

## Dialogues On Democracy: The Short Debate Between Armeanio Lewis And Jon Bigger

On the British Site “Freedom News” there was, albeit short, but lively debate between two anarchist on the polar opposites of anarchist thought. Armeanio Lewis being a staunch and uncompromising Individualist. Jon Bigger being a staunch uncompromising social anarchist. Historically these two conceptualizations of anarchist thought and ideas have been in disagreement, and as we saw in the debate are still in disagreement.

The debate sprang 3 articles, two by Armeanio and one by Jon, however both contain not only fair and arguable viewpoints, but respectful dialogue that doesn't read as if the two anarchist were ready to pull a knife to the other's throat. Both remained respectful but offered a wealth of arguments and counter-arguments to each's respective ideas. This is why they have been compiled into a hopefully quick zine to be read and digested from anarchist globally, in the hopes to not only continue the debate and dialogue on democracy, but to also encourage more respectful debate between Individualist anarchist and Social Anarchist.

- Anonymous

# The Second Greatest Lie: An Anarchist Critique Of Democracy

In the United States it is coming up to the midterm elections. Tis the season we register to vote! Miserable canvassers surround my daily trips to run errands, asking me to register with a fake enthusiastic tone. Everyday I register to vote. Today, I am a member of the “Libertarian party” whatever that means. Yesterday I was a Democrat, tomorrow I think I will be a Republican!

Representative democracy in America is a joke. Many anarchist critiques exist of this specific node of apparatus control, and I am happy they do! We all know representative democracy is a lie, but what about democracy itself?

Many anarchist preach the politic of “direct democracy” to take the place of representative democracy. There is no specific definition of what this means, besides that it is “direct” and allegedly comes from the individual’s choice, rather than the coercive nature of hierarchy. This translates to many different theories, from workers deciding on delegates to represent them (direct representative democracy?), to individuals in a community deciding what happens to the social infrastructure of their everyday lives. It gets decidedly more complicated when we reach the field of how we tally votes and individual decisions, and their influence on the overall decision. Do we only accept a pure consensus? Or can we fall back on a majority decision if pushed?

The theory of direct democracy is simple in words, complicated in practice. To be fair, direct democracy has been an idea propagated by anarchists for centuries. and is a pinnacle tenet to libertarian socialist ideology.

However, political climates change, as do needs and wants. Theories serve as an individual expression of desire, and I can promise you our desire’s as anarchist have grown since Spain 36, and even Seattle 99. We are individuals constantly in motion and discovering something new everyday. Our theories move with society, or at least they must if we wish to at least be a threat to the dominate order, so why are we still stuck in notions of a more direct democracy? Sometimes ideas are good enough to stick, but the point of this essay is to at least provide nuance and a needed critique of a stale and outdated idea.

I won’t argue the historical implications and worth of direct democracy, but a modern critique of its existence and propagation. This is dialogue and boredom, not ideology or dogma. This is a call for anarchists to stop and think about the possibilities of their theories.

When we think of democracy, we picture an assembly of people debating and raising hands in favor or against propositions and proposals that affect us all. We all know to be true that our current model of democracy is tainted with corruption, manipulation, and the overarching lie of “freedom of choice.” We live in a dominating and coercive social order that perfectly structures us into roles and obligations, hidden by this smoke screen of “freedom” and “individualism.” We are coerced into deciding between a jackass, and a liar, but in reality it is not even a choice, only a reality. We only ever get the jackass and the liar, because they are one in the same.

Our very participation is a pressuring force. Whether you define our society as a mass, or a class, or any term you use to define a collection of individuals with a shared material and social position, we all influence each other. Control isn't solely produced and sold to us, it depends on our reproduction as well. The lie of democracy was produced and sold to us through tales of utopia in Greece, and now we reproduce it ourselves with the lie of individuality. This is the logic of submission, and the reality of social order. We reproduce our own social environment.

We are sold ideas, and we resell them. The action of saying yes may be powerful, but imagine if we all said no. Our no could have the same power as saying yes, but with the effects we want. A mass refusal to participate would be quit a grand attack in my opinion.

