

Maydan Newspaper interview with a member of the Anarchist Group Amsterdam.

*1) First of all, could you please talk about the recent politic situation in the country; how many parties are there and how are their influence on the public? Do these parties really represent the groups in the society as they claimed? And are there any big changes for political parties if we try to compare the old ones and recent ones?*

I should say I am not an expert on the political situation in the Netherlands. But I do have some thoughts on elections and anarchist organizing around them so I would like to answer these questions.

The Netherlands has representative system. This means in practice that there's always a coalition government and that there are many different political parties. It also means that, contrary to what you might think, there is hardly any difference between them. Of course, I am an anarchist and my interest in parliamentary politics is none, many people will disagree with my statement. But consider this: from the 12 political parties in Parliament, from the 'Party for the Animals' to the Party for people older than 50 years (50PLUS), to the 'Socialist Party' (SP), there is no anti-capitalist party, there is not even an anti-neoliberal party, except maybe the SP.

Three of the parties are 'Christian' parties, which seems to mean that they have reactionary attitudes to woman's rights and LBTG issues. (although I think none would go so far as to oppose homosexuality openly.) But a moderately neoliberal and pro EU agenda otherwise.

Of the three parties considered left wing, only the Socialist Party is remotely recognizable as such. Under the surface however there is always a lingering anti-immigrant sentiment. The others two parties are no more than vehicles for careers in the state bureaucracy, and to refer to them as 'the left' has lost pretty much any ideological ground. More so because these parties have adopted the political frames of the far right.

On the far right there is the Peoples Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) flanked on the right by the infamous Party of Freedom (PVV). They are now more or less in power (together with the Labor Party (PvdA), but that is nothing more than a career machine).

After roughly 55 years of what came down to a three party system, the political landscape has become unstable. In The Netherlands, as pretty much everywhere else, it was the 'left' that dismantled the welfare state and pushed neoliberal policies of privatization and repression. The upper working class and lower middle class voters feel extremely betrayed by them and the right wing uses this to their advantage. The right is working very hard to whip up nationalism, xenophobia and fear for electoral gain. It finds nothing in it's way except for the conservative elite, who are afraid to lose control in the incredibly rapid shift to the right. In this shift election results seem to matter very little.

*2) How do the anarchists influence this political structure? What is their word on the political arena?*

Anarchists have little to no influence on the national political arena at this moment. There are very mixed attitudes to electoral politics in the radical left. Some advocate voting for the SP to counter the shift to the right. Some even seem to think (rather unrealistically if you ask me) that a strong 'left' government will somehow 'protect' the radical left/anarchists. And there are some who call out not to

vote, but rise up instead (complete with pictures of their burning ballots). But what the discussion comes down to is to vote for the SP or not to vote at all.

*3) What is the approach of anarchist especially in elections? And how does this approach find its place in the public?*

Anarchists are a tiny minority in The Netherlands and an anarchists approach to elections has long been almost none existent. It could be summarized by the slogans on some stickers and posters: *Don't vote, think for yourself!* and: *If elections could change anything they would have been outlawed long ago!* calling on people not to vote, because a vote in the elections could be seen as a vote of confidence in the system.

But lately this attitude seems to change and people seem to pick up on the potential around the election circus. By now it has become such a hollow ritual (A Feast of Democracy!), at times so divorced from reality, that it has become plain to a lot of people, even to some anarchists, that it matters very little if you vote, let alone who you vote for. So as to focus the issue around voting is really missing the point.

Around the national elections two years ago Kritische Studenten Utrecht, a group partly connected to the Vrije Bond, an anarchist network organization, published and pasted several posters with a slightly different approach. One for example, depicting an Egyptian woman on Tahir square with the words: *You could not vote for this Egyptian woman... Still she, together with thousands of other people, managed to overthrow a dictator by protesting on Tahir square.* This to indicate that meaningful political change does not come about through voting but through collective action.

*4) What are the main actions or campaigns that anarchists hold during the elections? Do these campaigns or actions taken by anarchists reached their aims?*

There are some anarchist working on publications that seek to address those people that are looking for an alternative to the spectacular nonsense that the elections have become. And in 2012 the 'anarcho-society of Tilburg' organized a public debate on the night of the elections around the theme: *Does voting lead to a better world?*. People pasted posters over political party propaganda with the slogan *Same circus, different clowns.* And of course there is the tradition that if you hand in your ballot at the bar of an anarchist space you get a free drink. All these actions have in common that they focus on the spectacle of the elections.

But the best propaganda against electoral politics is still electoral politics itself. Sure, the hollow propaganda of the political system reaches a fever pitch in these times and it should be pretty simple to attach our own message to it. So letting this opportunity to juxtapose the limited options presented to us and the world that is possible go by would be a waste. But I think we should stop making the mistake of giving a lot of weight to the act of voting itself. Whether or not you fill out a ballot every so many years doesn't matter. We should stop making it the issue all together and focus on the things that do matter instead.

*5) We know that there are movements whole around the world that said to be attracted by each others. Some of them have created big experiences which are related with direct democracy. And*

*some of them evolved to election campaigns for parties which ends with gaining the power of govern. Could you please interpret the new meaning of elections after the new social movements that happens whole around the world now?*

Elections are a way for the ruling elite to fight out their differences without tearing the system apart. I don't think they have a different meaning these days as they ever had. But it has become clear to a lot of people that politicians are not capable to do anything about unemployment, austerity and environmental destruction. One of the hopeful developments in these uprisings around the world is that of the general disgust with politicians and politics. Collective struggle changes the people involved, it opens up great horizons and possibilities which make the limited options presented to us by the system even more dreary. But at this moment the social movements around the world aren't capable of destroying the fundamental system. And as long as that hasn't changed there will always be politicians out there ready to 'represent the movement' and as long as they see no alternative that makes a difference, there will be people voting for them.