

Breaking Bread, Sharing Soup, and Smashing the State: Food Not Bombs and Anarchist Critiques of the Neoliberal Charity State

Sean Parson¹

Members of the anarchistic mutual aid group Food Not Bombs have been arrested in scores of cities throughout the nation. Their crime? Providing free vegan food in public spaces. In this article I contend that the group's oppositional relationship to neoliberal charity provides a partial explanation for the state's hostility to the group; however, this is not sufficient on its own for explaining why certain cities have cracked down on the organization. Instead, Food Not Bombs' resistance to neoliberal charity makes the group's actions a serious threat to state power only given the right confluence of neoliberal economic development, austerity, urban gentrification efforts, and public visibility. In this article, I look at the impacts of neoliberal policies on homeless services, examine how neoliberal charities discipline and regulate the poor, and then analyze the way that Food Not Bombs activists see their actions as a form of resistance to neoliberal charity. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2014 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS: Food Not Bombs, Homelessness, Charity, Neoliberalism, Food, Housing.

¹ **Sean Parson** is an assistant professor in the departments of Politics and International Affairs and Sustainable Communities at Northern Arizona University. He is currently completing a book manuscript, tentatively titled *Cooking Up Revolution: Food Not Bombs, Anarchist Homeless Activism and the Politics of Space*, and also working on a research project that examines resource colonialism and anti-colonial environmental resistance in the United States. Over the years he has been involved in Food Not Bombs, climate justice activism, and the Northwest forest defense movement; recently he has been working with the Repeal Coalition in Flagstaff, Arizona. When he has free time, he likes to take his four-legged friend Diego on hikes around the mountains of Northern Arizona. Address correspondence to: Sean Parson, Assistant Professor in the departments of Politics and International Affairs and Sustainable Communities at Northern Arizona University; e-mail: Sean.Parson@nau.edu. **Acknowledgments:** I want to thank the folks in San Francisco Food Not Bombs who not only let me interview them and go through their fliers, newsletters, and other personal collections, but also have inspired me. I also want to thank Deric Shanon both for his comments and for thinking about my work for this issue. In addition, I want to thank Biko Koenig, Jill Martinez, and Grant Walsh-Haines for providing feedback and comments on earlier drafts of this article. Finally, I want to thank A.E.L Olvera for her tireless edits and comments on this article; without her help and support this piece would be a confusing mess.