imposes its will and interests by force.

— Democracy and Anarchy (1924)

But if we do not for one moment recognize the right of majorities to dominate minorities, we are even more opposed to domination of the majority by a minority. It would be absurd to maintain that one is right because one is in a minority. If at all times there have been advanced and enlightened minorities, so too have there been minorities which were backward and reactionary; if there are human beings who are exceptional, and ahead of their times, there are also psychopaths, and especially are there apathetic individuals who allow themselves to be unconsciously carried on the tide of events.

In any case it is not a question of being right or wrong; it is a question of freedom, freedom for all, freedom for each individual so long as he does not violate the equal freedom of others. No one can judge with certainty who is right and who

— Democracy or Anarchy (1884)

Pierre Chardon

> Disrespectful, unbelieving, blasphemous, critical, we will not be duped by the democratic illusion. The master remains the master, the State remains the State, and we remain, we, their relentless enemies, whatever their protocols, up until the day where they leave us as we please, to experience the anarchist life, a tolerance they cannot accord us without abdicating.

— The Democratic Illusion (1913)

Oscar Wilde

> All modes of government are failures. Despotism is unjust to everybody, including the despot, who was probably made for better things. Oligarchies are unjust to the many, and ochlocracies are unjust to the few. High hopes were once formed of democracy; but democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people. It has been found out. I must say that it was high time, for all authority is quite degrading. It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised. When it is violently, grossly, and cruelly used, it produces a good effect, by creating, or at any rate bringing out, the spirit of revolt and Individualism that is to kill it."

— The Soul of Man under Socialism (1891)

that not one of them considers suffrage a natural right; that, on the other hand, they all agree on the central proposition that rule is evil, and on the corollary that it is none the better for being majority rule.

— *Liberty*, August 29, 1891

Charlotte Wilson

The special theory of democracy is that the general tendency of humanity which becomes so apparent whenever men associate on anything like terms of economic equality, should be made by men into an arbitrary law of human conduct to be enforced not only in the ninety-nine cases where nature enforces it, but by the arbitrary methods of coercion in the hundredth where she doesn't. And for the sake of the hundredth case, for the sake of enforcing this general natural tendency where nature does not enforce it, democrats would have us retain in our political relation that fatal principle of the authority of man over man which has been the cause of confusion and disorder, of wrong and misery in human societies since the dawn of history.

"Men are not social enough to do without it," it has been said. For our part we do not know when they will be social enough to do with it. Experience has not yet revealed the man who could be safely trusted with power over his fellows; and majority rule is nothing else in practice than putting into the hands of ambitious individuals the opportunity to crush their fellows by the dead weight of the blind mass of which we have spoken.

is wrong, who is closer to the truth and which is the best road to the greatest good for each and everyone. Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.

In our opinion, therefore, it is necessary that majority and minority should succeed in living together peacefully and profitably by mutual agreement and compromise, by the intelligent recognition of the practical necessities of communal life and of the usefulness of concessions which circumstances make necessary.

— Majorities and Minorities (1921, 1922, 1924)

This is why we are neither for a majority nor for a minority government; neither for democracy not for dictatorship. We are for the abolition of the gendarme. We are for the freedom of all and for free agreement, which will be there for all when no one has the means to force others, and all are involved in the good running of society. We are for anarchy.

— Neither Dictators, nor Democrats: Anarchists (1926)

It is well known that anarchists do not accept majority government (democracy), any more than they accept government by the few (aristocracy, oligarchy, or dictatorship by one class or party) nor that of one individual (autocracy, monarchy or personal dictatorship).

— A Project of Anarchist Organisation (1927)

Peter Kropotkin

It is becoming understood that majority rule is as defective as any other kind of rule; and humanity searches and finds new channels for resolving the pending questions.

— Process Under Socialism (1887)

It seems to me proved by evidence that, men being neither the angels nor the slaves they are supposed to be by the authoritarian utopians - Anarchist principles are the only ones under which a community has any chances to succeed. In the hundreds of histories of communities which I have had the opportunity to read, I always saw that the introduction of any sort of elected authority has always been, without one single exception, the point which the community stranded upon; while, on the other side, those communities enjoyed a partial and sometimes very substantial success, which accepted no authority besides the unanimous decision of the folkmoot, and preferred, as a couple of hundred of millions of Slavonian peasants do, and as the German Communists in America did, to discuss every matter so long as a unanimous decision of the folkmoot could be arrived at.

Communists, who are bound to live in a narrow circle of a few individuals, in which circle the petty struggles for dominion are the more acutely felt, ought decidedly to abandon the Utopias of elected committees' management and majority rule; they must bend before the reality of practice which is at work for many hundreds of years in hundreds of thousands of village communities - the folkmoot

resentation of our lives in the hands of a minority by means of the vote and parliamentarianism, of that false life of cardboard and money whose goal is for us to forget and for us to accept our alienated, submissive, and empty lives.

— Against Democracy (2013)

Benjamin R. Tucker

"Anarchy is no government; democracy is government to secure human rights." So the "American Idea" puts it. I put it differently. Anarchy is equal liberty; democracy is reciprocal tyranny.

— *Liberty*, November 5, 1887

The Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* has a very clever man on its editorial staff. His editorials are far above the ordinary literary level of the journalist, are often sensible, and always show a decided inclination to serious consideration of the subjects with which they deal, and to independent and original thought. But occasionally his originality carries him too far. Witness the following original discovery, which he gave to the world unpatented in a recent editorial against woman suffrage: "Nobody who is not an Anarchist in theory, if not in practice, ever pretended that suffrage was a natural right; but from the Anarchist point of view that suffrage is a natural right, you can just as easily argue, as Anarchists do, that 'property is robbery.'" If this editor had ever investigated Anarchism, of course he would know that most Anarchists do not believe in natural rights at all;

It seems that, in the police searches, numerous copies of a book called Contra la democracia were found. This book attempts to provide tools of reflection and debate for those who oppose democracy, that mythicized and deified system that we are all obligated to venerate and defend, given that if we don't, we run the risk of ending up with our bones in the State's dungeons. However, we know that democracy is precisely the following, the same story once again: repression and incarceration of all those who raise their heads and fight daily for the destruction of all Authority and the construction of a new world that works based on horizontality and mutual aid, in which all vestiges of Power have disappeared.

Democracy is, necessarily, prison, the police, pistols and bombs, wage labour, schools as centres of indoctrination and distortion, psychiatrists, merchandise, the Parliament, government and domination as a form of "organizing" society…; democracy is simply one more way that the State and Capital, the dominant minority, have of administering their system of oppression. It's because of this that, as anarchists, we declare war against democracy and any other system of domination and Power; it's because of this that we fight and will continue to fight the "public peace" mentioned by the torturer Javier Gómez Bermúdez, the public peace of jails, of wars, of unemployment, of wage and labour exploitation, of hunger, of misery, of evictions, of consumerism, of beaten and expelled migrants, of arrests and police torture, of the hundreds of women killed at the hands of machismo and patriarchy, of the rep-

- and they must remember that in these communities, majority rule and elected government have always been synonymous and concomitant with disintegration - never with consolidation.

— Proposed Communist Settlement: A New Colony for Tyneside or Wearside (1895)

After having tried all kinds of government, and endeavored to solve the insoluble problem of having a government "which might compel the individual to obedience, without escaping itself from obedience to collectivity," humanity is trying now to free itself from the bonds of any government whatever, and to respond to its needs of organization by the free understanding between individuals pursuing the same common aims.

— Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles (1927)

E. Armand

Democracy and dictatorship are synonymous terms. The people have never marched but under the goad of a dictatorship—concealed or declared. Democracy, in all the periods of history, has set its pace according to the injunctions of the dictatorship of one of its privileged elements.

— The Anarchist Individualist Initiation (1923)

Monsieur Dupont

Every time an anarchist says, "I believe in democracy," there is a little fairy somewhere that falls down dead.

