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When we say don't "just" vote, I think it's important for us to get more specific. What are some things you have done to help create and inspire a better world that have nothing to do with casting a ballot every four years?

One of the things we're up against is that electoral politics has a monopoly on the popular imagination, especially in the so-called United States. As anarchists, one of our responsibilities is to expand the limitations of what feels possible, and stretch the boundaries of our neighbors' and coworkers' collective visions.

The most recent Boston Anarchist Bookfair happened to be held the weekend before the most recent local elections. For two days, people filled the gym of a community center, engaging in conversations, and sharing literature and art. It was our biggest bookfair yet!

Our bookfair made it clear that in this moment of rising fascism, people are hungry for transformative ideas and collective action. The space was packed with people, including liberals now curious about anarchism, craving more meaningful ways to change the current conditions beyond ballots, punditry, and charity.

What grows out of these gatherings is unknown, but I have hope they help cultivate lasting connections and plant infinite seeds of something that will outlive capitalism and the state.

-Matt Dineen

# ***OUR DREAMS DON'T FIT IN BALLOT BOXES***

16 Anarchist Examples of  
Encouraging Liberals to Break Free



## NOTE

“Our Dreams Don’t Fit in Ballot Boxes: 16 Anarchist Examples of Encouraging Liberals to Break Free” is an act of love and solidarity. Please share this zine freely and widely.

For other zines in this series, see “Don’t Just Do Nothing: 20 Things You Can Do to Counter Fascism,” “Anarchist Compass: 29 Offerings for Navigating Christofascism,” “Ritual as Resistance: 18 Stories of Defending the Sacred,” “Everyday Antifascism: 14 Ways That Solidarity Keeps Us Safer,” and “The Heart Is a Muscle: 19 Embodiments of Antifascist Grief,” all freely available on [Itsgoingdown.org](http://Itsgoingdown.org) and [sheerspite.ca](http://sheerspite.ca), with big thanks to them both for hosting the texts and PDFs on their respective websites.

I extend my gratitude to dio cramer ([diocramer.com](http://diocramer.com), @dioishh) for the beautiful cover artwork, Cassey and LV for giving my intro a read to offer suggestions, and Casandra ([www.houseofhands.net](http://www.houseofhands.net)), who yet again kindly turned my design and layout into PDFs.

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Many years back, in a study group, I read Murray Bookchin’s “Market Economy or Moral Economy?” with some anarchist friends, a few of whom were part of a collective organic farm. Inspired, we decided to put the ideas into experimentation.

We set up a weekly farmers’ market by squatting an unused triangular area across from a school in our immigrant and low-income neighborhood. The anarcho-farmers were the core, but other local farmers joined, based on a voluntary set of ethics gleaned from the essay. The heart of these principles revolved around the “goodness” embodied in “goods” produced in our city, food not as commodity but having inherent “use value,” and prices based on “to each according to their needs and desires” – which often meant free veggies, and in a part of town with no grocery. We also offered and encouraged DIY skill shares, and invited local bands to come lend their music.

The scrappy farmers’ market quickly became a beloved hub for hanging out, forging bonds, and having fun – mostly for poor and working-class liberalistic folks. There, they were introduced to anarchism, but without hitting them over the metaphoric head with theory or even the word. We instead used the “carrot” – or big, fresh, organic bunches of them.

One week, a loud punk band came to play. For the first time ever, the police appeared, intent on “evicting” us. An elderly woman – who came weekly to alleviate loneliness – instantly got in the cops’ faces in defense of her/everyone’s reclaimed spot. Others quickly joined her, forcing the police to leave.

What we anarchists learned that day was this: When we create autonomous spaces worth fighting for, liberals will use direct action to “get the goods” of a self-organized community.

–Cindy Barukh Milstein

I've really come to appreciate how lucky I am over the past two years. Like many Jews, my dad was raised to support the state of Israel. This is also the man who raised me, however. While our political analysis differs, our values don't, and I wouldn't be the anarchist I am today without my liberal parents' guidance. So when he told me after October 7, 2023, that he wasn't ready to let go of Zionism, I told him that as long as we both agreed genocide is wrong, it was OK.

