

not voting is not enough!

i believe that everything i've said so far in this zine is lying right beneath the surface of our decisions not to vote. but beneath it is more. beneath it, waiting to be spoken aloud, is a shared understanding of the world we want to see.

we want a world where we and our neighbors make the decisions that affect our neighborhood. where we and everyone up and downstream from us make the decisions that affect our river; where everyone who shares air decides what factories can emit. a world of genuine democracy.

we want a world in which the sky is free of bomber planes, the earth is free of landmines, barbed wire, searchlights. a world in which our safety comes from depending on each other for what we need in ways so complex we can't attack each other without hurting ourselves. a world where our needs are met without hurting other people. a world of true justice.

we know voting can't get us there. the question is what can.

one piece of that answer is building the foundations of that world in our communities, through projects like: sista II sista's sistas liberated ground in brooklyn, which aims to stop violence against women and girls without inviting the police to attack community members; urban food projects like the south central farm in los angeles or brooklyn's value added farm; community supported agriculture projects; neighborhood and workplace rotating micro-loan funds; community harm reduction clinics; learning sites like the albany free school; and so on.

another piece is resisting attacks on our communities and their autonomous institutions. which means projects like cop-watch patrols; eviction-free zones and tenant councils; support work for communities under attack in mexico, bolivia, palestine, angola...; groups to defend public spaces and community centers; work on the criminal justice system like that of critical resistance and the jericho movement;

so this november, keep doing what you've been doing: don't participate in the charade.

but don't stop there.

not voting is not enough. it never has been, and it never will be.

creating a world worth living in takes more than refusing to pretend that the one we live in today is just fine. it takes action. the things we hate about today's life will not end unless we work to end them; the life we want will not begin unless we work to build it.

not voting is not apathy - but stopping there is.

APATHY?

**a consistent majority of eligible voters in the u.s.
choose not to vote for president.**

this is usually condemned as "apathy".

if you're reading this, you're probably part of that majority:

**do you feel apathetic? do you - in the words of Webster -
"lack... feeling or emotion, interest or concern"?**

i don't think you do.

**i think you're making a deliberate choice,
either consciously or on a gut level,
and i think it's a perfectly reasonable one.**

**this pamphlet is my attempt to explain
where that gut-level choice comes from,
why it makes sense,
and why not voting is not enough.**

why don't we vote?

we don't vote because the candidates are interchangeable.

the past 28 years, for instance, show very little change in large-scale policy across four presidencies and both parties. reagan, bush I, clinton, and bush II all cut social services to the bone and increased military budgets. all pushed for 'free trade' agreements that screwed over u.s. workers and foreign economies, as well as the environment. all invaded countries that posed no threat to the u.s. (grenada, panama, somalia, iraq, &c). all used the politics of fear to spread the myth of a terrorist threat, expand the death penalty, and extend arbitrary police powers. the only differences have been in the pretty phrases they've used to sell the same old shit, and in exactly which corporations they helped most.

we don't vote because the system is rigged.

first, the advantages of incumbency make elections a pure formality.
then the electoral college makes most of our votes irrelevant.
then corporate money openly buys both candidates every time.
then corporate media play on our fears and hopes like a cheap violin.
then electronic voting machines make it impossible to trace scams.
and if that's not enough, the punchline can be gerrymandering, voter intimidation,
games with ballot layout, or just a denied recount.

we don't vote because we want democracy.

we all know in our hearts what democracy means: having a voice in the decisions which affect our lives. and we all know exactly what voting has to do with that: nothing. no-one but ourselves can represent our particular needs and desires – especially not someone who's also supposed to represent the needs and desires of folks whose interests conflict with ours. without direct democracy, there is no democracy. which means we need structures we create ourselves, within our communities, to come up with common goals, not a system of occasionally changing who gets to misrepresent us.

did we ever vote?

the idea of a past paradise in which voting was universal is a myth. for most of this country's life, only rich white men were legally allowed to vote, and even today, bans on ex-offenders voting disenfranchise the poor folks and people of color who're targeted by police and courts.

but many – even most – of us in the u.s. come from traditions which understand that freedom and self-determination have nothing to do with voting. here are a few stops on that long historical path:

- many of the indigenous peoples of the americas had, and still have, complex systems for making decisions by building consensus within communities. the drafters of the u.s. constitution adopted some of their ideas (separation of powers, for instance, from the six nations/haudenosaunee) but replaced this core principle with winner-take-all voting and 'representative' structures.

- since the early middle ages, the songs and folktales of english peasants and townsmen have rejected kings, nobles and parliaments alike as outside forces imposing their will against community needs. "the law" is the opposite of "liberty", as sure as the sheriff of nottingham is the opposite of robin hood. you can hear this tradition alive today on any country radio station, in any punk club.

- the christian reformation movements in central and northern europe (muntzerites, anabaptists, brethren of the free spirit, levelers, diggers, early quakers and mennonites) believed that just as no one could come between anyone and their god, in the realm of human society no one should step between people and claim to speak for them. their movements overthrew governments from prague to london - it took the joined armies of europe's kings, plus the pope and self-appointed protestant leaders like martin luther to defeat them.

- the africans brought as slaves to the americas established many small communities of escapees and resisters – maroon towns, quilombos, &c. many of these mixed african, indigenous and european christian traditions to develop ways of living autonomously as communities of equals, often welcoming euro-americans escaping indentured servitude and joining with indigenous communities.

- the eastern and central european immigrants of the 1880s-1920s brought with them traditions of peasant revolt and refusal to accept the authority of kings or parliaments. many also brought political beliefs in community self-government and autonomy and put them into practice in their workplaces and neighborhoods. the erasure of these histories as some immigrants become 'white' has made them harder to see today. the new immigrant wave of the past few decades has brought parallel traditions and beliefs from el salvador and india, china and the dominican republic, mexico and guinea-bissau – all places where peoples' movements have never had the fantasy that voting can bring the world we want to live in.

- the movements of the past century, from civil rights to feminism to environmentalism to queer liberation, have all looked back to these histories to take inspiration for new approaches. from freedom schools to consciousness-raising, from peace camps to sit-ins, we've all been affected by the alternatives they've created after setting aside the myth of the ballot box.