The guilt-ridden, double-checking tenets of democracy bother all fragments of radical opinion like a haze of late summer midges but the anarchist milieu seems especially prone to tolerating, even embracing, this maddening visitation…

The cyclical return within the milieu to the tenets of democracy is conducted by those who in other elements of their own analysis understand that it has nothing to do with either Greek ideals or power to the people and that in reality it consists of little more than a parade of cattle-prodded common senselessness, more LA Arnie than Athenian Socrates. These revolutionaries state explicitly in their most lucid moments the determinate relationship between capital and its political administration but it seems that even this is not enough and the temptation to refer back to the democratic form as an ideal is irresistible. […]

The most radical democrats seek to establish what they call real or direct democracy, which they say will bring all socially occurring phenomena within the scope of the proposed popular assembly. In one bound they forget, in that endless oscillation that is chronic to the left, the objective influence of big money on the solutions they propose even after their own efforts to point out the specifics of such instances as examples of the problem of the present. […]

Radical and direct democrats seem ever-doomed to forget that the form society takes is not finally determined by public opinion, but by the ownership of property. The surface of opinions and of subjective values, even if regimented into a mass movement, are no opposition at all to the force of

squads". Obviously, such activities, by their very nature, cannot be organised democratically — whether or not they are approved of by a majority of the strikers.

— Against Democracy (2016)

Anonymous #2

Democracy justifies itself based on certain principles that are no less false for having been repeated a thousand times as truths, and its justification is so internalized that even its opponents believe in its principles. Considering how ingrained and immobile the idea of this system's fundamental goodness is in the people's thinking, change seems impossible; nobody seems to be suggesting any other organizational forms these days, or even other ways of life.

We daughters of democracy have been told that this is the best of all regimes; our parents and grandmothers lived under a system where coercion and repression were more direct, and now that it has taken on a softer form, we are expected to accept it from birth. Why is it that we are going to be a poorer generation than the previous ones, without there even having been a war in between? The blame lies with the irreparable transformations imposed by their system. […]

In democracy we leave the defense of our interests, the satisfaction of our needs, and the organization of human relations and life in the hands of others.[…]

sulted. They almost always begin with action by a determined minority who break from the passivity and isolation of the majority of proletarians around them. They then try to spread this action through example rather than through reasoned argument. In other words, the division between decision making and action is always being breached in practice. Right-wing populists (and a few anarchists) complain that trouble-making activities are organised by self-appointed cliques of activists who represent no one but themselves… and, of course, they're right!

The miners' strike in the UK in 1984–5 provided many inspiring examples of how the class struggle is anti-democratic in practice. The strike itself did not start democratically — there was no ballot, no series of mass meetings. It began with walk-outs at a few pits threatened with closure, and was then spread by flying pickets. Throughout the strike there was an unholy alliance of the right-wing of the Labour Party and the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) saying that the miners should hold a national ballot. The most militant miners consistently rejected this, saying things like: "scabs don't have the right to vote away another man's job" — which is a democratic form of words but I think you will agree that the attitude behind it certainly isn't. On occasions, members of the RCP were quite rightly beaten up and called "Tories" because of their support for a ballot.

There were also numerous examples of sabotage and destruction of Coal Board property, often organised by semi-clandestine, so-called "hit

property ownership. Such movements press the button marked "have your say," but it is connected to nothing, they are "making themselves heard" down the phone but the line is cut, they are "standing up for what's right" but their feet are in quicksand. The petitions and lobbyings and protests and pressurings are so many open doors to empty rooms.

The labyrinth of participation turns out to be a fetish of alienated consciousness, "getting involved" is specially designed to convince the unwary that their concern is special, that this time they're really making headway against all precedence of the circumlocution office, and that really, really change is very close now, ah but they aren't and it isn't — and if, as the radicals have diagnosed, this democracy is one sign of a fundamental economic alienation then it would be a strange medicine indeed that recommended its treatment by means of a blanket application of its symptom. […]

So, if it is now established that democracy at its heart is a trick to distract attention from economic domination of one class by another then it is unlikely that any popular assembly in any imaginable circumstance could defend itself against non-explicit manipulation from hidden forces, factions, splinters and so on (the contrary: the more open and honest the assembly is towards the citizenry the more responsive it is to hidden influence). I also do not see how any given democratic institution could prevent at least one degree of alienation opening up between itself and the social body, and in that unspoken space who knows what lurks?

Democracy cannot dismember capitalism. […]

It is no miraculous feat of prophecy to predict that many if not all of those involved in the current protest movement will end up as future entrepreneurs and politicians of the establishment. Such is the history of political protest. The French, American, and Russian revolutions, and even the protests of the Sixties all disguised self-interested, economically based, ambitions behind a Birnham wood of slogans for universal emancipation.

Many energetic and independent souls have entered democratic politics saying they were going to bring the practice of democracy into line with its alleged ideals. All have ended instead by adapting themselves to what existed before them. The English rebel MP Diane Abbott, famous only for castigating her New Labour colleagues for sending their children to private schools, ends by sending her kid to a private school. I don't criticise her, it's inevitable, the political class are separate, her kid would certainly be a target, and the nature of privilege is that you can choose to escape what the rest of us have no choice in. Those who attempt to reform privilege from within end up as its beneficiaries. So it is no surprise when, for whatever reason, democratic ambitions are proclaimed within the anarchist milieu and these we-don't-mean-it-in-the-same-way-they-do self-described anarchists conclude their ignominious career by proposing anarchist intervention in the electoral process (as the former editor of Green Anarchist did in Freedom 9/08/03).

When anarchists declare themselves democrats for respectability's sake, so they can get on better

3. Embodiment of the view that no one can be trusted — Democratic structures take the "war of all against all" for granted, and institutionalise it. Delegates always have to be revocable so they won't pursue their own hidden agenda which, of course, everyone has.

All of these principles embody social atomisation. Majoritarianism because everyone is equal and usually has one vote. The separation between decision making and action because it's only fair that you should consult everyone before acting — if you don't you are violating their rights. A particularly obnoxious example of the third thing — embodying the view that no one can be trusted — is the demand for "Faction Rights" put forward by Trots. Usually they call for this when some organisation is trying to throw them out. What this right amounts to is the freedom to plot and conspire against other members of what is supposedly a working class organisation. Obviously, no genuine communist organisation could ever entertain any idea of faction rights.

It is probably the second of these principles which is the most important and which needs to be stressed here.

These democratic principles can only stand in complete opposition to the class struggle since, by definition, the class struggle implies a break with social atomisation and the formation of some kind of community — however narrow, transient or vague this may be.

Major events in the class struggle almost never begin with a vote or with everybody being con-

in fact they do mean the same thing that the bourgeoisie mean by democracy, despite superficial differences. The fact that they chose to use the word democracy is actually far more significant than they claim. This is why it is important to say "Death to democracy!" [...]

I now want to talk about democracy "within our own ranks" — that is, amongst proletarians in struggle. The usual "workers' democracy" argument, for example, will say "OK, we don't have democratic relations with the bourgeoisie but amongst ourselves there should be the most perfect equality and respect for rights." This is usually seen as a way of avoiding bureaucratisation and domination by small cliques and ensuring that as many people as possible are involved in a particular struggle. The idea is that if people are allowed the right to speak, the right to vote etc., then you can just go along to a meeting and immediately be part of this democratic collectivity and so immediately be involved.

What does democratising a struggle mean in practice? It means things like:

1. Majoritarianism — Nothing can be done unless a majority agree to it.

2. Separation between decision making and action — Nothing can be done until everybody has had a chance to discuss it. This can be seen as analogous to the separation between the legislative and executive arms of a democratic state. It's no coincidence that discussions within democratic organisations often resemble parliamentary debate!

at university research departments, so they can tap into a shared and honourable left tradition,-so they can participate in the global forum, when they crown their decomposition by saying, "we're democrats too, we're true democrats, participatory democrats" they ought not be surprised at how enthusiastic democracy is to return the compliment, and of course to extract its price. Those who sign their names soon find themselves falling silent on a spray of other matters to which democracy and the force behind it are secretly hostile, and of that invisible bouquet class is the big, bold, blousey one.

— Democracy (2006)

Alexander Berkman

The essence of authority is invasion, the imposition of a superior will — generally superior only in point of physical force. The menace of man-made authority is not in its potential abuse. That may be guarded against. The fundamental evil of authority is its use. The more paternal its character or the more humanistic its symbols and mottoes, the greater its danger. No slavery so deep-rooted and stable than the subtle hypnotism of Democracy's phraseology. It is mesmerizing to watch the girations of a balloon labelled "Liberty." The required optical intensity only too often lulls to forgetfulness even those vaguely conscious that the proudly soaring balloon holds nothing but gas — a child's toy with no substance.