Zionism's remaining hold on him didn't last two weeks. Now I invite him to anti-Zionist shabbats whenever I can.

To most people flooding the streets right now, "liberal" is both a political and moral stance. On a human level, they want the same equal, just, kind world that we do. Liberalism and capitalism are just the devils they know, and "revolution" is a scary unknown that their minds populate with specters of Maximilien Robespierre and Joseph Stalin.

Our job, then, is to show them how liberalism is actually what hinders the world they want. That is, we have to help them expand their imaginations. Take them to Food Not Bombs to break bread with their unhoused neighbors; bring them along with you while doing copwatch to illustrate why we can't trust the police; invite them to anti-Zionist shabbats! As long as you can establish that you're coming from the same moral framework, the rest just might follow.

-liz

**M**ost of us didn't pop out of a womb as an anarchist - although babies, toddlers, and other young folks typically engage in anarchic behaviors until adult "authority figures" beat such instinctual impulses out of them. Likely, many of us were once liberals, and via a meandering path of experimentation, started to think and act for ourselves, with others, in nonhierarchical ways. And at some point, we began to proudly embrace anarchism, not merely as a circle A patch or tag, but rather as an embodied set of ethics and liberatory practices, and indeed, a clear-eyed lens through which we routinely see and engage with the world. From there, as anarchists, we daily, routinely - like breathing, as something we must do, yet almost stop noticing - model otherworldly forms of social organization and social relations, such as solidarity, reciprocity, mutual aid, and communal care.

Then we usually feel annoyed at liberals - and even outraged, often justifiably so. Or at a minimum, deeply impatient, particularly because so much is at stake these christofascist days. Can't they see how they're begging for crumbs from the same "master" who is abusing them? That the powers that be never willingly give up their control? Don't they see the futility of trying to vote their way out of fascism, or the danger of relying on the "rule of law" amid the increasing lawlessness of state, courts, and militarized police? Aren't they cognizant of how liberalism itself is the "handmaiden" of ushering in and sustaining a racist, misogynist, and murderous status quo?

We anarchists can kvetch about liberals until, as they say, the cows come home - or birds come home to roost. And for sure, we need to blow off steam together, while staying alert to the challenges and limits of organizing with liberals. But we should not abdicate our crucial role and responsibility in welcoming new folks into our beautiful circle(s). We shouldn't forget that someone, something, or many things did that for us!

This little zine, then, offers some humble stories of what it means, figuratively and perhaps literally, to set up anarchist “welcome wagons” for those not-yet-anarchists – those many liberals who know that their “dreams don’t fit in ballot boxes” – especially given the collapse of “representative democracies” and rise of fascisms globally – but can’t (yet) imagine how to “break free.” As the pieces here underscore, that friendly hand frequently involves inviting people into our do-it-ourselves practices. But anarchistic practice alone is not enough; the contributions in this zine emphasize education too, along with gladly and transparently sharing the values we hold dear.

None of us came to anarchism in exactly the same way, and we never know what will create that “light-bulb moment” for others to once and for all shed their liberal illusions. Too often, however, we don’t stick around to find (or help) out. Plenty of liberals were drawn into anarchistic “mutual aid” at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the nakedly crass ways that state and capital abandoned almost everyone, but such efforts swiftly slid into “charity” not “solidarity” because we didn’t give people an anarchist compass to carry them further.

Why does it matter? Because we need many (many!) more people willing and able to fight the tide of authoritarianism, side by side, if we aspire to have more folks survive. And because we need many (many!) more people desirous of putting myriad dreams into lived and life-giving reality, not waiting around for a savior, whether in the form of midterms, the next president, or some supposedly better mayor, political party, or nonprofit. And crucially, because anarchism is the beautiful idea that all of us inherently matter, all of us have gifts to offer each other, and that together, we have everything we need to bring about abundant, hitherto-unimaginable forms of freedom, self-determination, and self-governance.

