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ESPECIFISMO

the anarchist praxis of building popular movements and revolutionary organization

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First published in *The Northeastern Anarchist* #11 in Spring 2006, Adam Weaver's "Especifismo: The Anarchist Praxis of Building Popular Movements and Revolutionary Organization" broke new ground as the first English introductory article on the concept of Especifismo. While being short and limited in scope, this article has since become a standard introductory text which has been translated into Spanish, French, Turkish, Tagalog, Portuguese, and Italian and is now used as a point of reference by revolutionary political organizations around the world.

The piece was based on early translations and exchanges by Brazilian-American anarchist Pedro Ribeiro but since its publication new translations have further deepened and enriched the understanding of Especifismo.

These include the *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya's* (FAU) 1972 theoretical piece "Huerta Grande" and the multi-chapter political program "Social Anarchism and Organization" by the *Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro* (FARJ).

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Introduction

Throughout the world anarchist involvement within mass movements as well the development of specifically anarchist organizations is on the upsurge. This trend is helping anarchism regain legitimacy as a dynamic political force within movements and in this light, *Especifismo*, a concept born out of nearly 50 years of anarchist experiences in South America, is gaining currency world-wide. Though many anarchists may be familiar with many of Especifismo's ideas, it should be defined as an original contribution to anarchist thought and practice.

Notes

References

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Further Reading

1. Andreas Araiza Kokkinis, Troy. *Anarchist Popular Power: Dissident Labor and Armed Struggle 1956-76*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2023.
2. Baker, Zoe. *Means and Ends: The Revolutionary Practice of Anarchism in Europe and the United States*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2023.
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The first organization to promote the concept of Especifismo—then more a practice than a developed ideology—was the *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya* (FAU), founded in 1956 by anarchist militants who embraced the idea of an organization which was specifically anarchist. Surviving the dictatorship in Uruguay, the FAU emerged in the mid-1980s to establish contact with and influence other South American anarchist revolutionaries. The FAU's work helped support the founding of the *Federação Anarquista Gaúcha* (FAG), the *Federação Anarquista Cabocla* (FACA), and the *Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro* (FARJ) in their respective regions of Brazil, and the Argentinean organization *Auca* (Rebel).

While the key concepts of Especifismo will be expanded upon further in this article, it can be summarized in three succinct points:

1. The need for specifically anarchist organization built around a unity of ideas and praxis.
2. The use of the specifically anarchist organization to theorize and develop strategic political and organizing work.
3. Active involvement in and building of autonomous and popular social movements, which is described as the process of "social insertion."

A Brief Historical Perspective

While only coming onto the stage of Latin American anarchism within the last few decades, the ideas inherent within Especifismo touch on a historic thread running within the anarchist movement internationally. The most well known would be the Platformist current, which began with the publishing of the "Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists." This document was written in 1926 by former peasant army leader Nestor Makhno, Ida Mett and other militants of the *Dielo Trouda* (Workers' Cause) group, based around the newspaper of the same name.[1] Exiles of the Russian revolution, the Paris-based *Dielo Trouda* criticized the anarchist movement for its lack of organization, which prevented a concerted response to

Bolshevik machinations towards turning the workers' soviets into instruments of one-party rule. The alternative they proposed was a "General Union of Anarchists" based on Anarchist Communism, which would strive for "theoretical and tactical unity" and focus on class struggle and labor unions.

Other similar occurrences of ideas include "Organizational Dualism," which is mentioned in historical documents of the 1920's Italian anarchist movement. Italian anarchists used this term to describe the involvement of anarchists both as members of an anarchist political organization and as militants in the labor movement.[2] In Spain, the *Friends of Durruti* group emerged to oppose the gradual reversal of the Spanish Revolution of 1936.[3] In "Towards a Fresh Revolution" they emulated some of the ideas of the Platform, critiquing the CNT-FAI's gradual reformism and collaboration with the Republican government, which they argued contributed to the defeat of the anti-fascist and revolutionary forces. Influential organizations in the Chinese anarchist movement of the 1910's, such as the *Wuzhengfu-Gongchan Zhuyi Tongshi Che* (Society of Anarchist-Communist Comrades), advocated similar ideas.[4] While these different currents all have specific characteristics that developed from the movements and countries in which they originated, they all share a common thread that crosses movements, eras, and continents.

Especifismo Elaborated

The Especifists put forward three main thrusts to their politics, the first two being on the level of organization. By raising the need for a specifically anarchist organization built around a unity of ideas and praxis, the Especifists inherently state their objection to the idea of a synthesis organization of revolutionaries or multiple currents of anarchists loosely united. They characterize this form of organization as creating an

> *"exacerbated search for the needed unity of anarchists to the point in which unity is preferred at any cost, in the fear of risking positions, ideas and proposals sometimes irreconcilable. The result of these types of union are libertarian collectives without much more in common than considering themselves anarchists."*[5]

the document. In 1927, the *Dielo Trouda* group did host a small international conference of supporters in France, but it was quickly disrupted by the authorities.

In comparison, the praxis of Especifismo is a living, developed practice, and arguably a much more relevant and contemporary theory, emerging as it does out of 50 years of anarchist organizing. Arising from the southern cone of Latin America, but its influence spreading throughout, the ideas of Especifismo do not spring from any call-out or single document, but have come organically out of the movements of the global south that are leading the fight against international capitalism and setting examples for movements worldwide. On organization, the Especifists call for a far deeper basis of anarchist organization than the Platform's "theoretical and tactical unity," but a strategic program based on analysis that guides the actions of revolutionaries. They provide us living examples of revolutionary organization based on the needs for common analysis, shared theory, and firm roots within the social movements.