The democratic authority of majority rule is the last pillar of tyranny. The last, but the strongest. It

is at the base of this pillar that the Anarchist ax has been hewing.

— Apropos, *The Mother Earth Bulletin* (1917)

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

What is democracy? The sovereignty of the nation, or, rather, of the national majority… in reality there is no revolution in the government, since the principle remains the same. Now, we have the proof to-day that, with the most perfect democracy, we cannot be free.

— What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government (1840)

Democracy is nothing but the tyranny of majorities, the most execrable tyranny of all; for it rests neither on the authority of a religion, nor on a nobility of race, nor on the prerogatives of talent and fortune: it is based on numbers, and takes for a mask the name of the People.

— Solution of the Social Problem (1848)

We may conclude without fear that the revolutionary formula cannot be Direct Legislation, nor Direct Government, nor Simplified Government, that it is No Government. Neither monarchy, nor aristocracy, nor even democracy itself, in so far as it may imply any government at all, even though acting in the name of the people, and calling itself the people.

No authority, no government, not even popular, that is the Revolution. Direct legislation, direct

The classical Liberal idea is that information equals power, or information equals freedom. From this we get the silly political tactic of "speaking truth to power" as if "power" were some creature with a conscience, and/or a sense of guilt. The chanting of "Shame, Shame" at demonstrations when the cops rough up lawbreakers or when a politician shows his face is the result of this kind of mythological thinking. The idea that exposure and/or embarrassment is enough to get those in power to alter their policies is a legacy of the myth surrounding Gandhi (especially the film version), who supposedly single-handedly embarrassed the British Empire enough to get them to grant independence to India. This pacifist and liberal nonsense continues to have a bad influence on most anarchoid activists, evidenced by their calls for mass mobilizations: more numbers equals more influence, equals more responsiveness from representatives.

They have assimilated many democratic myths.

— Democracy and Conspiracy: Overlaps, Parallels, and Standard Operating Procedures (2006)

Wildcat

A lot of people will agree with a lot of what I'm saying (or will think that they do!) but will say "Ah, Yes, but what you're talking about is bourgeois democracy. What I mean by democracy is something quite different." I want to suggest that when people talk about "real" or "workers'" democracy in opposition to bourgeois democracy,

impossible; that it be ruined from top to bottom – its economy, its social regime, its politics, its manners, customs, and prejudices.

— The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921 (1947)

Lawrence Jarach

The Mythic Appeal of Democracy

A myth isn't a lie-it is a story told by people with a particular outlook to others with a similar outlook. It can contain truth and falsehood in varying mixtures and ratios, but the important thing is that it makes sense to its audience.

According to the believers in Democracy (rule of the people — however "the people" is defined and narrowed to exclude particular segments from participation in government), it is a system of decision-making that enables the rule of the wisest and most capable and skillful, regardless of hereditary class privilege; this is its republican (anti-monarchist) heritage. Democrats (especially those who identify with the tradition of Liberalism) believe that majority rule provides more voice in decision-making for more people. They believe that more representation means more fairness, that a more informed voting base increases the wisdom of representatives, which furthers the responsiveness and fairness of said representatives. For democrats, information is power. These are some of the myths of Democracy and they are tirelessly promoted by the State through public school indoctrination and fanciful media images. […]

government, simplified government, are ancient lies, which they try in vain to rejuvenate. Direct or indirect, simple or complex, governing the people will always be swindling the people. It is always man giving orders to man, the fiction which makes an end to liberty; brute force which cuts questions short, in the place of justice, which alone can answer them; obstinate ambition, which makes a stepping stone of devotion and credulity…

— The General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century (1851)

Every idea is established or refuted by a series of terms that are, as it were, its organism, the last term of which demonstrates irrevocably its truth or error. If the development, instead of taking place simply in the mind and through theory, is carried out at the same time in institutions and acts, it constitutes history. This is the case with the principle of authority or government.

The first form in which this principle is manifested is that of absolute power. This is the purest, the most rational, the most dynamic, the most straightforward, and, on the whole, the least immoral and the least disagreeable form of government.

But absolutism, in its naïve expression, is odious to reason and to liberty; the conscience of the people is always aroused against it. After the conscience, revolt makes its protest heard. So the principle of authority has been forced to withdraw: it retreats step by step, through a series of concessions, each one more inadequate than the one before, the last of which, pure democracy or direct government,

results in the impossible and the absurd. Thus, the first term of the series being ABSOLUTISM, the final, fateful term is anarchy, understood in all its senses.

— The General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century (1851)

Socialists should break completely with democratic ideas.

— Selections from the Carnets

Emilio Covelli

Humanity is divided into oppressors and oppressed. The first need a state to sanction their oppression, by restraining the liberty of others within certain limits. The others tend to rise up against every government and to freely associate among themselves.

So, on the one hand, the aristocratic or democratic politics and on the other, socialism, the true socialism, revolutionary anarchist socialism.

The oppressed have always attempted to free themselves and join their forces. They have not succeeded because they have always turned against one form of government, and not against authority itself…

— From "l'Anarchia" (1877)

that democracy isn't anarchy at all, it's the final stage of statism. It's the last wall of the castle. It's the curtain with the man still behind it. […]

Something not so obvious in the past, but obvious now, is that it's impossible to be both anti-capitalist and pro-democratic. And yet the noisiest anarcho-leftists, such as the ones published by AK Press and PM Press, are democrats.

Rudolf Rocker, who is one of the very few anarchists whom Chomsky has read, and whom he has described as the last serious thinker, thought that anarchism was the synthesis of liberalism and socialism. But Rocker explicitly did not consider democracy to be any part of this synthesis. He considered democracy to be inherently statist and anti-socialist and anti-liberal. Rocker was right. Chomsky is wrong. Chomsky is always wrong.

— Chomsky on the nod (2014)

Voline

The achievement of the true emancipating revolution requires the active participation, the strict collaboration, conscious and without reservations, of millions of men of all social conditions, declassed, unemployed, levelled, and thrown into the Revolution by the force of events.

But, in order that these millions of men be driven into a place from which there is no escape, it is necessary above everything else that this force dislodge them from the beaten track of their daily existence. And for this to happen, it is necessary that this existence, the existing society itself, become

where I came to the conclusion that the rejection of democracy is the most important task for contemporary anarchists.

— Nightmares of Reason (2010)

Noam Chomsky is an ardent believer in democracy, which, once again, proves that he is a statist, not an anarchist. Democracy is a form of government. Anarchy is society without government. […]

…but that has not stopped some anarchists from trying to make anarchism popular by identifying it with democracy, the regnant political dogma of the 20th century. Whereas what we need to do is, as the Situationists put it, to leave the 20th century. I don't think that democracy is popular. It's just fashionable, and probably not even fashionable, except among some professors and students. There is nothing democratic about the governance of colleges and universities, which is where the democratic theorists nest. There are no demands by anyone to democratize them, as there were in the 1960's and early 1970's. I am not aware that in his many decades as a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that Noam Chomsky has ever advocated campus democracy. Democracy in factories, democracy in East Timor, sure, but not democracy at MIT! NIMBY – Not In My Back Yard!

Whatever democracy might theoretically mean, in the real world, "democracy is a euphemism for capitalism… […]

All anarchists should get into their heads, those of them who have some room for it there, the truth

Albert Meltzer

> People are no longer satisfied with democracy in its narrow, rigid, liberal sense of representative government or the freedom of institution. They begin to feel that the freedom which affects their working hours is fundamental to their status as men and women as much as (and the thinking would say far more than) the right to elect those who shall rule. As this idea of workers' control seeps into the main struggle for democratic rights, and is accepted as a principal part of them, so will the term "democracy" become obsolete, since we shall be moving from the idea of representative government to a far higher ideal, that of Anarchism, the absence of government altogether.

— Should we defend democratic rights? (1951)

Henry David Thoreau

> Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight.

— Civil Disobedience (1848)

Mikhail Bakunin

> In short, we reject all legislation, all authority and every privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even that arising from universal suffrage, convinced that it can only ever turn to the

advantage of a dominant, exploiting minority and against the interests of the immense, subjugated majority. It is in this sense that we are really Anarchists.

— What is Authority, from the manuscripts of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution* (1870)

Albert R. Parsons

Whether government consists of one over a million or a million over one, an anarchist is opposed to the rule of majority as well as minority.

— Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis (1887)

Lucy S. Parsons

It is better to have majority rule [...] than to have minority rule which is only in the interest of the few [...]. But the principle of rulership is in itself wrong; no man has any right to rule another man.

— The Ballot Humbug (1905)

London Anarchist Communist Alliance

But whilst State Socialism is impracticable as a system of real Socialism, it is indeed possible if its advocates had their way, that all matters of general interest and more and more of private interest too would pass under the control of the State; whether it be a little more democratised or not, it does not

The speakers, in the limited time allotted to them, tend to sacrifice reasoning to persuasion whenever they have to choose, if they want to win. As Hobbes wrote, the speakers begin not from true principles but from "commonly accepted opinions, which are for the most part usually false, and they do not try to make their discourse correspond to the nature of things but to the passions of men's hearts. The result is that votes are cast not on the basis of correct reasoning but on emotional impulse." "Pure democracy, like pure rum, easily produces intoxication, and with it a thousand mad pranks and foolishness." Dissenters feel intimidated, as they were, for instance, when the Athenian assembly voted for the disastrous Sicilian expedition: "The result of this excessive enthusiasm of the majority was that the few who were actually opposed to the expedition were afraid of being thought unpatriotic if they voted against it, and therefore kept quiet." [...]

Democracy in any form is irrational, unjust, inefficient, capricious, divisive, and demeaning. Its direct and representative versions, as we have seen, share many vices. Neither version exhibits any clear advantage over the other. Each also has vices peculiar to itself. Indeed the systems differ only in degree. Either way, the worst tyranny is the tyranny of the majority.

— Debunking Democracy (2011)

More or less unexpectedly, this book gave me the opportunity to develop my own ideas, some of which find their first or fullest expression here, and influence my future direction. This is

for how long, and who gets the first or last word? Who schedules the meeting? Who adjourns it? And who decides, and by what rules, the answers to all these questions? "If the participants disagree on the voting rules, they may first have to vote on these rules. **But they may disagree on how to vote on the voting rules, which may make voting impossible as the decision on how to vote is pushed further and further back." [...]

As (among many others) Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Henry David Thoreau, Mikhail Bakunin, Benjamin Tucker, Errico Malatesta, and Emma Goldman said—and does anybody disagree?—democracy does not assure correct decisions. "The only thing special about majorities is that they are not minorities." There is no strength in numbers, or rather, there is nothing but strength in numbers. Parties, families, corporations, unions, nearly all voluntary associations are, by choice, oligarchic. Indeed, in assemblies whether direct or representative, in electorates as in legislatures, the whole is less—even less—than the sum of its parts. It is even mathematically demonstrable (but not by me) that majority decision-making generates inefficient, socially wasteful, more or less self-defeating decisions. [...]

Direct democracy, to an even greater degree than representative democracy, encourages emotional, irrational decision making.

The face-to-face context of assembly politics engenders strong interpersonal psychological influences which are, at best, extraneous to decision making on the merits. The crowd is susceptible to orators and stars, and intolerant of contradiction.

matter, for we reject Democracy as well as Absolutism. Authority is equally hateful to us whether exercised by many, or by few, or by one.

— An Anarchist Manifesto (1895)

CrimethInc.

But even if there were no Presidents or town councils, democracy as we know it would still be an impediment to freedom. Corruption, privilege, and hierarchy aside, majority rule is not only inherently oppressive but also paradoxically divisive and homogenizing at the same time. [...]

It's worth reflecting on what sort of utopia is implied by idealizing direct democracy as a form of government. Imagine the kind of totalitarianism it would take to produce enough cohesion to govern a society via consensus process—to get everyone to agree. Talk about reducing things to the lowest common denominator!

— The Anarchist Critique of Democracy (2016)

Even as its partisans have trumpeted its supposed inclusivity, in practice democracy has always demanded a way of distinguishing between included and excluded. That could be status in the legislature, voting rights, citizenship, membership, race, gender, age, or participation in street assemblies; but in every form of democracy, for there to be legitimate decisions, there have to be formal conditions of legitimacy, and a defined group of people who meet them.

In this regard, democracy institutionalizes the provincial, chauvinist character of its Greek origins, at the same time as it seemingly offers a model that could involve all the world. This is why democracy has proven so compatible with nationalism and the state; it presupposes the Other, who is not accorded the same rights or political agency.

The focus on inclusion and exclusion is clear enough at the dawn of modern democracy in Rousseau's influential Of the Social Contract, in which he emphasizes that there is no contradiction between democracy and slavery. The more "evildoers" are in chains, he suggests, the more perfect the freedom of the citizens. Freedom for the wolf is death for the lamb, as Isaiah Berlin later put it. The zero-sum conception of freedom expressed in this metaphor is the foundation of the discourse of rights granted and protected by the state. In other words: for citizens to be free, the state must possess ultimate authority and the capacity to exercise total control. The state seeks to produce sheep, reserving the position of wolf for itself. […]

Those who promote democracy as an alternative to the state rarely draw a meaningful distinction between the two. If you dispense with representation, coercive enforcement, and the rule of law, yet keep all the other hallmarks that make democracy a means of governing—citizenship, voting, and the centralization of legitimacy in a single decision-making structure—you end up retaining the procedures of government without the mechanisms that make them effective. This

— Free Speech Suppressed in Barre, Vt., in *Free Society* (1899)

> The State, government with its functions and powers, is now the subject of vital interest to every thinking man. Political developments in all civilized countries have brought the questions home. Shall we have a strong government? Are democracy and parliamentary government to be preferred, or is Fascism of one kind or another, dictatorship — monarchical, bourgeois or proletarian — the solution of the ills and difficulties that beset society today?
>
> In other words, shall we cure the evils of democracy by more democracy, or shall we cut the Gordian knot of popular government with the sword of dictatorship?
>
> My answer is neither the one nor the other. I am against dictatorship and Fascism as I am opposed to parliamentary regimes and so-called political democracy. […]
>
> More pernicious than the power of a dictator is that of a class; the most terrible — the tyranny of a majority.

— The Individual, Society and the State (1940)

Bob Black

> "There are no self-evident democratic voting rules - Majority or plurality? Proxy voting? Quorums? Are supermajorities (three-fifths? two-thirds?) required for all, some, or none of the decisions? Who sets the agenda? Are motions from the floor entertained? Who decides who gets to speak, and

and sensibility, erasing all the complexity and diversity of human needs and desires.

This is why even directly democratic assemblies can end up deciding to carry out inhuman genocides, like the one ancient Athens inflicted upon Mylos in 416 BC. Excluded people have been enslaved and raped as a result of direct democratic decisions. Direct democracy is "members only." Because it is smaller, it excludes even more people than representative democracy—producing isolated bubbles that fight each other like the city-states of ancient Greece. Everybody is an outsider, a foreigner, a possible enemy; that's why the community has to build armies to defend itself and you have to die to protect the opinion of the majority even if you disagree with it. Whoever will not go along with the decision must be punished—like Socrates, the world-famous victim of democracy, and thousands of others. The charismatic leaders find the best possible direct connection with their followers, and the democratic mechanisms for manipulating public opinion work directly better than ever! Direct democracy will never liberate us from democracy.

— Destination Anarchy! (2016)

Emma Goldman

I do not distinguish between monarchy and democracy, whether one man or a dozen of men backed by force represent authority; it has the same aim; the results are the same. They exercise their power at all cost and check every independent tendency.

combines the worst of both worlds. It ensures that those who approach anti-state democracy expecting it to perform the same function as the state will inevitably be disappointed, while creating a situation in which anti-state democracy tends to reproduce the dynamics associated with state democracy on a smaller scale.

Finally, it's a losing battle. If what you mean to denote by the word democracy can only occur outside the framework of the state, it creates considerable ambiguity to use a term that has been associated with state politics for 2500 years. Most people will assume that what you mean by democracy is reconcilable with the state after all. This sets the stage for statist parties and strategies to regain legitimacy in the public eye, even after having been completely discredited. The political parties Podemos and Syriza gained traction in the occupied squares of Barcelona and Athens thanks to their rhetoric about direct democracy, only to make their way into the halls of government where they are now behaving like any other political party. They're still doing democracy, just more efficiently and effectively. Without a language that differentiates what they are doing in parliament from what people were doing in the squares, this process will recur again and again.