–Cindy Barukh Milstein

I teach creative writing in a noncredit community college program that draws a lot of liberal boomers. About a year ago, I started facilitating a book club for my students that focuses on banned books, using it as an entry point into more radical politics. I half jokingly refer to it as my “Radical Propaganda Book Club.” I have them read books like Assata Shakur’s autobiography, for example, and compare what we’re reading to current events.

Most recently, after Mark Bray was doxed, threatened, and compelled to leave the United States, I added his “Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook” (with some reading from the latest White House commentary designating “antifa” as a domestic terrorist organization) to our class. That book sparked some amazing conversations about liberalism, antifascism, and anarchism (during which I came out as an anarchist to my students).

My students’ eyes light up as they start to understand the material. I’ve noticed the ways that they’re growing more critical of news, speaking out now against ICE, and engaging more and more in mutual aid instead of charity.

These are baby steps, I know. I may not be igniting the fire of revolution in the hearts of my elder students, but I’m helping to “deprogram” them one book club meeting at a time, and hopefully opening their eyes to different possibilities for how to live and act in this world.

–Dani

## 12

There's a big meadow on the edge of my neighborhood - private property, but with no "official" use. Neighbors walked their dogs through it. There was also a tree swing, some chairs, and a table, yet it wasn't much of a community spot.

Eventually, the swing and chairs were left unusable, sitting broken for years. So I repaired some of the chairs, found more in free piles and dumpsters, and brought all of them to this badly needed green space. I fixed the swing and tied a plastic bag to the table for garbage.

Suddenly there were signs of life. The table now almost always had people sitting around it, and among the tags and doodles that appeared on the furniture were notes thanking the person fixing the meadow up.

Further additions were made by others. More chairs appeared, someone else repaired the table, another person zip tied a plastic bag dispenser to a fence post for the dog walkers, and a small guerrilla garden popped up.

It seemed obvious that this meadow had more to offer, and as an anarchist, there was nothing stopping me from improving it. I think seeing someone else take initiative to modify the space gave my neighbors (who probably disagree with me politically) the permission they needed to contribute too. It broke the mystique of waiting for someone with official authority to "fix up" the private property, transforming it into a shared gathering area for public enjoyment. One anarchist action, even anonymously, can encourage others to do the same.

-antifa repairman

## 1

I run Little Folx, a tiny day care in my home and ongoing experiment in anarchist parenting. Most of my audience is liberal moms in Portland, Oregon, so my posts have to move softly enough to slip in but still hold sharp truth. Parenting taught me that autonomy and consent cannot be preached, only lived. You cannot force a child or an adult into liberation. You can only hold space for their questions and trust that curiosity will do its slow work.

It is much harder for me to have the same patience with adults that I do with children. Some days I want to scream, to shake people awake, shove the reality right at them, and tell them to fight back. But that doesn't work for most folx. Adults need the same gentleness, the same space, to arrive at freedom on their own terms.

Teaching children through play and care work is theory in practice. Every time I let a toddler pour their own water, I am practicing the same patience I need when an adult follower of my written reflections begins to question the system. Both are learning that freedom is not chaos but instead a shared act of responsibility, community, and trust.

-Krystal Lawhead

## 2

A few months ago, during a poorly attended union work session, a fellow organizer, a liberal, asked me to explain my political beliefs. I described the basic principles of anarchist communism as I understand them - worker self-management, federalism, social control of the means of production, and class struggle. For a long time, while I'd advocated my values during meetings, I'd generally left the explicit name of my politics out of my discussions. This was the first time I honestly called



myself an anarchist, and I was met not with the clichés and denunciations that I'd expected but instead curiosity and interest. Even a "rival" (we're all friends and comrades in solidarity) who advocates for a more liberal unionism listened and self-reflected on their own beliefs.

Being constantly involved in my union, responding in an accessible way when someone asks me why the boss does X or the human resources office thinks Y is a good idea, humbly filling in gaps in understanding, and articulating the need for the abolition of the wage system – all of this has contributed to shifting liberals' minds in my union. It's a small step, of course. But now, for instance, we're reading anarcho-syndicalist texts at our union book club, and the most active members have a much more militant, anticapitalist view, even if they're not explicitly anarchists.

