



For Americans who feel caught in the snare of an openly hostile government, it's essential to understand how to organize without a leader. Exarchia's greatest lesson may well be that when the state fails or turns against us, penalizing us, denying us resources, restricting our speech and freedom of movement, and attacking the weakest among us, all we have is each other: our bravery, our competence, our delight, our anger, our refusal to back down or see another harmed. People have the power to topple dictators. ☹

ANARCHISTS HAVE SOME LESSONS FOR TRUMP'S AMERICA



Text **Cara Hoffman**
Illustrations **Molly Crabapple**

So successful is the variety of people involved; young and old, rich and poor, lawyers operating inside the system, and militants fighting on the street. Each act of resistance reinforces the other, and they have been collectively effective at stopping the usurpation of public space, arrests, and evictions — the violent kind by police and the quiet kind by landlords who raise rents or foreign investors who buy up buildings. Exarchia's tactics should feel familiar to Americans because many were inspired by American history, which has a startling number of autonomous peoples' movements — agrarian collectives, networks of enslaved people working as cells to transport themselves and others to freedom, the abolitionists who helped them, the Industrial Workers of the World and Indigenous resistance, underground abortion networks, the anti-AIDS taskforce ACT UP, anti-pipeline activists, and the Earth Liberation Front, whose once radical ideology about protecting the earth has become largely mainstream.

Here's how Exarchia has fought back.

Maintaining the spirit of the neighborhood is key. Exarchia is known for festivals featuring the community choir and local orchestras, carnivals, and all-night dance parties, some commemorating past victories or memorials to authoritarian fighters. The history of the movement is kept alive, especially for children. When a statue of angels in the square was destroyed by government order, puppets created replicas of the angels, bringing them out at festivals and protests. At Carnival, costumed protesters danced the Sitraki around a giant burning effigy of Mitsotakis in front of military police. Last spring they created an enormous paper-mache tiger that provided the streets. Thrilled children skipped around it, putting their heads in its mouth.

A diversity of tactics is most essential to protect the neighborhood. This ranges from sabotage of construction machinery to boycotts of gentrying businesses to protests that fill the streets and lawsuits that fill court dockets. What makes all of these methods

Edonald Trump has promised to arrest his opponents, turn the military against the “enemy from within,” and launch mass deportations. He praised Adolf Hitler’s generals, mused about how a former member of Congress might feel when guns are “trained on her face,” and said he wouldn’t mind if journalists were shot. These statements have prompted historians as well as some of Trump’s former advisers to call him a fascist. As he prepares to take office, the specter of authoritarian rule stalks the nation.

How Americans respond will determine their future and the future of the world. But what should that response be?

One answer lies in a small enclave of Athens called Exarchia, where I’ve lived for seven years researching peoples’ uprisings. Roughly the size of New York’s East Village, Exarchia has been an antifascist bastion since the 1970s and an exemplar of how fighting authoritarianism can animate a community.

There are of course downsides to living in Exarchia. It’s good to have a reliable gas mask for when police use tear gas to break up protests. Vandalism of Airbnb rentals is common — despite residents’ efforts, abandoned buildings that have been occupied and repaired, their agendas determined by whatever is most pressing in the community.



In recent years Exarchia has come under threat by the conservative government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The government has evicted squatters and sent migrants from the community to refugee camps. It has clear cut trees in the central square and stationed squads of militarized police on the streets to guard the highly contested site of a new metro station, which residents see as a move toward gentrification. Actions like these destroy communities.

Generations of antifascists built Exarchia, including fighters who resisted the Nazis during World War II and self-organized brigades who fought home-grown and foreign fascists during the Greek Civil War. Decades later, people enraged by the government killing of dozens of protesters and bystanders at Polytechnic University in Athens in 1973 helped topple the US-backed dictatorship. In 2008, anarchists took to the streets again after a police officer murdered a 15-year-old, sparking protests throughout the nation, evicting the police from Exarchia and establishing a new measure of autonomy.

If you’re imagining a neighborhood filled with thugs wearing black balaclavas, think again. From Exarchia’s Strefi Hill, a park maintained by residents, one can watch children playing basketball and people walking dogs and having rap battles, the Acropolis and gleaming sea visible in the distance. Balconies are filled with climbing jasmine and gardens. The buildings themselves form an enormous interconnected mural of graffiti tags and abstract and figurative paintings. Bitter orange trees line the streets, blooming white in spring.

It’s hard to tell a friend from the community choir, your dentist, your mechanic, or your neighbor’s grandmother from an antifascist. Each week, Exarchia’s residents hold open assemblies in community centers and in squatted spaces — vacant buildings that have been occupied and repaired, their agendas determined by whatever is most pressing in the community.

Decisions are acted upon by those who are most enthusiastic and have the relevant skills. An agronomist, for example, would volunteer to look into environmental reports on the neighborhood. People who have served in the military or studied law might have ideas about security. Exarchians have created their own migrant shelters and community centers, free food kitchens, and parks and libraries in squatted spaces. Antiauthoritarian groups deliver food and medicine to those in need. They do all this having accepted that the government, churches, and nonprofits can’t be depended upon to provide these services.