When we identify what we are doing when we oppose the state as the practice of democracy, we set the stage for our efforts to be reabsorbed into larger representational structures. Democracy is not just a way of managing the apparatus of government, but also of regenerating and legitimizing it. Candidates, parties, regimes, and

even the form of government can be swapped out from time to time when it becomes clear that they cannot solve the problems of their constituents. In this way, government itself—the source of at least some of those problems—is able to persist. Direct democracy is just the latest way to rebrand it.

Even without the familiar trappings of the state, any form of government requires some way of determining who can participate in decision-making and on what terms—once again, who counts as the demos. Such stipulations may be vague at first, but they will get more concrete the older an institution grows and the higher the stakes get. And if there is no way of enforcing decisions—no kratos—the decision-making processes of government will have no more weight than decisions people make autonomously. This is the paradox of a project that seeks government without the state.

These contradictions are stark enough in Murray Bookchin's formulation of libertarian municipalism as an alternative to state governance. In libertarian municipalism, Bookchin explained, an exclusive and avowedly vanguardist organization governed by laws and a Constitution would make decisions by majority vote. They would run candidates in city council elections, with the long-term goal of establishing a confederation that could replace the state. Once such a confederation got underway, membership was to be binding even if participating municipalities wanted to withdraw. Those who try to retain government without the state are likely to end up with something like the state by another name.

humanity, however we (and those with whom we share our lives) see fit? […]

There is no general assembly that could know better than we do how we can make the most of our abilities to benefit the people around us. This is the difference between an affinity group, which produces a collective and expansive power, and a democratic assembly, which concentrates power outside our lives and relationships, alienating us from ourselves and each other.

Direct democracy is supposed to get rid of the apathy produced by representation, since it appears as a "participatory" form of democracy. But is the idea that we will have an assembly of millions of people? Would such an assembly really be capable of offering us freedom and equality? Each of us would just feel like a statistic in it as we waited for days for our turn to speak. On the other hand, if we reduce that form to the miniscule level of a neighborhood assembly, don't we trap ourselves in a microcosm like oversized ants?

Any kind of "direct democracy" reproduces the same conditions as representative democracy, just on a smaller scale. The majority suppresses the minority, driving them into apathy. Often, you don't even try to express your opinion, as you know you will have no chance to put it into practice. Often, you are afraid to speak, as you know that you will be humiliated by the majority. Homogeneity is the ultimate imperative of any democratic procedure, "direct" or representational—a homogeneity that ends up as two final opinions (the majority and minority), losing the vast richness of human intelligence

different until you escape from the tribe. And today, when the control of the capitalist market and democratic state are absolute all around the world, there is no other way to escape democracy except to destroy it.

Even knowing all of this, some people defend democracy. They want to find a form of democracy that doesn't end up in oligarchy, just like the 21st century communists who are searching for communist systems that don't lead to totalitarianism. But the Founding Fathers of all nations stand over democrats of all kinds, looking on approvingly as normality reasserts itself—the same conditions of exploitation, new faces in the same old positions of authority.

This world will never change as long as we are afraid to cut the roots of this order. Democracy is the final alternative for all who are afraid to step into the unknown territory of their own desires, their own power. Likewise, the demand for "real" democracy is the last way for social movements to legitimize themselves in the supposed "social sphere" (and to avoid criminalization). Just as it is the final step, democracy is also the final obstacle to new possibilities arising in social movements.[…]

Direct democracy offers us an alternative way to govern our lives. But is this really what we need? Do we want to reproduce the limits of the old world on a smaller scale? Do we want the "general assembly" to decide about our lives? Or do we want to expand our lives into new forms of self-determination and open sharing of creativity, to offer our power freely for the benefit of all

The important distinction is not between democracy and the state, then, but between government and self-determination. Government is the exercise of authority over a given space or polity: whether the process is dictatorial or participatory, the end result is the imposition of control. By contrast, self-determination means disposing of one's potential on one's own terms: when people engage in it together, they are not ruling each other, but fostering cumulative autonomy. Freely made agreements require no enforcement; systems that concentrate legitimacy in a single institution or decision-making process always do.

It is strange to use the word democracy for the idea that the state is inherently undesirable. The proper word for that idea is anarchism. Anarchism opposes all exclusion and domination in favor of the radical decentralization of power structures, decision-making processes, and notions of legitimacy. It is not a matter of governing in a completely participatory manner, but of making it impossible to impose any form of rule.

— From Democracy To Freedom (2016)

Shawn P. Wilbur

It seems clear to me that nearly all of the arguments for attempting to incorporate democracy into anarchy involve some confusion of principles, or a confusion of principles and practices. And, unfortunately, those confusions often look a lot like those used in the attempt to prove that anarchy is itself impossible, such as Engels' attempt to dismiss anti-authoritarians by conflating

authority and force. It is less clear to me why so many people who presumably have some investment in the notion of anarchism struggle so mightily to fully embrace anarchy, but that's not because the challenges inherent in anarchy are not absolutely apparent. Instead, I'm just not sure why anyone would embrace anarchism if they had serious doubts about the possibility or desirability of anarchy. […]

If we understand democracy in Proudhon's terms, as the distribution of authority onto the greatest number of heads, the notion of "pure democracy" almost has to appear as a sort of ultimate anarchist nightmare: the pure hegemony of the principle of authority, so dispersed in its manifestations as to be impossible to come to grips with; the final incorporation of the belief in the impossibility of anarchy in our common sense; *self-government* in the most insidious of forms, based on the internalization of hierarchy as essential to the self. That worst-case scenario is just that, but it isn't entirely alien to what we experience in societies that have long been governed by the principle of authority.

— Anarchy and Democracy: Examining the Divide (2017)

Voltairine de Cleyre

The principle of majority rule itself, even granting it could ever be practicalized — which it could not on any large scale: it is always a real minority that governs in place of the nominal majority — but even granting it realizable, the thing itself is essentially pernicious; that the only desirable condition

the public sphere). The celebration of democracy in terms that directly invoke the early days of the American polity may end up reinforcing rather than questioning loyalties to the nation-state. […]

Thus we return to the main point: for anarchists in the USA and Western Europe, at least, the choice to use the language of democracy is based on the desire to mobilize and subvert a form of patriotism that is ultimately establishment-friendly; it risks cementing the nationalist sentiments it seeks to undermine. Anarchists have always had a public image problem. Trying to undo it through the connection to mainstream democratic and nationalist sentiments is not worth this risk.

— Democracy: The Patriotic Temptation (2016)

Tasos Sagris

Democracy keeps you afraid, afraid of the enemies of democracy that have hidden within your tribe, your democratic community, your nation. Democracy created borders in your life and now you have to protect these borders with your own body. The borders are imaginary, social inventions, but your dead body on the battleground is real. Democracy excludes the rest of humanity from your community and it prepares an army, including you, to kill all the excluded ones. The moment you refuse to kill for the sake of democracy, you too are excluded. […]

Democracy is a conservative tribal method by which certain ancient Greek tribes reproduced themselves. It will never allow you to become

revolutions" while unearthing and enlarging their libertarian content.

The appeal to the consensus view of the American polity as founded in a popular and democratic revolution, genuinely animated by freedom and equality, is precisely intended to target existing patriotic sentiments, even as it emphasises their subversive consequences. Milstein even invokes Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address when she criticises reformist agendas which "work with a circumscribed and neutralized notion of democracy, where democracy is neither of the people, by the people, nor for the people, but rather, only in the supposed name of the people." Yet this is a dangerous move, since it relies on a self-limiting critique of the patriotic sentiment itself, and allows the foundation myths to which it appeals to remain untouched by critiques of manufactured collective identity and colonial exclusion. While noting the need not to whitewash the racial, gendered, and other injustices that were part of "the historic event that created this country," Milstein can only offer an unspecific exhortation to "grapple with the relation between this oppression and the liberatory moments of the American Revolution."

Yet given that the appeal is targeted at non-anarchist participants, there is little if any guarantee that such a grappling would actually take place. The patriotic sentiment appealed to here is more often than not a component of a larger nationalist narrative, one that hardly partakes of a decolonial critique (which by itself would have many questions about the Western enlightenment roots of notions of citizenship and

of society is one in which no one is compelled to accept an arrangement to which he has not consented.