–Bennet

### 3

Here on Shoshone-Bannock land, I always start with "Letter from Birmingham Jail" to try to help people move onward from the rest stop that is called "liberalism." Most of them either don't remember reading that piece, or do not realize that it's a critique against the thought patterns they were taught or grew into. Liberalism is, in large part, about being comfortable with the status quo.

So when someone who is pretty universally respected by liberals, like Martin Luther King Jr., asks them to question that comfort, I've found some good-faith questioners reconsidering their stances, asking themselves, "At what expense do I enjoy said comfort?" For them, it ends up being the soft knock they need to break the shell protecting them from seeing this social order for what it is, and begin to peek out more and more.

–Owl

### 11

We live in a smallish college town outside a major Southern city, where No Kings rallies have brought out the largest protest crowds. We gambled that many people attending No Kings were not hardened liberals but instead dissatisfied future anti-capitalists, so we went there to flyer for a cookout and assembly, inviting people to meet each other and take action against fascism, ICE, bosses, cops, and so on.

Over the course of a few months, what began as a small group of comrades has grown into a space bringing us autonomists together with disillusioned liberals, lost radicals, and experienced organizers (and some pups) twice a month in a public park to share food and zines, rotate the role of facilitator for political education, and scheme-up ideas for tangible ways to engage beyond these gatherings. After completing a mutual aid and organizing resource zine for locals, our assembly turned toward making plans to disrupt the growth of fascism in our community.

By chance, within days of this commitment, a fascist showed up to a bar's costume party dressed as a Nazi. Assembly participants quickly mobilized: we attended a huge street celebration to spread flyers celebrating the women who confronted him and declaring our town a no-Nazi zone, while encouraging other residents to join us in taking direct actions against fascism.

We'll continue to make space at assemblies for patient and compassionate learning shaped around practice. It's through doing that we grow the most, after all.

–squid and k.d.

Getting out onto the street every week with a Free Shop that's available for everyone to take part in – bringing, taking, and facilitating with no boundaries – has been transformative for our community. Our project comes across as quite a fluffy idea because everyone wants to share things and do something good for the environment by gifting clothes, books, toys, housewares, and so on, that they don't want anymore. But we've always been careful to mark what we're doing as radical, anticapitalist, and intersectional in nature.

We have flags up (commonly anarchist, trans, Pride, and Palestine flags). We have zines and stickers available, and have a practical guide, posted on our Instagram, to starting one's own Free Shop. We normalize masking and not talking to cops. We never allow money to be part of the space, and make it clear when we speak to people that we aren't a charity, church, or any kind of organization. We're just people from our town. We won't allow the Free Shop to be co-opted by politicians or nonprofits.

When people who come to the Free Shop have trouble with the anarchist part of it, being able to say, "This is anarchy in action, you're already seeing it happen on a small scale" often makes folks realize they've misunderstood what anarchism is, and we've seen massive turnarounds from people who were initially quite antianarchist.

–Bournemouth Anarchists

Some years ago, I formed a collective with friends. We started some cool projects and engaged in community organizing. After a couple years, the group was less and less active. Most of what remained was a Signal chat, and over time, some other locals joined it. Although the thread was mostly dormant, we did respond to the occasional crisis in our area.

Recently, someone in the chat brought up the government shutdown threatening food stamps with disruption and cancellation, asking, "What can be done?" Some of us expressed interest in getting food to folks facing scarcity (including ourselves). Knowing the scarcity will likely outlast the shutdown, we had a meeting to determine a course of direct action.

A handful of anarchists and one local liberal activist (with no mutual aid experience) showed up. As we worked out the logistics of where the food might come from – existing distros, local orgs, religious institutions, and farmers – everyone contributed ideas, including the activist, who said, "I know someone in the next valley over who can connect us to distros and folks facing a lack of food out that way."

Later, while figuring out where to store the food, the activist offered resources: "We can store the dry goods at my office; there's some extra space there."