Refusal of participation is what I like to call “Subversion.” It is taking the power used to control us, and changing it into what we wish to see. The point must be made, however, why would we only stop at a simple subversion? Why not liberation?

As anarchists, we claim our goal is that of either hierarchy must be legitimate, or it must not exist at all. We can differ there, but we are all against coercion to consent. We all believe individuals should be allowed to make decisions for themselves, without coercive efforts of any person, community, or object. So why, as anarchists, do we accept direct democracy as satisfactory? Why do we not demand more?

Democracy is, in totality, the epitome of collectivism. Democracy goes hand in hand with the lie of individuality, as it builds upon that lie and is an extension of this collectivist order, this social order. From representative democracy to direct democracy, if we as a “community” seek to choose amongst ourselves, why do we collect in meeting halls to decide on matters? Any collection of human beings brings about coercion and hegemony, as we are social creatures.

You can argue, two individuals talking and deciding on a matter is “direct democracy” and I will say that is just lazy and a straw argument. Definitions are dependent on democracy for crying out loud. Democracy is not two individuals talking about a decision they must reach a conclusion to, democracy is an extension of “community” on the individual to decide and pretend like their opinions matter. Democracy is what makes us into a mass of, for lack of a better term, sheep. Democracy is just the smoke screen of a social order, a hegemonic structure of coercing individuals into a “solution.”

Harsh words they may be, and I can already feel the blood boiling from those in disagreement, but think about it. Remember general assemblies and how boring they would get? Remember hearing stupid opinion after stupid opinion, and that especially stupid opinion put forth by that stupid person? (We all remember this person from occupy). The process would take forever and eventually become so dull we would vote “yes!” on any proposal, no matter how strictly we think we adhere to “anarchist principles.” General assemblies are a perfect example of direct democracy. They are based around consensus and everyone gets a say. The only effective aspect they played in our lives ( or do play if you continue using this process) was/is the helping us find our REAL friends and comrades. The boredom caused us to look around for eyes just as annoyed as we were, and we found them. We found our comrades and created our own groups, and many of them still exist to this day. Democracy, and extreme collectivism in general, lets us separate those in our “community” who we feel close to, and who we wish saw punched in the face.

Swiftly put, direct democracy would only allow us to really find community, rather than the terrible community that we are faced with everyday. This is the only positive I can see from implementing this model of decision making everywhere. Our goal as anarchists is to not install a new hegemony of will under the guise of “community”. Our goal, or desire as anarchists is to destroy that which destroy’s us, our self, our individuality. Anarchism is the truest expression of individualism, so why submit ourselves to the will of order when we can chase our desires mutually as equals?

Instead of propagating the lie of democracy, we should be exploring alternatives and newer, fresher ideas. Now, I’d be quite the asshole to suggest exploring alternatives without offering any jumping off points! So, I propose differing collectives, reading groups, and individuals ask each other these questions, and in general really discuss what we mean by democracy and whether or not it is desirable.

1. How do I coerce others with my daily actions? What are those specific actions? Ask each other, and discuss with each other in what ways you reproduce your own social environment. Ask each other about specific actions you take that coerce others into “your” line of thinking and the different positions “you” take.
2. Why do you want democracy? Delve deep into the reasons, and personal validation you provide to justify democracy as the specific decision making model you wish to see your self-governance take place.
3. What are other words we use to describe our social interactions and decision making processes? Personally, consent is my preferred “model” for decision making. Consent for me is not coercing the person in any way shape or form and allowing their complete individuality to take hold. There have to be more options however, and I am positive if you are reading this you can come up with at least 1 other model.

Discuss this essay itself. Do you agree? Do you disagree? What do you really think? I have personally left this critique vague in order to allow individual conclusions and realizations when reading this essay. I also love discussion, so if you want to discuss this essay, or really anything else, feel free to email me at [redacted]. Say whatever you like, whether you hate me for being a dirty petty bourgeois individualist, or if this essay inspired you. Whatever it is, I'd love to hear it.

The last authority you have to question is yourself. Hurry comrade to not only arm yourself, but to think for yourself!