— Why I am an Anarchist (1897)

> [The Americans of the Revolutionary War] thus took their starting point for deriving a minimum of government upon the same sociological ground that the modern Anarchist derives the no-government theory; viz., that equal liberty is the political ideal. The difference lies in the belief, on the one hand, that the closest approximation to equal liberty might be best secured by the rule of the majority in those matters involving united action of any kind (which rule of the majority they thought it possible to secure by a few simple arrangements for election), and, on the other hand, the belief that majority rule is both impossible and undesirable; that any government, no matter what its forms, will be manipulated by a very small minority, as the development of the States and United States governments has strikingly proved; that candidates will loudly profess allegiance to platforms before elections, which as officials in power they will openly disregard, to do as they please; and that even if the majority will could be imposed, it would also be subversive of equal liberty, which may be best secured by leaving to the voluntary association of those interested in the management of matters of common concern, without coercion of the uninterested or the opposed.

— Anarchism and American Traditions (1908-1909)

Andy Robinson

Anarchy and democracy are incompatible, because anarchy is based on an active politics of desire whereas democracy is necessarily reactive and thus plays into the repressive logics of industrial society and especially, of contemporary capitalism. I conceive of a politics of desire as operating through the liberation of active desires — desires that actively connect with the world — over and against reactive desires — desires that are fueled by a primary desire to repress desire itself. Conventional political ideologies depend deeply on reactive schemas, and the point of anarchy is not simply to oppose the macro-social forms that result from such schemas, but also to oppose the micro-social and emotional/psychological formations on which such forms are built.

Democracy and the politics of desire may seem complementary, but in fact they run contrary to each other. The reason for this is that, while the politics of desire involves an immediacy of expression and an opposition to discursive exclusions that operate repressively, democracy implies the exclusion or repression of minorities as part of its basic logic. That minorities be prevented from expressing themselves with wildness and immediacy — that they remain always the "loyal opposition" within the confines of a system in which the majority gets its way — is a necessary part of the idea of democracy. For this reason, democracy goes against the emancipation of desire, operating simply as a particularly powerful ideology of recuperation with especially effective,

in the audience a sense of indignation at having been deceived: while the emotional attachment to "democracy" is confirmed, the belief that it actually exists is denied.

Now there are two problems with this maneuver, one conceptual and one more substantive. The conceptual problem is that it introduces a truly idiosyncratic notion of democracy, so ambitious as to disqualify almost all political experiences that fall under the common understanding of the term—including all electoral systems in which representatives do not have a strict mandate and are not immediately recallable. By claiming that current "democratic" regimes are in fact not democratic at all and that the only democracy worthy of the name is actually some version of an anarchist society, anarchists are asking people to reconfigure their understanding of democracy in a rather extreme way. While it is possible to maintain this new usage with logical coherence, it is nevertheless so rarefied and contrary to the common usage that its potential as a pivot for mainstream opinion is highly questionable.

The second problem is graver. While the association with democracy may seek to appeal only to its egalitarian and libertarian connotations, it also entangles anarchism with the patriotic nature of the pride in democracy which it seeks to subvert. The appeal is not simply to an abstract design for participatory institutions, but to participatory institutions recovered from the American revolutionary tradition. Bookchin is quite explicit about this, when he calls on anarchists to "start speaking in the vocabulary of the democratic

Essentially, the association of anarchism with democracy is a two-pronged rhetorical maneuver intended to increase the appeal of anarchism for mainstream publics. The first component of the maneuver is to latch onto the existing positive connotations that democracy carries in established political language. Instead of the negative (and false) image of anarchism as mindless and chaotic, a positive image is fostered by riding on the coattails of "democracy" as a widely-endorsed term in the mass media, educational system, and everyday speech. The appeal here is not to any specific set of institutions or decision-making procedures, but to the association of democracy with freedom, equality, and solidarity—to the sentiments that go to work when democracy is placed in binary opposition to dictatorship, and celebrated as what distinguishes the "free countries" of the West from other regimes.

Yet the second component of the maneuver is subversive: it seeks to portray current capitalist societies as not, in fact, democratic, since they alienate decision-making power from the people and place it in the hands of elites. This amounts to an argument that the institutions and procedures that mainstream audiences associate with democracy—government by representatives—are not in fact democratic, or at least a very pale and limited fulfilment of the values they are said to embody. True democracy, in this account, can only be local, direct, participatory, and deliberative, and is ultimately achievable only in a stateless and classless society. The rhetorical aim of the maneuver as a whole is to generate

and therefore insidious, ways of excusing social repression.

> Democracy has come to mean at least three different things in contemporary political discourse. First of all, it means "rule by the people" — the literal meaning. Secondly, it means more specifically, rule by the majority — counterposed to minority rule (and also, invisibly, to the refusal of rule, to anarchy, which is also a refusal of minorities to be ruled by majorities, as well as a refusal to rule over them). Thirdly, it is used to refer to a complex of institutions typical of societies embracing aspects of liberalism. It is only in this third sense that democracy can be taken to imply minority rights, and only of the kind and in the context implied by the "rule of law" and the power of the state. In all of these senses, democracy is a specific instance of state power — and not, as implied by some anarchists, a critique of state power or a form of anarchy. Unconditional rule by a majority cannot be compatible with anarchy because it implies repression on various levels.

— Democracy vs Desire: Beyond the Politics of Measure (2006)

Wolfi Landstreicher

> "The Lesser Evil" by Dominique Misein exposes how the logic that is so basic to a democratic system — the logic of compromise and negotiation, mediocrity and making do — comes to permeate every aspect of life to the point where dreams and desires fade, passion disappears (what passion can one feel for a lesser evil?) and revolution loses

all meaning. This domination over all of life is the purpose of the participatory social system the bourgeoisie imposed. This permeation into every aspect of life makes the democratic order the most successful totalitarian social system to ever exist. In "Who Is It?", Adonide compares classical dictatorships with the totalitarianism of the democratic system where everyone can excuse himself because she is only a cog in this vast social machine, and individual responsibility, which is the basis for individual self-determination, seems to disappear. […]

At present, capitalism and the socio-political system that best corresponds with it — democracy — dominate the planet. They undermine real choice, creativity and self-activity…all that is necessary for individuals to be able to create their lives as they desire and for the exploited to be able to rise up intelligently against their exploitation. For this reason, it is necessary that those of us who want to make our lives our own and live in a world where every individual has access to all she needs to create his life as she sees fit stop demanding that this system become more of what it claims to be and instead start attacking it in all of its aspects including the democratic system in order to destroy it. At this time such insurgence is the truest expression of real choice, self-determination and individual responsibility.

And what of those times when we need to act together with others and need to decide what to do? In each instance, we will figure out how best to make decisions without turning any such process into a system or an ideal to strive for. A decision-

From the very origins of the democratic concept, "rule by the people" has always been a way to increase participation in the project of government, and "the people" have always excluded classes of slaves and foreigners, whether inside or outside of national boundaries. The question of freedom lies not in who rules, but whether anyone is ruled, or whether all are self-organizing.

— Reflections for the US Occupy Movement (2011)

People need to get it out of their heads that democracy is a good thing. *Real* democracy does not preclude slavery. *Real* democracy means capitalism. *Real* democracy means patriarchy and militarism. Democracy has always involved these things. There is no accurate history of democracy that can furnish us an example to the contrary.

— Diagnostic of the Future (2018)

Uri Gordon

Historically, democracy was not a word that anarchists tended to use in reference to their own visions or practices. A survey of the writings of the prominent anarchist activists and theorists of the 19th and early 20th century reveals that, on the rare occasions on which they even employed the term, it was used in its conventional, statist sense to refer to actually-existing democratic institutions and entitlements within the bourgeois state. […] The association between anarchism and democracy makes its appearance only around the 1980s, through the writings of Murray Bookchin.

any other government, is to maintain the wealth and power of the ruling class. Democracy is innovative in that it allows a greater diversity of ruling class voices to advocate various strategies of control, and "progressive" in that it allows for adaptation to maintain control under changing circumstances.

The surest way to test this hypothesis is to observe historical examples in which oppressed or underprivileged citizens of a democracy have advocated their own interests, in contradiction to the interests of the wealthy and powerful. If the liberal mythology concerning democracy is correct, the oppressed will be fairly represented, political representatives will advocate their cause, and some equitable compromise will be reached between the privileged and the oppressed. If progressives and other reformists are correct in their belief that the system is fundamentally sound but corrupted through various causes that can be solved with the appropriate legislation, then the wealthy and powerful will receive unfair advantages in the legislative and judicial processes set in motion to achieve justice. If our hypothesis positing the authoritarian, elitist nature of democracy is correct, then the many institutions of power will collaborate to divide the opposition, win over reformist elements, and crush the remaining opposition to retain control with whatever means necessary, including propaganda, slander, harassment, assault, imprisonment on false charges, and assassination.

