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Eight Thoughts on How to Fuck Up the Election in Montréal

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August 2015

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the system we live under—and thereby making space for directly democratic alternatives to crop up, if people so desire—is better served by a rhetoric of negation.

Trying to get people to speak our weird political language is a hopeless project. People will look into anarchist ideas of what a future society could like if they want to, and only if they want to. In the meantime, though, we can say things in a language they understand, like *FUCK ALL POLITICIANS, DESTROY CANADA*. People may not agree with that slogan, but they'll understand what it means.

Every time there's an election, on the provincial or federal levels anyway, Montréal anarchists respond. There are stickers, there are posters, there are demos. *ON NE VOTE PAS, ON LUTTE!* declares the banner at the front of the march.

I think that every person should, on occasion, reflect on their habits. It may be too much energy to change a habit, even a bad habit, but it is at least good to know what the habits are, what they entail, and think about how to live with them better.

This is also how I feel about the Montréal anarchist population as a whole. I am not sure if there are many of us who have been involved in anti-election organizing on an ongoing, election-to-election basis. But as something larger than ourselves, we seem to have been engaging with these spectacles for years. This is, at least in some ways, a good thing. It's the consistency of our collective practice that makes Montréal look attractive to anarchists that don't live here.

Is anti-election organizing the best use of our time and energy? I don't know. To be frank, I suspect that it isn't—and so I am thinking of what some other anarchists in this city (probably drawn from the anti-civ/post-left crowd) might have to say about the matter.

Like, “the only proper attitude of an anarchist toward an election is indifference.”

Or, “anti-electoral organizing is just activism of a different flavour, and activism needs to be abandoned.”

Or, “a march against the election is going to be as weak as the majority of anti-systemic demos in Montréal these days.”

I don't think any of this is wrong. Or, at least, I don't think that it's wrong to for anyone else to think these sorts of these things. But I also think that the habit of opposing elections might be a hard one for the anarchist population, as a whole, to break. And, besides, I actually think fucking with elections can be, if done right, a good idea. Joyful, empowering, and strategic. A right proper step towards liberation for a whole bunch of

people. A right proper attack on the Canadian state and liberal-industrial society.

Anarchists here have yet to seriously fuck up elections, though. We haven't even reached the point where we have a consistent audience for our dares and our stunts—since, even if we can't seem to get ourselves beyond the dead end strategy of outspectacling the Spectacle, we should at least be able to hold some half-significant section of the population's attention for a second.

On August 2, Harper requested writs for a federal election, launching the campaign season. The date of the vote is October 19. It is, the media insists, going to be “historic”—for a whole host of reasons. In the perhaps naïve hope that this election could be historic in a way that matters *to anarchists*, with a particular eye to us in Montréal, what follows are some thoughts on how we might approach anti-election organizing this time around.

#1. Whoever they vote for, we are ungovernable.

This is a nice thought. It's possibly not true—we are, alas, actually quite governable, a lot of the time anyway—but it is something to aspire towards. With this in mind, *we should expend zero energy on trying to influence the outcome of the election.*

Someone is going to be the prime minister of Canada. We shouldn't deny the fact that there are differences between Mulcair, Trudeau, and Harper in terms of their politics, but at the same time, we should be clear that, as anarchists, our opposition is not to these specific people, but to the office of prime minister itself—and the whole Canadian state that exists around it.

#7. If you're not organizing against the election, don't organize against the election.

The Unis'tot'en camp. The occupation of Palestine. The provincial government's austerity measures. There are, of course, a million things that anarchists in Montréal, or at least some of us, are trying to bring to public attention. In the moment of the election campaign, we will be tempted to use the election as a platform to do this. We know that lots of people are thinking about the election, and if we can somehow catch their attention with that, then talk to them about abortion access in New Brunswick...

This sort of things cheapens the issues, though. It makes us look desperate for any attention that we can possibly bring to the things that concern us. Worse, it encourages participation in the election, even when we don't endorse any particular party. “Think about social housing when/if you go to the ballot box...” Fuck this approach. If you want a person to think about social housing, tell them to think about it. Don't mention the election. If the election is brought up anyway, say what you think about it, and leave it at that.

#8. Don't fight democracy with hollow calls for democracy.

Anarchists are divided on the word “democracy”. Some of us like it, some of us don't. This tension isn't necessarily the worst thing, and I'm not going to pretend to have resolved it, but I want to come out against calls for “direct democracy” and “true democracy” as part of our opposition to Canadian representative democracy. Not because directly democratic structures are terrible or something, but because destroying

for street fighting. It'll be easier to get people out into the streets with us if, instead of taking a \$3.00 trip to Berri Square, they just have to walk a few blocks. If we could get something consistent going in the neighbourhoods, from now to October 19, all the better.

For those of us at school, it may be worthwhile, too, to think of university and cégep campuses in the same way as neighbourhoods. Demos inside of UQÀM have often been hype. There's also no doubt that canvassing and pro-voting propaganda will be widespread on every single campus on the Island.

#6. Let's keep it fun.

An election is kind of like a hockey series. Some people think the whole thing is boring as shit. Other people are entertained by it. This is what glues people to their screens during the debates and gets people to check the poll numbers daily.