**Armeanio Lewis**

# Democracy: Why it Should Be As Direct As Possible

Freedom recently published an article calling for a debate on whether direct democracy was desirable [ it can be found here]. Titled “The Second Greatest Lie: An Anarchist Critique of Democracy”, it was actually more a stream of consciousness on direct democracy. To go into the faults of that article would be a task few would take up. It was frankly very confused but the writer should be thanked for opening up a debate on the issue. I want to put the case for democracy and explain why it needs to be as direct and participatory as possible.

First an understanding needs to be gained of what democracy is. It is a very over-used word. It comes from the ancient Greek words demos and kratos meaning people and power. On a very basic level then it should denote a political order in which power rests with the people. In ancient Greece this actually involved mass general assemblies and citizen participation in decision making, although that didn't include slaves or women. On that basis it would be contra to anarchist beliefs to want to copy the ancient Greek system of democracy per se blibcom.orgut it's an interesting juxtaposition in comparison to the dominant form of democracy which is akin to the Roman Republic with its senators.

In effect then modern debates about democracy run along the lines of people either preferring a Roman or a Greek version of government. Anarchists often turn towards the Greek version because in theory it allows for greater participation and therefore an opportunity for self-governance, which is arguably our ultimate aim. The history of direct democracy does not require sentimentality or deference though. This system had its faults and it not desirable as a replacement for the liberal democracy we currently have in the UK and elsewhere. As anarchists we shouldn't be concerned with finding an off the peg replacement for the status quo.

If anarchism is seen as an experiment to be conducted pending a future anarchist society, rather than a ready-made system to be put in place once a revolution is achieved, then direct democracy can be seen as part of that experiment. This ia na experiment that can be continually tried and tested until we have got to where we need to be. We don't need to wait for revolution. Consensus decision making, committees, workplace and community structures can become the place where these experiments play out. There is no rigid set of rules here. It should be for each group to decide the best method for self-governance and even then there is no obligation to use the same method all the time or for every decision. Some decisions might not be suitable for consensus and some groups might prefer voting anyway. Others might wish to experiment in different forms of consensus decision making. It is for us all to support the efforts of others to find out what works for them and see if it can be adapted for our needs.

One criticism levelled at democracy in the article was that it naturally leads to informal hierarchies emerging. Yes, it does. So what is needed is a way to ensure those hierarchies can be disestablished when they emerge. It remains unclear as to how that can occur without further direct democracy. In fact, direct democracy allows for such disestablishment and it is illogical to conclude that because hierarchies form then direct democracy should be avoided. On the contrary in a direct democratic system the responsibility for ensuring domination is curtailed rests with the participants, directly. This means a continual renewal of the anarchist principles underpinning the group in question. This links closely with the concept of mutual aid in as much as it is in everybody's interests to prevent hierarchies from emerging and smashing them when they do. Direct democracy is the answer rather than the problem as it was presented in the article.

There is also the issue of individuality. Once a political ideology is broken down it always concerns the relationship between the individual and the collective within a society. For anarchists there is a desire for freedom to be absolute. Yet that has to be squared with the need for a harmonious community. Again, direct democracy can help. There are occasions where an individual may withdraw their cooperation on certain matters. How the group decides to handle such decisions is important. Finding a way, perhaps on a case by case basis, for people to withdraw from groups without incurring the wrath of the majority is an experiment anarchists could do well to try. Without it direct democracy could still mean majority rule or else individuals may block consensus decisions from being reached. Do we allow an individual to break free and under what circumstances? How do we handle those moments where an individual does more than break free from the collective and acts in a way which would currently be labelled criminal? Direct democracy can be extended to decisions of justice and I would argue that it needs to. As a community we can't just say 'anything goes' but neither can we allow an over-arching system of government to be re-erected once it has been got rid of. The key point here is that as anarchists what frustrates us about government is our lack of participation in the decision making process. Again, it is hard to see how we can solve that by ditching the notion of direct democracy. On the contrary it is our best opportunity to find a way to resolve these issues.