By opening our organizing space to people outside our original affinity group, linking with up locals, and swapping our collective concern and drive for action, a small amount of anarchists were able to share our methods and the value of our principles with a liberal from our town, and that liberal is now doing mutual aid alongside us.

–Mol Fiadh

## 5

I always tell people that organizing in Las Vegas is special, but I don't think people understand just how much so. Even liberals who were raised in Las Vegas, I would argue, have a different understanding of what goes on societally.

There's simply no way you can grow up in a city surrounded by sex and sin and not internalize some of the counterculture. Having organized politically in Las Vegas for over a decade, and personally having gone through my own journey from Democrat to leftist to anarchist, I know that this city presents political possibility beyond what most liberals like to acknowledge.

In 2016, following Donald Trump's first election, many of my college friends mobilized to hit the streets of the Las Vegas Strip to express their dissent. Me and a few union buddies saw that a lot of those folks would immediately disconnect from organizing after the demonstration. So we activated our networks to work the entire crowd, talking one-on-one with protesters about the importance of staying involved and supporting mutual aid in our communities.

While liberals typically applaud protesters for the optics of a well-attended "direct action," we applauded liberals on the Las Vegas Strip that day for refusing the status quo, putting their bodies on the line, and breaking their own preconceived notions of what politics in Las Vegas needs to look like. We also gathered their contact info, with their consent, to share with our local anarchist collectives so as to plug them in later.

These and other little acts of radical community building fuel me and my anarchist buddies while working in liberal spaces.

-Nina Nova

## 9

The persistent urge to (un)settle the practice of "democracy" here in the so-called united \$tates of ameriKKKahhh is rooted in the day-to-day and collective commitment to abolish an authoritative system that is working as it's intended to. As a queer xicané born and raised in unceded Tongva territory, a few things that have helped me stay accountable to antifascist work while modeling it for others have been the following:

- Acknowledging and staying accountable in (un)settling the settler state we live in, and its workings toward banishing and surveilling Indigenous people, Black people, and other people of color. Colonial domination is contingent on capture, therefore we as individuals must refuse to be coerced by settler logics that separate us and compartmentalize the land.
- Facilitating a mini study group based on materials produced by those living at the far edges of the social-financial margins (using zines, anarchist literature, art, workshops, report backs, talking circles, crafting meet-ups, etc.). In my experience, we've met at a local coffee shop on Saturday mornings, and after our fourth meet-up when we completed a study series, we created a collective zine that documented everyone's reflections.
- Offering our crafts and gifts (whatever that may be) to our local antifascist struggles. Perhaps this looks like showing up for a local rent strike rally, joining a tenants' union, helping create a flyer, donating financially by directly supporting individuals impacted by ICE, offering interpretation skills, bartering baked goods or herbs from your garden, and on and on. There's room for everything!

-kimethyst



## 6

flag burning tonight! He looked flummoxed: "Why would you do that?" "Well," I replied, "Trump says we can't do it, so we're going to." He made an ugly face at the sound of Trump's name. "As anarchists," I added, "we don't believe that Trump should have any say over how we do things around here." "Anarchist?" he asked. "What does that mean?"

A friend chimed in: "Anarchists believe we'd all be better off without police, politicians, and prisons." The man looked skeptical: "They're not gonna like that! That's how they're makin' all their money." He accepted the invite to dinner, albeit assuring us he wasn't going to burn any flags.

Around 80 people showed up. I recognized friends and neighbors, and lots of new folks – more like the PTA crowd than a hardcore scene. Many brought kids, and a big crew of queer and trans teens arrived on their own. "I think this might be the best youth turn out we've ever had at an event!" I whispered to a collective mate. The food was plentiful, and conversation organic; people discussed the state of the world and their lives.

When the time came, one of my collective mates gave a short speech, we passed out flags, and folks tossed them one at a time into a fire bowl. Whoosh! The flame leaped upward with each tiny sacrifice. Some people met the task nonchalantly, others ecstatically; one screamed, another giggled. Toward the end, kids demanded the remaining flags, zealously burning them in handfuls with fire dancing in their eyes. "What would it have been like to burn a flag as a kid?" I wondered.

