

# What is a free store?



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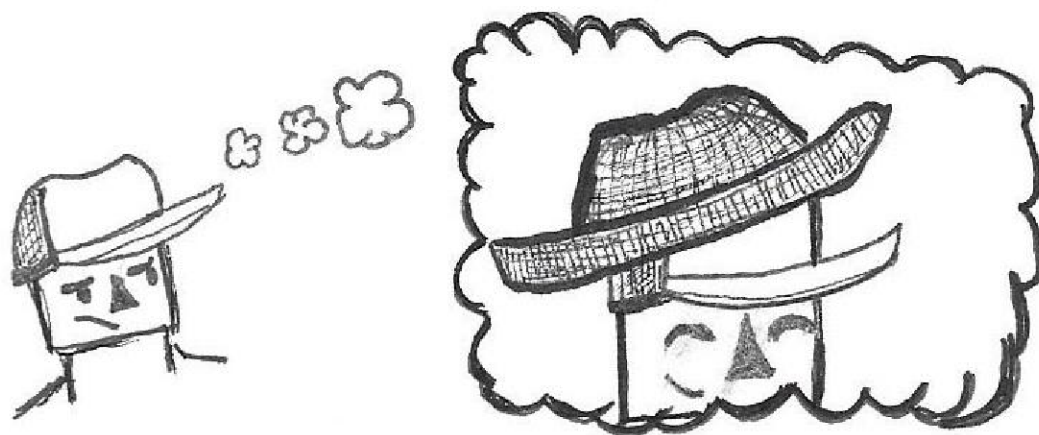
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## So what is a free store?

This short zine is meant to explain what a free store, or really really free market, is. Maybe you've picked this up at a free store, or a friend has sent/given it to you, or you just stumbled across it online. Regardless, it'll explain what free stores are, why anarchists like them so much, how they challenge our system, and hopefully inspire you to get involved in one or even start your own.



So, a free store really is pretty much exactly what it sounds like - a marketplace where everything is free! Think of your town's run of the mill flea market, but if it was run by a bunch of anarchists who hate money almost as much as they hate their parents. Anyone can bring whatever they want to give away or barter, and anyone can take what they need. A free store can have anything you could think of - clothes, food, plants, art, household appliances, old instruments from when you tried to learn the guitar and gave up 2 weeks in, or whatever else the participants can get their hands on. It can also serve as a place to trade knowledge as well as goods, whether that's in the form of zines (like this one!), books, skill-shares, workshops, or lectures. Free stores can pop up at festivals, shows, protests, or anywhere else people can gather, or have a fixed location for a community to gather at and exchange goods.



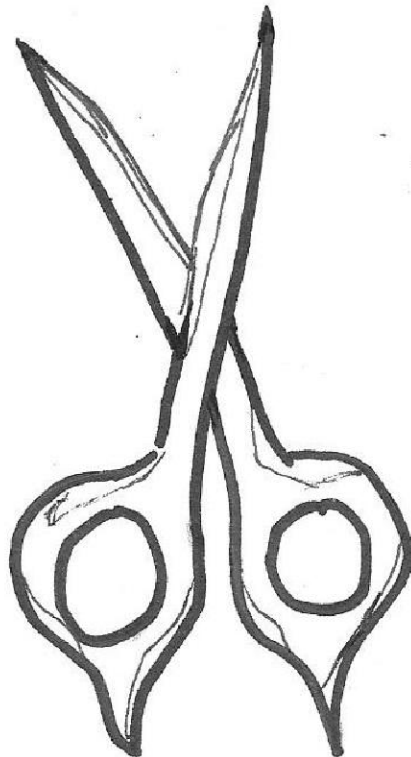
All of this may sound cool and interesting, but what's the point? And why is a glorified garage sale seen as a radical act by anarchists who've been putting them on for decades?