— What is Democracy? (2004)

making process is a tool to be taken up as needed and laid down when not; democracy is a social system that comes to dominate all of life.

What does democracy look like? The jackboot that you voted to have in your face.

— This is What Democracy Looks Like (2006)

The fact that democratic systems serve power becomes more obvious when we examine the nature of democratic participation. Democracy starts with the assumption that the "good of all" (or "the greatest good for the greatest number") takes precedence over the needs and desires of the individual. This collectivist assumption dates back to the early days of capitalism when it was worked out in the writings of utilitarian philosophers such as John Stuart Mills and Jeremy Bentham. Thus, apolitical decision-making process that separates decision from action becomes necessary. Decision and execution of the decision must be separated in order to guarantee that "the good of all" is, indeed what is carried out.

But what is this "good of all"? In practise, it could just as readily be called "the good of none". Within the democratic system, the method for finding the "common good" is to bring all sides or their representatives together to negotiate and come to a compromise. But what really is the nature of compromise? Each gives up a little of this, renounces a little of that, sacrifices a bit of the other thing (leaving aside the fact that a few are in a position to be able to sacrifice much less than most), until whatever they may have first desired has disappeared in the haze of the democratic "good of all".

Here then is democratic equality: Each leaves the table of negotiation equally disappointed, equally resentful, equally taking solace in the fact that, at least, the others lost as much as oneself. In the end it is only the two-headed hydra of power, the state and capital, that wins from this process. […]

Opinion, the idea flattened and separated from real life, gives us the illusion of freedom. After all, can't I express my opinion? Can't I have my say? This is the supposed beauty of democracy. The entire process by which opinion develops, this process of separating ideas from life and flattening them into the basis for pub talk and opinion polls is the basis for the general consensus by which democracy justifies itself. It presents itself as the one political system that, unlike other political systems, allows the free discussion about all political systems. That such a construction determines the outcome of any such discussion in advance should be obvious. What is less obvious is the option that is left out: the refusal of every political system.

It should be clear from all this that there is an agenda behind democracy. The "common good" that it works for is actually the good of the present social order. What else do we really have in common beyond the fact that we are all exploited and dominated by this order? So the "common good", in fact, means that which is good for the continuation of exploitation and domination. By drawing us into the process of fictitious participation outlined above, democracy becomes the most truly totalitarian political system that has ever existed. Our lives come to be defined in terms of its processes in ways that no other

who is willing to bomb people of color in foreign countries with a total disregard for their lives. So, Martin Luther King is dead, but his dream lives on in the disproportionately small handful of black and Latino congresspeople, the one or two CEOs of color in the Fortune 500, and the occasional television show that depicts well-off, middle class black families like the Cosby's, untroubled by police brutality or economic exploitation.

The government has retained its white supremacist character, and more importantly, it is more powerful now than it was before the Civil Rights movement, because it has largely removed the threat of racial strife and oppression-motivated uprising; a few token people of color rise to positions of power, providing the illusion of equality, but populations of color on the whole remain a cheap pool of surplus labor to be used and abused by the system as needed. So when we consider how the government actually responded to the Civil Rights movement, and what sorts of changes have occurred in our society as a result, it becomes apparent that the democratic process was more effective at rescuing those in power from a potential emergency than at granting any real relief or meaningful liberation to an oppressed group of people. […]

At its base, democracy is an authoritarian, elitist system of government designed to craft an effective ruling coalition while creating the illusion that the subjects are in fact equal members of society, thus in control of, or at least benevolently represented by, government policy. The fundamental purpose of a democracy, same as

legal pressure on the democratic process to bring about change, and even then it was not until race riots occurred in nearly every major city and more militant black organizations formed that the white political apparatus started cooperating with pacifist, middle-class elements of the movement, like Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

And what was the outcome of that political compromise? People of color in America still face higher unemployment, lower wages, less access to good housing and health care, higher infant mortality, lower life expectancy, higher rates of incarceration and police brutality, disproportionately lower representation in government, corporate leadership, and the media (except as villains in Hollywood or culprits on the TV-show COPS). In fact, Dr. Kenneth Clark, whose work on the psychological effects of segregation on black school children was instrumental to the Brown v. Board of Education victory in 1954, stated in 1994 that American schools were more segregated than they had been forty years earlier. White supremacy still exists in every arena of American life.

What exactly did the Civil Rights movement achieve? Advancement into the white-dominated institutions has been opened up for a very small number of blacks, Latinos, and Asians, particularly those who embrace the conservative ideology of the white-supremacist status quo, like Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who opposes affirmative action or other legal measures that alleviate racial inequality, or General Colin Powell,

political system could accomplish. This is why democracy is the state structure best suited to the needs of capital. Capital needs to permeate every moment of life, to define it terms of the economy. To do so requires a transformation in the nature of human beings, the transformation of living individuals into producer-consumers. Democracy, by transforming the self-creating individual into a citizen of the state, that is into a cog in the social machine, in fact helps capital to accomplish this project.

So, in reality, this is what democracy looks: an empty existence devoid of vitality, given to the endless repetition of the same activities not of our choosing, compensated with the right to chatter on and on about that on which we cannot act. To wed revolution to this pathetic ideal would create a meager revolution. To wed anarchism to it would rain the life from all our finest passions and leave a stunted caricature for the amusement of academics and cultural theorists. Our revolution can't grow from such paltry ideals; it must spring from the great dreams of those who will not compromise their lives.

— The Paltry Ideal of Democracy (1998?)

ziq

Democracy is the tyranny of the majority, however you try to window-dress it. In practice, all forms of democracy have been used by a majority group to control or otherwise dictate to a minority group. All forms of democracy have been used to

smother autonomy, to stifle self-determination, and to absolve rulers of responsibility for their actions. How can a ruler be responsible for their atrocities when ”the people” elected them and empowered them to commit those atrocities? […]

Fruitless attempts to get everyone to reach the same agreement is just the latest form of the bureaucratic meandering that has long sabotaged political action. After countless hours of heated debate, and a long series of compromises, the consensus reached (if it’s ever reached at all) will likely be very watered down from its initial form and be of little benefit to anyone in the group. A plan for concrete action will have been turned into a frustrating exercise in concession, tepid half-measures, and ultimately; inaction. All because the people who made the plan felt the need to gain the approval of a committee of naysayers before pursuing it.

Anarchists always oppose monarchy; the rule of one. We always oppose oligarchy; the rule of a few. So why wouldn’t we oppose democracy; the rule of many? Why should the many get to decide how you or I live our lives? A ruler is a ruler is a ruler. Democracy has been expertly wielded as a weapon by the elites in society. By combining democracy with meticulously-crafted propaganda, the powerful are able to control voters and manipulate them into voting against their own interests.

— Do Anarchists Support Democracy? (2018)

The whole point of democracy is to shift responsibility from the individual to the intangible and indomitable system. The institutions of democracy

available methods, to cure the alleged injustice. Of course, it would be more than a little ludicrous for the privileged, white pundits who guide the nation’s opinions from their talk shows and opinion columns to blame people born in ghettos for not overcoming racism and poverty if they didn’t have at least a few historical examples of how democracy can actually work to help people in need. But our history books are full of examples of oppressed groups of people winning their equality through the democratic process. Everybody knows the story of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement, and as any grade-schooler can tell you, this story has a happy ending, because black people won their rights. In the face of age-old prejudices, the democratic process prevailed. Or did it?

In fact, the democratic process had already succeeded in officially defeating racism way back in the 19th century, when our government granted full legal rights regardless of race, on paper at least. And in 1954, a full decade before the Civil Rights movement was at its strongest, the Supreme Court ordered the recognition of those legal rights, in response to the tireless work, within legal democratic channels, of the NAACP and other organizations. But still, there was no real change in the race relations of America. All the reforms won through the democratic process were symbolic. It was not until black people took to the streets, often illegally, outside the democratic process, that what we now know as the Civil Rights movement came into full form. The Civil Rights movement used illegal activism (“civil disobedience”) in tandem with

– demands that almost always end up subsuming real and radical struggles – that for a few years now we have been conducting a campaign against this dominating and domesticating monstrosity referred to as democracy. […]

Democracy justifies itself based on certain principles that are no less false for having been repeated a thousand times as truths, and its justification is so internalized that even its opponents believe in its principles. Considering how ingrained and immobile the idea of this system's fundamental goodness is in the people's thinking, change seems impossible; nobody seems to be suggesting any other organizational forms these days, or even other ways of life.