As I began to clean up, I saw the reticent gentleman from earlier in the day drop a small flag into the fire. In a second it was gone, leaving only an ashen shadow on the spot it had fallen. Maybe Trump was right about something after all: This act of defiance could change people in unexpected ways.

-LV

My advice to anarchists working with liberals: remind them of recent history. Cultural memory among liberals is often short, and their perception of political history frequently centers around who was in office, not what social movements were taking place. What was a momentous, rebellious, and/or traumatic event for us, may have just been a news ticker on MSNBC for them.

While the liberals I'm currently working with on ICE resistance are well-intentioned and putting in valuable work, some of them still maintain the hope that we can collaborate with other elements of the state to defeat ICE. As a way of counter-ing this impulse, myself and my comrades often talk to them about the police brutality that we witnessed during the George Floyd uprising, reinforcing the notion that all levels of law enforcement cooperate with each other and are part of the same racist system. Referencing specific times when we saw firsthand (and/or were victims of) police violence has proven effective, at least within my organizing milieu.

This has been an especially successful tactic when training rapid responders; we've been consistently told by training participants that our willingness to educate about history has helped them to better understand why opposition to policing is so important.

As a final note, I want to mention that there's power in numbers; having one or two anarchist buddies back you up usually makes it more likely that your recollections and experiences will be taken seriously, or at least will be seriously considered, by liberals.

-mj

## 7

I have been thinking a lot about how we move people past electoral politics and into the reality of our situation. How to convince people that no one else is coming to save us. I've had a lot of conversations about how it's time, now, to get uncomfortable in all sorts of different ways. Get uncomfortable in your daily life; get uncomfortable in your discussions.

My friends and I have an anarchist book club, where we invite folks from all walks of radicalization to join us and have these uncomfortable dialogues. I remind folks that "hope is a discipline" and we must do our part in building the better world.

I've been reading zines by Indigenous and other anarchists about why voting is not harm reduction and is not bringing us closer to liberation. I share these ideas in conversations with people about their grief. It's grief that liberals are feeling - for a system that they thought they could rely on.

I remind people that progression and history are not linear. We are not walking a straight line to liberation. We must live as if liberation is coming tomorrow and carve out those pockets of freedom.

Our anarchist book club invites folks to feed our homeless neighbors, and we pass out free zines in our neighborhoods. We are building the world we want to live in, and we hope that an invitation to help us to do that will bring people closer to abandoning a system that abandoned most of us in its conception.

-Megan Jones

## 8

I woke up and looked at my phone. A bad habit, I know, but one that's hard to break when there's a new horror daily. Today's contribution: Trump declares flag burning a crime. I quickly sent a Signal message to one of my collective mates: "We have to host a public flag burning." The reply: "I was just thinking the same!"

I'm part of a small, anarchist collective that runs a radical bookstore in the US South, and most of the people who frequent our shop aren't radicals. They're leftish, liberal, or don't put themselves in boxes but still seem to appreciate our inclusive, friendly space. They weren't planning to burn flags, but we thought they would. In my experience, radicals tend to underestimate the appeal of their own ideas. Since Trump's election, liberal leaders had offered their pissed-off constituents nothing, and now we had an opportunity to invite a rethinking of their relationship to flag and country.

So when we announced a "Community Potluck and All-Ages Flag Burning" for Labor Day, we were optimistic enough to buy several hundred mini flags. We wagered that it was more meaningful for 100 people to burn small flags than 1 person to burn a big flag while 99 others watched. The event would be an invitation, not a performance. And for folks who'd never burned a flag before, the experience could be transformative, stripping the symbol of its power and literally reducing it to ash. Our participatory flag burning would be a collective ritual to summon our courage and inscribe our lives with the joyful insubordination we needed. I'd bring potato salad.

A couple hours before our gathering, a gentleman several years older than my parents wandered into the bookstore and asked what sort of events we hosted. As it happens, I explained, we're putting on a community potluck and all-ages