If people walk away from the TV in order to watch us walk-past their apartment, that might already be a victory. But it's a lot better if they come out into the streets with us. Even better if they have such a good time that, instead of reading the latest story from the campaign trail, they spend their week thinking of how they can actually contribute something to the next demo.

We don't need to imagine this being fun for the "average person", though. We should make sure it's fun for ourselves. We aren't going to want to do it otherwise. Doing things in the streets with our friends should be more appealing than whatever spectacle would occupy our time otherwise—elections, *Game of Thrones*, whatever. If we're doing something public and spectacular, and we're not alienating as all fuck, we should also be able to make a few human connections, too. Out of this, we might get new hockey buddies, sex partners, or criminal accomplices.

The Canadian left dreads another Conservative victory in particular, but we should not. If we dread it, a Harper win will depress us, and a Harper loss make us lose our guard.

#2. It doesn't matter whether or not people vote.

There's a certain sticker I've seen around the city, starting in the summer of 2012: *LES ÉLECTIONS, ON S'EN CÂLISSE—ON VOTE PAS, ON LUTTE!* ("We don't give a fuck about the elections; we don't vote, we struggle.") In the corner, it says *A—ANTI—ANTI-CAPITALISTES! A—ANAR—ANARCHISTES!*

This sticker pisses me off for a few reasons. First of all, the word "anarchistes" has two fewer syllables than "anti-capitalistes", so if you know the original chant, you know this one doesn't sound right. But more importantly, it says that anarchists don't vote.

Most anarchists don't vote. This is all well and good. But some do, perhaps for stupid reasons—like me, who voted Bloc in the last election out of the belief that balkanization would be a fertile environment for anarchy. This might be embarrassing, but it doesn't invalidate my identity as an anarchist.

In the larger society, there are people who vote and people who don't. There are no studies as to whether one group is more or less likely to be drawn to anarchist ideas or ways of living, so all we have are our assumptions on the matter. But this isn't even the real problem. What's strategically stupid for us is that this sticker doesn't just say anarchists don't vote. It says that you, the voter who's reading this, are not an anarchist. That you can't be an anarchist. Because you vote.

Voting is the least effective means available of achieving political change. We should say this, loud and clear. It's a moot point, really, because we already do. We should also criticize, severely if necessary, anyone we encounter who tries to siphon

people's time and energy into electoral canvassing for a particular party, "progressive" as it may be. But whether or not an individual person decides to waste some time at a ballot box really shouldn't concern the rest of us.

#3. Anarchists can predict the future.

I imagine a demonstration, some time in September, led by this banner: *LE NDP N'EST PAS DIFFÉRENT—DON'T TRUST THE NO DIFFERENCE PARTY.*

If Mulcair wins the election, as current polls are projecting, then the Canadas will get their first NDP government ever on the federal level. There is no doubt that, after nine years of Conservative rule, a lot of Montréalers will be hopeful about the prospects of a social-democratic government. And no doubt, either, a lot of those people are going to be sorely disappointed.

I don't think we can predict who will actually win the election—but, if the NDP does win, we can predict quite accurately what will happen. The tar sands will continue to be exploited, cuts to social services will continue, the state surveillance apparatus will develop further... I don't need to list everything here. As anarchists, we know all this. But if we can spread this message to others, and then be seen to have been right after the fact, that could be good for our credibility amongst the larger population that usually understands as total wingnuts.

#4. If any single politician deserves our ire, it's Justin Trudeau.

Trudeau is the equivalent of Barack Obama at the end of the Bush years. He is the political embodiment of Hope for a Better Capitalism. He is young, dynamic, full of interesting new ideas. He is the underdog, the outsider to politics. He's the one you

can almost believe is running for his ideals, not for his career. For all of these reasons, he is our enemy, and we should try to destroy him.

Trudeau's riding (covering Villeray, Parc Ex, and some of Saint-Michel) is one of the poorest in Canada. It's also a place where many of us live. It's also a fun place to take the streets. Without endorsing anyone else, we could make it clear to the population there what Trudeau actually is—an imperialist, a supporter of state surveillance, and a privileged brat. We could troll him in his own riding while he's trying to win the election nationally. This would be funny, especially if our activity got Trudeau to thinking that he might lose locally to one of the other parties' third-rate candidates. But it would also display the proper attitude of an anarchist to politicians, including "honest" politicians. *You're not our friend, and we're not cutting you any slack because you'll decriminalize marijuana. We'll pass the bong around while we occupy your office and shit on your desk.*

#5. The neighbourhoods are where we should take the streets.

What actually excites me about trolling Trudeau is the prospect of marching in Villeray and Parc Ex. All over the city, though, it makes more sense to organize small demonstrations in our neighbourhoods—preferably in ways that are harder for the SPVM to keep tabs on—than to mobilize for big showdowns downtown.

On the whole, anarchists and other militant anti-capitalists have lost the ability to hold the streets downtown. This isn't necessarily true in the neighbourhoods, though—and especially not if things happen unpredictably, or in multiple locations at once. I'm not saying we shouldn't do anything downtown, but we should think of the benefits, and not only