Direct democracy shouldn't be seen as an end point then but one of continual renewal. It would be naïve to think that once an anarchist society is achieved then problems of hierarchy will wither away. They won't. Just like patriarchy, racism and other forms of domination, society will need to guard against losing democratic participation and the gains achieved. In short anarchists will need to nurture direct democracy in order for an anarchist society to flourish. The experiments have already begun. We need to record what is learned for future generations and ensure that groups, committees and activists can carry on the experiment. We should resist the urge from some for us to ditch these principles. They are absolutely essential if we are to achieve self-governance.

**Jon Bigger**

# Democracy Is Already Direct: A Response To Jon Bigger

As I was on my way home from vacation I noticed a response article continuing dialogue that I opened with my most recent article, which was a very basic critique of democracy from an anarchist perspective. I am sad to hear the author of this response was confused by my critique, but alas it is understandable as the position I hold is as popular as SKA. Like ska however, individualist anarchism never died and I'm glad this platform exist as a way to continue dialog from centuries before between individualist and social anarchist.

In the response Jon laid out the definition of democracy, historical actualization in Greek times, and what it means to them as an anarchist. They may not have engaged every point I made, but here is my attempt to engage theirs.

First, our conceptions of democracy differ. As they stated, the word democracy comes from the Greek words demos and kratos, which means "people" and "power." The problem with depending on these definitions is it is so open on what "people" and "power" actually means. Who are the people and what power do they have? Is it a select group or everyone? Is it specific power or power over everything? To rely on open definitions is to solely rely on merit of the position presented. Being the individualist I am, I cannot fault that as it's my general position on everything. Definitions are meaningless for justification, as they prove nothing but intent, and as anarchist we don't care about intent but actuality. We hate cops don't we?

The Greek actualization proves this, as their actualization and conceptualization of democracy was the embodiment of every disagreement I have WITH democracy. Their assemblies were not even done on mass, but on a level of social capital. Those who were in positions of power were in attendance, while the women, slaves, soldiers were not even allowed to participate. To place this organizational method of human interaction into a spotlight reflects the weakness of pro-democracy positions; It's dependant on historical anecdotes rather than individual desire and want. It's dependant on experimentation and possible failure, rather than fluxuating and ever changing desire. It's a system, not anarchy.

It must also be stated Athenian democracy emerged out of the necessity to coordinate a community of fragmented (literal) patriarchs governing small or big land holdings. Participation, by virtue of citizenship, wasn't because of abstract appeals to humanism but because citizenship was derived from co-"ownership" of the polis in the form of holding land. As such, the common exclusion of women and slaves (far outnumbering those participating in democracy) was derived directly from their relationship to the constitutional basis of democracy: the attempted smoothening of conflicts between land-owning male family-heads. Democracy could only function in Greek antiquity because its participants shared a common social position. The 'pie in the sky' extension of this position, as in "Greek democracy had its limits but was well-meant, if only they...", would have spelled the direct end of the democratic apparatus itself.

The modern debates on democracy are not solely based upon Greek versus Roman conceptualization (thank god!), but rather I see them as debates between the individual and the social. Popular forms of anarchism do often retreat to the Greek conceptualization of democracy as a juxtaposition to justify their feelings, but again this debate goes deeper than democracy, but the view on social and individual itself. I am not making a case against democracy alone, but social order itself and any organizational method that places community over the individual. That my friends, is my main argument against democracy. To summarize my position stated in my opinion piece; democracy forces the individual to conform, as democracy itself is an apparatus of power. Democracy is the will of the majority against the minority, or the will of the minority against the majority. Democracy is the organizational method of power. Simply put, it's the economics of rule.

The argument of "self-governance" is also based on faulty lines. It reminds me of the "anarcho"-capitalist argument of self-ownership. In both ideas, the individual is rooted as an object pertaining to system, either being the system itself or a direct node linking others to this system. An example of being a direct node would be through the federalist notion of "delegates" in a council, representing a collective. The idea of self-governance translates to self-ownership, it essentially means the same thing. Coming from an individualist anarchist perspective, neither are desirable. I do not want to govern myself according to morals and rules of community or society, nor do I wish to own myself as an economic relation. I simply wish to BE myself, and exist as myself.