# **Some thoughts, or No-Seriously, Go Do It Yourself!**

Don't take anything here too seriously. This was written largely by one person (with the help of some wonderful comrades), who has a limited perspective, and who is far from an authority on how anyone should do anything. Everything in here-from what a free store is, to how it works, to why it's a valuable idea, to how to set one up-will vary wildly. Many people may highly disagree with some of the things I say about free stores and about anarchism, and that's fine! The whole point of free stores-and of anarchy- is that it's endlessly adaptable, ever changing, and can mold itself to fit any situation. When you're done with this zine, go out there and do things yourself! Let your own spirit of creativity and compassion for those around you inspire you way more than any words written by a random anarchist.



Ideally, the free store won't be a one-off event, and you'll continue to help it grow and adapt. Each free store should be a learning opportunity-what worked and what didn't? What did people need, what did people have a lot of, and what did people not want? How can you make it go better? Who could you reach out to help? The most important thing to remember is that, even though I may keep saying "you", this shouldn't be the pet project of a single person, or a handful of dedicated activists. Ideally, a free store should expand to truly be a project for a community, by a community. There shouldn't be gatekeepers or people obsessed with having things go their way. There should be an organic process of the free store adapting to the environment it's in, and no ready-made roadmap for you to follow.





## So why is a free store?

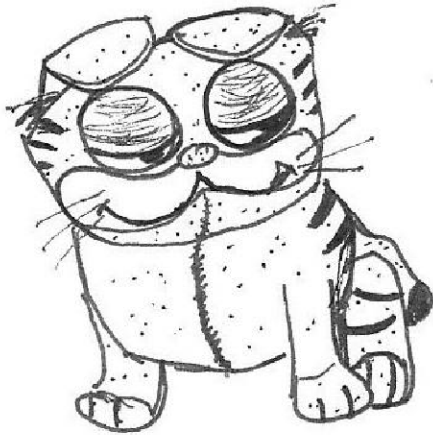
The immediate point of a free store is pretty obvious- people need stuff, and it sucks that our alienating capitalist society means you have to work a shitty job that you hate to afford stuff. However, free stores also address another need a lot of us have - how to get rid of the stuff we don't need. We live in a consumerist throwaway culture, where we often have a lot of stuff we don't need and no good way to get rid of it. Usually, people will throw it away, donate to a thrift store, dump it on the side of a road, or give it away to a friend. Free stores offer benefits over all those options, though. The real point of a free store is that it creates community. We all feel increasingly alienated from everyone around us, since most places to socialize at-such as bars, shops, and restaurants- require money, and our society forces us to rely on businesses and the government to survive, instead of relying on each other and ourselves.

Free stores fight against this conditioning. They build up a real, authentic community that doesn't hinge upon expectations of compensation, or in other words, mutual aid. They allow you to meet your needs without engaging in capitalism, and to facilitate people giving away their stuff to people who need it without relying on the luck of knowing someone who needs what you have, and without a thrift store profiting off it. It helps lay the foundation for a better world for all of us, where we can depend on and support each other, something that anarchists would call "prefiguration". We anarchists (or at least the ones writing this zine) believe the best way to have a revolution and create a better world is to go out and build systems free of exploitation and hierarchy in the here and now, in the hopes that they can serve as the groundwork for society tomorrow, instead of begging politicians to give a shit for once. Free stores are an example of this idea of prefiguration, even if it's a tiny, small scale one that anyone can take part in.

The Free Store also serves as an exercise in mutual aid. Mutual Aid is a revolutionary concept that emphasizes building relationships within our community so that we can rely on our own communities for our basic needs instead of having to rely on a

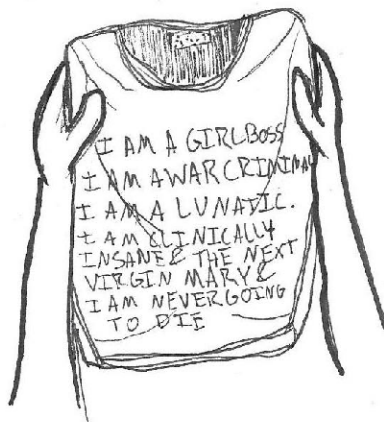
After you know there's enough donations for a free store, it's probably a good time to find a location. You can try to integrate it into an existing community by hosting it at another event. This ensures that you'll have people who already happen to be going to the other event that can come browse your free store. You could also find a sympathetic business owner who'd be willing to let you host it at their business. If all else fails, set up in a park or on the sidewalk, who's going to stop you? The cops?