— Against Democracy (2013)

Peter Gelderloos

How absurd is it to talk about freedom and democracy to someone who was born in a ghetto, or someone who just immigrated to escape poverty or persecution, someone who never got the opportunity for a good education and works eighty hours a week in grueling, dangerous job with no dignity or respect just to afford payments on a cheap hovel and a meager diet? […]

It is easy, however, to dismiss these claims of powerlessness and recurring injustice by simply blaming the victims for being too lazy to drag themselves out of poverty, or to make the democratic process work for them, through petitioning, voting, letter-writing, and all the other readily

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.

— Do Anarchists Vote in State Elections? (2018)

William Gillis

"Rulership by the populace" is clearly a concept irreconcilable with "without rulership" unless one has atrophied to the point of accepting the nihilism of liberalism and its mewling belief in the inescapability of rulership. Or perhaps even going so far as to join with fascists and other authoritarians who silence their conscience with the ideological assertion that one cannot even limit power relations, only rearrange them. […]

Those claiming that democracy and anarchy can be reconciled seem to either be rhetorical opportunists — gravely mistaken about what they can and should leverage — or else they seem gravely out of alignment with anarchism's aspirations, treating "without rulership" not as a guiding star but a noncommittal handwave. […]

Let us be clear; if anarchy means anything of substance then many of these people are not really anarchists. At least not yet! They do not believe

anarchy is achievable or even thinkable. And this is reflected in their own frequent aversion and/or equivocation in relation to the term "anarchy," gravitating more to some positive associations they have seen made with it than the underlying concept of a world truly without rulership. Compared to our present society they want the things often associated with anarchism without the core that draws them. I was — for a time — hopeful that such individuals would move to the much more open term "horizontalist." In truth they'd be better described as minarchist social democrats, who want a cuddlier, friendlier, flatter, more local and responsive state that makes people feel like happy participants and doesn't engage in world historic atrocities. […]

If anarchism is to mean anything of substance, it is surely not merely an opening bid from which you are happy to settle. Anarchy doesn't stand for small amounts of domination: it stands for no domination. Although our approach to that ideal will surely be asymptotic, the whole point of anarchism is to actually pursue it rather than give up and settle for some arbitrary "good enough" half-measure. Such tepid aspirations is what has historically defined liberals and social democrats in contrast to us.

But it's important to go further, because "democracy" doesn't solely pose a danger of half-measures but also of a unique dimension of authoritarianism. A pure expression of "the rule of all over all" could be a hell of a lot worse than "Sweden with Neighborhood Assemblies." The etymology itself seems to best reflect a nightmare

world and in their very nature never can be. "Government" means a power centered in one person or a set of persons, capable of making laws and punishing all violations of them. Whether born to this power, and regularly anointed by "the will of God," or placed there by the so-called will of the people, is immaterial so far as results go. A government must consist of legislative and executive power, or it is no government. The most democratic form has its body of law-makers, passing laws for the control and guidance of every kind of people, in every department of industry, in almost every relation in life, whether it has any knowledge of these people and their interests or not. It has its courts, judges, lawyers and constables; back of these, and supporting them, its station-houses, bridewells, jails and prisons; and yet behind these, well-trained police, soldiers, Winchester rifles and Gatling guns.

— Abolition of government (1886)

Anonymous

Democracy, the most widespread contemporary form of political domination (as the primary and most sophisticated expression of the State), constituting an authoritarian, buck-passing, submissive mentality, and the ideal legal framework for the development of the capitalist economy, which is the source of exploitation and poverty.

It is for these reasons, and faced with the disquieting demands for more and better democracy from many sectors that have in recent years increasingly begun to engage in protest and disobedience

(yes, barbaric) law of numbers. Every step we have taken was in open defiance of everybody else. In the sciences and in the arts, as well as in politics and economics, as well as in the practicalities of life, everything has been done in spite of the wishes and decisions of majorities. […]

As to any quibbles that might be raised about the instability of associations, we can answer in advance that nothing lasting or practical is to be expected of subordinating the thinking and performance of some partners to those of others and, experience being the great touchstone in every clash of views, multiplicity of practices is always going to be preferable to restriction of already conventional practices. Then again, it is our understanding that every grouping should be specific and clear as to its purposes before it is launched and before the means to be employed are determined, care being taken at all times to ensure complete independence of the person. If this happens, there will be nothing or next to nothing left to be resolved later; and trivial matters towards which the members are generally indifferent because the doing of them is not worth falling out over, will be sorted out by common arrangement and without any pointless wrangling.

— The Law of Numbers (1895)

Lizzie M. Holmes

The words "the people" and "government" never have been identical in the whole history of the

scenario in which everyone constrains and dominates everyone else. If we seek to match words to the most distinct and coherent concepts then perhaps the truest expression of "demo-cracy" would be a world where everyone is chained down by everyone else, tightening our grip on our neighbors just as they in turn choke the freedom from our lungs.

— The Abolition Of Rulership Or The Rule Of All Over All? (2017)

Moxie Marlinspike and Windy Hart

Anarchists distinguish themselves by asserting a direct and unobstructed link between thought and action, between desires and their free fulfillment. We reject all societal processes that break that link—such as private property, exchange relations, division of labor, and democracy. We call that broken link alienation.

Passions and desires can only be a delight when they are real and definite forces in our lives. In this condition of alienation, however, they are inevitably muted by the knowledge that the conditions of our existence are not under our control. In this context, dreams are only for dreamers, because our desires are constantly faced with the impossibility of action. In this sinister way, when we lose our connection with the desires and passions that drive us forward, it is impossible to wrest back control of our lives and we are left to linger in a condition of passivity. Even the desire to change the material and societal conditions that function

on alienation is met with this passivity and hopelessness, essentially leaving them intact.

Society thus ends up divided into the alienated, whose capacity to create their lives as they see fit has been taken from them, and those in control of these processes, who benefit from this separation by accumulating and controlling alienated energy in order to reproduce the current society and their own role as its rulers. […]

So at heart, we are against democracy because its very existence maintains this division that we're seeking to abolish. Democracy does nothing but maintain the existence of alienated power, since it requires that our desires be separate from our power to act, and any attempts to engage in that system will only serve to reproduce it. Democracies of any type make decisions via elections, the very essence of which transfers one's will, thought, autonomy, and freedom to an outside power. It makes no difference whether one transfers that power to an elected representative or to an elusive majority. The point is that it's no longer your own. Democracy has given it to the majority. You have been alienated from your capacity to determine the conditions of your existence in free cooperation with those around you.

There is an important distinction here. Parties are political in their claim to represent the interests of others. This is a claim to alienated power, because when someone takes power with a claim to represent me, I am separated from my own freedom to act. In this sense, anarchists are anti-political. We are not interested in a different claim to alienated power, in a different leadership, in another form

of representation, in a regime change, or in anything that merely shuffles around the makeup of alienated power. Any time someone claims to represent you or to be your liberatory force, that should be a definite red flag. We are anti-political because we are interested in the self-organization of the power of individuals. This tension towards self-organization is completely orthogonal to democracy in any of its various forms.[…]

When democracy frames our discussion and forces us to argue in its terms, all actions to change the socio-political environment must happen via its means and achieve only those ends it will sanction. For these reasons, democracy reproduces itself with little special effort from the ruling class. A democratic system of "majority rule" encourages the alienated and exploited class to feel like they have control while it actually remains safely in the hands of the alienating and exploiting class. Even the most obvious contradictions get overlooked because the system has equated its existence with freedom and so places its existence outside the realm of contestable ideas. By claiming itself as a priori or the first principle of individual and social liberty, democracy appears like a tolerant and pliable source of the public good beyond all scrutiny.

— An Anarchist Critique of Democracy (2005)

Ricardo Mella

The whole of history – absolutely all of it – is a rebuttal of the law of numbers, of the barbaric