I will say I am refreshed to hear Jon does not believe anarchist should offer alternatives to the current social order, but sadly that is what their argument devolves into. The idea of anarchism being an "experiment" is offering an alternative to status quo. If one sees anarchism as a system, then it is an alternative, simple. This is, yet again, where we differ on opinion. My anarchism is not an experiment but an actualization of my individual desire; Free from all order. Free from the committee that aims to suppress me, free from the community that aims to repress me, and free from the workplace that aims to enslave me. Any notion of a different organizational method for collective, no matter the size, is an offering of alternative, which brings me to another point. WHY direct democracy?

Jon makes the claim anarchist see freedom as something that should be an absolute. This position confuses me as how can freedom be absolute when it is neither defined, nor existent? The notion of freedom is a completely subjective position pertaining to an individual's ego. From this perspective, freedom cannot, and should not be an absolute. Freedom is an abstract sense of value pertaining to social and material relationships. It is how we gauge whether we are happy and confident to act on our own as our own. It is not an absolute status one can have, but an ever-flowing tension between individual and social. A fluctuating feeling that is context specific. The notion of democracy is in direct (pun not intended) conflict with the idea of freedom, as I stated in the original article, because the people decide freedom, not the individual. An individual must be free to decide their own freedom, and what it means to them. It must be an abstract nothingness, rather than an absolute gauge.

This leads me into the question of hierarchies, and Jon's response. They stated that the only way to combat hierarchies forming from direct democracy, was more direct democracy. That is the equivalent of pouring gasoline on the fire that is burning down your house, or giving cops better guns to stop cops from killing people. They state that it is illogical to avoid direct democracy for this reason, as direct democracy is based upon the same foundation of mutual aid, IE opposing hierarchy because it is universally better than allowing it to exist, by actualizing alleged "anarchist principles."

The fault with this argument is that it assumes anarchist principles are even a thing, let alone an objective universal concept known by all anarchist, and every participant in said "direct democracy experiment." for one, how are we going to decide what these "anarchist principles" are? If we follow Jon's assertion, direct democracy. The very affirmation of what these alleged anarchist principles are depends on them already being in place to stop those gaining more power than others. I for one, based on my experience within anarchist organizations, do not trust this assertion by any means, and those who have participated as [tumblr\\_static\\_4w2tz4auu2gww0gw8o044go8owell](#) know why. In far too many situations have I seen individuals gaining power, and using this power for their own benefit. Just look at the current IWW drama concerning Mike Koz from the Chicago IWW, or Tomas from the Portland IWW. Many more examples of real life anarchist gaining power through direct democracy, and using it to protect themselves. Neither have been kicked out of the IWW, and if one wishes to know what I am talking about, a simple google search will help.

To continue with their assertion, we would hypothetically use direct democracy to equalize power, under "anarchist principles." Logically, the individuals with the power would be excluded from the meeting, or just would not know about it. Sadly, they have friends, as does EVERYONE with power. Would their friends be allowed to join? If they are, how would one stop those very friends from shielding the individual (which is what we always see in accountability processes)? The conclusions of Jon's assertion reach the destination of a vicious cycle, one where power is common place, and when it is attempted to be solved those with power always win. Power against that without will always dominate, which is why we must remove the position of power being possible to obtain. Whether this is even possible is a whole different ball game (spoiler alert, I don't see it as possible).

Finally, this brings us to the last argument made; that of the individual. This is where our real, concrete disagreements diverge. They are obviously arguing from a social anarchist viewpoint, so here is my rebuttal on the claim that we can not allow anything to go; yes, we must.

The state considers its actions as justice, while that of the individual crime. By advocating this specific notion of direct democracy, in which Jon states, and I quote: "Direct democracy can be extended to decisions of justice and I would argue that it needs to. As a community we can't just say 'anything goes' but neither can we allow an over-arching system of government to be re-erected once it has been got rid of."