Okay, so you've got the people, the supplies, and the location. Now all you need is the free store. The event itself doesn't have to be anything fancy. If you wanna do things real simple, just enlist a friend with a truck to transport everything and dump shit onto some blankets. Tables, clothing racks, bins, bags for people to carry stuff in, and anything else that'd make things run smoother can all be figured out. Of course, promotion of the event is also important. Spread it on social media, wheat-paste, flier, and sticker in the area, spread it through word of mouth, and do anything else you might think of.



When you put on your first free store, it's unlikely that a ton of people will hear the message and come out of the woodworks to give stuff away. You'll likely want to stockpile some donations with the people you're organizing with. The first consideration when gathering supplies and donations is considering what the people in your network have access to, and what people that would come to the free store might need. This will always depend on the specific circumstances of you and your community, so you should always sit down to figure this out pretty early on. Then, of course, comes the time to gather supplies. Get creative with this step, have some fun with it! Don't stick to just whatever crap you have lying in your closet, go and steal from your work, or dumpster dive, or shoplift, or check online marketplaces for free stuff, or see if local stores would give away excess/expired products, or make something yourself! Let your creativity run wild for every step of the free store, but especially here.

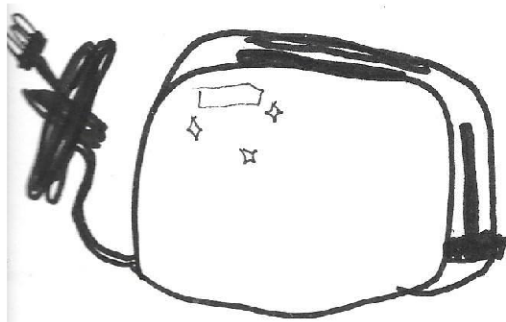
bunch of corporations and the government to survive. This Free Store is a way of distributing resources like clothes, food, appliances, art and other things for free, and within our communities without having to rely on stores like H&M, Walmart, Target, etc. We hope that the relationships built via the free store can be used to form the basis of a society that is without exploitation and instead about community.



## **Kill the cop in your head-take free shit!**

A lot of people will look at the piles of goods at a free store and be hesitant to take any. After all, they don't *need* it, do they? This mindset is part of our consumerist, capitalist conditioning, and part of what free stores want to destroy. We're taught that working hard to provide for yourself or your family is virtuous, while taking handouts makes you a parasite, or welfare queen, or

leach. These ideas keep us tethered to a reliance on our employers, and to the big businesses we have to buy everything from. I encourage anyone who finds themselves at a free store to let go of these ideas-if you see a funny shirt, or a gimmicky kitchen gadget that you like but have no real need for, take it! That's what the free store is for. Of course, if there's some way for you to give back, then that's awesome, but people are deserving of having their needs and wants met regardless of what they can offer up at any point. That's what makes a free store mutual aid-there's no expectation or requirement for you to be able to contribute something as valuable as what you take. Everyone gives with the idea that the act of giving will help their community, and everyone takes with the idea that their community will help them.



**Do it yourself!**

## **Make your own free store!**



If you're feeling lost and alienated, pissed off at how the world keeps getting worse and there's nothing you can do, helping with a free store is a great way to actually do something. A revolution will be more than just throwing bricks through windows. An obvious first step is to see if there's already a group that sets up free stores where you live, and showing up to help out, get some free shit, and give what you can. If there's nothing like that near you, setting up your own isn't that hard! The first step is to find other people. The whole point of a free store is to foster community, and that's pretty hard if you're a community of one. If you have some cool friends that'd be down to help you, start with them. Otherwise, you'll need to find people. You can search at the typical places where people who are down for this type of stuff tend to congregate-underground shows, raves, radical community spaces like anarchist bookfairs, Food not Bombs, or whatever else exists around you- or approach members of a community you're already a part of. Maybe the congregants at your church or place of worship would be down to spread peace and love. Once you've found some like minded people, it's on to finding supplies.