

# Voting

No, in Venezuela; Yes, in U.S.?

anon.

2007

On December 3, a month after the Republican Party was swept from control of the U.S. Congress, Hugo Chavez was overwhelmingly re-elected president of Venezuela for a third four-year term. On the night of his victory, in a speech to thousands, Chavez said Venezuelans should expect an “expansion of the revolution” aimed at redistributing the country’s oil wealth among the poor.

“Long live the revolution!” Chavez shouted from the balcony of the presidential palace. “Venezuela is demonstrating that a new and better world is possible, and we are building it.”

However, our Venezuelan comrades at *El Libertario* see neither Chavez nor his putative revolution in that light and called for a boycott of the polls. They correctly accuse the flamboyant left-wing nationalist of expanding industrial capitalism and the centralization of the state, all the while sharing the country’s oil wealth with the poor. We reprint two of *El Libertario*’s pre-election documents which contain an important analysis of Chavismo, and by implication, the reigning leftist giddiness about the man and his revolution. (See Venezuela, Elections 2006 and Depolarization and Autonomy in this issue.)

Here in the U.S. the FE’s Walker Lane, previously an anti-electoral stalwart, justifies his participating in the recent Congressional election and asserts that anarchists probably voted in greater numbers than the general US population.

Letters on both subjects are welcome by postal mail or email.

## Walker Lane Does the Dirty Deed—Again!

by Walker Lane

“Part of the reason why anarchists reject voting is because we think that voting is not part of the solution; it’s part of the problem. This is because it endorses an unjust and unfree political system and makes us look to others to fight our battles for us. It blocks constructive self-activity and direct action. It stops the building of alternatives in our communities and workplaces. Voting breeds apathy and apathy is our worst enemy.”

—from “An Anarchist FAQ [www.infoshop.org/faq](http://www.infoshop.org/faq)

Well, I did it again.

After casting a ballot in the 2004 presidential race, I voted in the U.S. November 2006 mid-term elections which saw the Republicans lose both Houses of Congress.

I realize that my act violates the anti-electoral anarchist canon, particularly since I’ve often written versions of it in these pages for several decades, and avoided the polls for an equal amount of time.

One can only speculate how many of our comrades adhere to this dictum. A friend told me he thought that a greater percentage of anarchists voted than did the general population. That's not so difficult since the voter turnout for the recent election was barely above 40 percent.

Without taking an exact headcount, I'd say that of the anarchists with whom I have contact, the majority of them took part in the recent voting, handily beating the national average. This may be in part a function of the age of my friends, since I suspect that the younger an anarchist, the less apt they'd be to vote, but that's as true about the population at large.

Even among friends who didn't vote, the Republican defeat was met with great glee.

The formulaic statement of anarchist anti-electoralism above states pretty well the traditional reasoning behind boycotting the polls. It's not that it's incorrect, although when it comes to the communities and individuals who make up the small anarchist movement in this country, it probably is not an accurate description of our situation. Is there one of us who voted who thinks elections, particularly the national ones, are anything more than an exercise in how the empire will be administered, and by which one of the ruling rackets?

Hopefully, there are no anarchists who think revolution can be legislated, or who have dropped community building and direct action for electioneering. I suspect the majority of those anarchists who voted are much like me; they did the quick (unless you vote in an African American district), slightly distasteful act of pulling a lever or pushing a button for the lesser of the two evils.

The English comrades whose statement we quote above worry about voting "breeding apathy." The U.S. population is so apathetic for openers—whether out of disgust, lethargy, or just having to face the sequential humiliation of work, then voting—that almost two-thirds regularly sit out all elections, and undoubtedly most other political activity as well. In fact, the media was quite ebullient that as many voted as did as opposed to the paltry 23 percent who managed to overcome the mental and physical impediments to participating in the 2002 balloting.

There are important considerations that arise when enemies of the state participate in its administrative functions that are worth addressing. First, what effect does it have on the individual who defines oneself as an anarchist? One voting comrade told me that he just did it, and couldn't understand why I made a public fuss about it.

But, it's important to confront whether the act of voting, that which has traditionally been rejected by the anarchist movement, transforms the individual or the movement. In the case of the U.S., I suspect neither is altered. It's not a matter of a vibrant, militant community and worker-based movement being diverted from a revolutionary trajectory into reformism through electoralism. Since we don't have much going besides some small admirable projects and publications, to want the lesser of the two evils, particularly when the Bush regime is extremely evil, doesn't seem to affect our ability one way or another to expand beyond our current miniscule political presence.

This election, like the one before it, was about affirmation or repudiation; a referendum on the most far-right and belligerent administration the US has experienced in the last century combined with equally awful domestic policies. Staying the hand of these psychopathic power and warmongers, religious hypocrites, and venally corrupt politicians seems to have taken the wind out of the sails of the right-wing trajectory begun in 2000.

The world was watching to see whether the American people (us) would reject the Iraq war and social wreckage Bush has created, or would we say yes to another two years of this. For all of their posturing, the Democrats are as committed to empire and class rule as their erstwhile rivals, so it's unlikely that the Democrats will challenge the direction in which their Tweedledee twin has sent the country. For instance, after the election that gave the Dems control of Congress, in good part due to popular opposition to the Iraq war, the incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid announced that he would support an increase in the number of U.S. occupation forces.

However, since stealing the 2000 presidential election, the Republicans have ratcheted up the nature of authoritarian state rule beyond the traditional manner exercised by both parties in turn. Bush's shredding of the formal guarantees of the Constitution, making the United States officially a torture state, the insane extension of imperial military force, plus a thousand other crimes, make it difficult to argue that the parties are currently identical.

The differences between the two parties (the political expression of different wings of the same capitalist state) are very small, but ones that have significant impact on the lives of millions, particularly the farther you are from the center of power. Ask a welfare mother, an African AIDS victim, or an Afghan peasant.

Though it may be humiliating to pick one's rulers, it is worse to be ruled by a pack of rightwing psychos who don't believe in evolution, want to suppress gays, women, and people of color, build walls around our borders, destroy the environment, and turn this already benighted land into a theocracy.

I live in an area that is heavily Democratic. It's pleasant walking through the area knowing that even though my neighbors may be only liberals, they are against the war, racism, homophobia, etc. It's a social and cultural milieu that is comfortable to live in, and one that is tolerant of radicals.

Plus, how, given our relatively small numbers, do we combat the ascendancy of the right wing? Gun nuts put a referendum on the Michigan ballot in November that would have allowed them to hunt mourning doves; how do you stop that without voting against it? Direct action? Good luck.

I was impressed when our oldest comrade, who fought in the 1930s Spanish Revolution in the anarchist militias, said he would have voted for the socialist candidate in the elections following the Madrid bombings in Spain that rid the country of a conservative Bush ally. Also, many on the left and anarchists in France voted for the conservative presidential candidate Chirac over the overtly fascist LePen in 2005, but left the voting booths with clothespins on their noses.

A friend and comrade from San Francisco told me that "everyone" in the Bay Area was registering to vote with the exception of one person he knew. I say, let's drink a toast to her upholding of the invariant anarchist principles.

In the meantime, let's get back to work on overthrowing capitalism and the state.

# fifth Estate

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