To be honest, this position terrifies me, as it is what the state levels against anarchist currently when we attack and negate social order, through our various actions. We already employ direct democracy within the justice system, through the means of “juries.” Juries, those who decide whether the defendant “criminal”, will be charged or not, must reach that decision through consensus. I feel as if you cannot invoke direct democracy as an organizational method when you have never experienced this, nor can you claim yourself an anarchist when you preach the exact same system in an alleged anarchist society. After we directly democratically decide whether the individual is guilty or not, how are we going to enforce that? Any enforcement by a community on an individual through means of a system of order (social order), is either a state or the beginning of one.

To Jon, their anarchism asserts that government as it stands is undesirable because they have no direct participation. This is in direct conflict with my anarchism, as government isn't desirable at all. The arguments presented by Jon are exactly what worry me about direct democracy. Where do we draw the line between community and society, and who gets to define these anarchist principles for which we conduct ourselves under? The anarchism of Jon is an advocacy of order and forced participation based upon faulty universal principles decided by power, rather than individual. This form of anarchism is soft utilitarianism, in the sense it treats the will of the majority more important than the will of the minority, which is an argument Jon sadly did not refute (maybe next time hopefully). One where the individual can still commit crime, as a legal system still exist and acts according to these principles, and the only solution is through this process of legal stratification. Jon's anarchism is like the Labor party, or the Green party in America. Looks nicer, talks nicer, but the same thing for which I am against.

Finally, this allows me to delve into alternatives from my point of view. Simple put, nothing is my alternative. This may confuse some, or garner applause from others. For those uninitiated in the super low key egoist club known as “My facebook friend's list,” let me explain. By nothing, I do not mean allowing things to remain as they currently are, but rather destroying them with nothing to replace them. Devoid of all systems of which to organize how we do things, how we conduct ourselves, and how we treat others. Nothing as an alternative to the current situation we find ourselves in, as it allows us literally anything and nothing, is what I preach with my anarchism.

This idea of nothing first arose from Max Stirner, a young hegelian philosopher who is famous for his conceptualization of “egoism,” other wise known as individual actualization. To summarize Max Stirner would be a feat requiring a whole different essay, however pertaining to the context of direct democracy and if it is desirable, Stirner does offer the alternative idea, rather he named it. This is known as a “Union of Egoist.” There are no specifics of what this means, as it is an aspect of egoist thought, so do not expect specific arrangement of hypotheticals. Simply put, a union of egoist is a small band of individuals who all share affinity and wish to continue association for however long they wish. Within in this union, no decision making exist as the union itself, but individual based between those that are effected by ones actions, but not even necessarily that as it may not even be needed. This is the idea of doing instead of asking, but without stepping over the limits of ones self, because of the affinity you share.

I would have no desire hurting my friend, so why would I? With them being a close friend, I would know what their boundaries are and are not. If an individual no longer wishes to be apart of this union, then that is the end of it. They are no longer apart of the union of egoist. With their withdrawal, the question must be asked “what happens if they attempt to harm others?” Simple, protect your neck. Power is how you attain things, protect things, and affirm things. To allow someone with power is suicide, so why would anyone grant an individual power? With a union of egoist, power cannot be gained, not because there is no incentive, but because of the closeness it literally cannot become and gain traction. Groups of friends can easily, and do, keep each other in check. Sometimes with violence, most of the time with words. We have all had disagreements with friends, and we have all solved most, if not all these disagreements. The notion of a system is not needed, unless of course you have a society.

I do not desire a society however, as look where it has brought us? Society is the death of the individual, and the emergence of the homogenous mass. One that affirms a moral code amongst its participants, and binds them to it, wether or not they accept. Participation is forced, as well as continuation. Work to feed others, follow the rules to keep others doing so, and continue the death machine tat is “progress” and “principle” into inevitable tension between those for and against. Any notion of society is repetition of a vicious cycle of system after system trying and failing. Feudalism failed, so now we have capitalism. Capitalism is failing, so what is next? Others opt for a new system, I opt for nothing.

My position against democracy is but a smaller piece of the grander argument that I hold. I am against society, and everything that aims to control my self.

I do hope Jon, or others offer a rebuttal to this essay, as this debate is something needed to further develop anarchist praxis, ideas, and theories into something better, something more desirable.

**Armeanio Lewis**