I believe there is much to take inspiration from within the tradition of Especifismo, not only on a global scale, but particularly for North American class-struggle anarchists and for multi-racial revolutionaries within the US. Whereas the Platform can be easily read as seeing anarchists' role as narrowly and most centrally within labor unions, Especifismo gives us a living example that we can look towards and which speaks more meaningfully to our work in building a revolutionary movement today. Taking this all into consideration, I also hope that this article can help us more concretely reflect on how we as a movement define and shape our traditions and influences.

dress the multiple political currents that will exist within movements and to actively combat the opportunistic elements of vanguardism and electoral politics.

Especifismo in the Context of North American and Western Anarchism

Within the current strands of organized and revolutionary North American and Western Anarchism, numerous indicators point to the inspiration and influence of the Platform as having the greatest impact in the recent blossoming of class struggle anarchist organizations world-wide. Many see the Platform as a historical document that speaks to the previous century's organizational failures of anarchism within global revolutionary movements, and are moved to define themselves as acting within the "platformist tradition." Given this, the currents of Especifismo and Platformism are deserving of comparison and contrast.

The authors of the Platform were veteran partisans of the Russian Revolution. They helped lead a peasant guerilla war against Western European armies and later the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, whose people had a history independent of the Russian Empire. So the writers of the Platform certainly spoke from a wealth of experience and to the historical context of one of their era's pivotal struggles. But the document made little headway in its proposal of uniting class struggle anarchists, and is markedly silent in analysis or understanding on numerous key questions that faced revolutionaries at that time, such as the oppression of women, and colonialism.

While most Anarchist-Communist oriented organizations claim influence by the Platform today, in retrospect it can be looked at as a poignant statement that rose from the morass that befell much of anarchism following the Russian Revolution. As a historical project, the Platform's proposal and basic ideas were largely rejected by individualistic tendencies in the Anarchist movement, were misunderstood because of language barriers as some claim[6] or never reached supportive elements or organizations that would have united around

While these critiques have been elaborated by the South American Especifistas, North American anarchists have also offered their experiences of synthesis organization as lacking any cohesiveness due to multiple, contradictory political tendencies. Often the basic agreement of the group boils down to a vague, "least-common-denominator" politics, leaving little room for united action or developed political discussion among comrades.

Without a strategy that stems from common political agreement, revolutionary organizations are bound to be an affair of reactivism against the continual manifestations of oppression and injustice and a cycle of fruitless actions to be repeated over and over, with little analysis or understanding of their consequences. Further, the Especifists criticize these tendencies for being driven by spontaneity and individualism and for not leading to the serious, systematic work needed to build revolutionary movements. The Latin American revolutionaries put forward that organizations which lack a program

> *"which resists any discipline between militants, that refuses to 'define itself', or to 'fit itself', … [are a] direct descendant of bourgeois liberalism, [which] only reacts to strong stimulus, joins the struggle only in its heightened moments, denying to work continuously, especially in moments of relative rest between the struggles."* [5]

A particular stress of the Especifismo praxis is the role of anarchist organization, formed on the basis of shared politics, as a space for the development of common strategy and reflection on the group's organizing work. Sustained by collective responsibility to the organizations' plans and work, a trust within the members and groups is built that allows for a deep, high-level discussion of their action. This allows the organization to create collective analysis, develop immediate and long term goals, and continually reflect on and change their work based on the lessons gained and circumstances.

From these practices and from the basis of their ideological principles, revolutionary organizations should seek to create a program

that defines their short- and intermediate-term goals and will work towards their long-term objectives:

> *"The program must come from a rigorous analysis of society and the correlation of the forces that are part of it. It must have as a foundation the experience of the struggle of the oppressed and their aspirations, and from those elements it must set the goals and the tasks to be followed by the revolutionary organization in order to succeed not only in the final objective but also in the immediate ones."* [5]

The last point, but one that is key within the practice of Especifismo, is the idea of "social insertion." It stems from the belief that the oppressed are the most revolutionary sector of society, and that the seed of the future revolutionary transformation of society lies already in these classes and social groupings. Social insertion means anarchist involvement in the daily fights of the oppressed and working classes. It does not mean acting within single-issue advocacy campaigns based around the involvement of expected traditional political activists, but rather within movements of people struggling to better their own condition, which come together not always out of exclusively materially-based needs, but also socially and historically rooted needs of resisting the attacks of the state and capitalism. These would include rank-and-file-led workers' movements, immigrant communities' movements to demand legalized status, neighborhood organizations' resistance to the brutality and killings by police, working class students' fights against budget cuts, and poor and unemployed people's opposition to evictions and service cuts.

Through daily struggles, the oppressed become a conscious force. The class-in-itself, or rather classes-in-themselves (defined beyond the class-reductionist vision of the urban industrial proletariat, to include all oppressed groups within society that have a material stake in a new society), are tempered, tested, and recreated through these daily struggles over immediate needs into classes-for-themselves. That is, they change from social classes and groups that exist objectively and by the fact of social relations, to social forces. Brought together by organic methods, and at many times by their own self-organizational cohesion, they become self-conscious actors aware of their power, voice and their intrinsic nemeses: ruling elites who wield control over the power structures of the modern social order.

Examples of social insertion that the FAG cites are their work with neighborhood committees in urban villages and slums called *Popular Resistance Committees*, building alliances with rank-and-file members of the rural *Landless Workers' Movement* (MST), and among trash and recyclables collectors. Due to high levels of temporary and contingent employment, underemployment, and unemployment in Brazil, a significant portion of the working class does not survive primarily through wage labor, but rather by subsistence work and the informal economy, such as casual construction work, street vending, or the collection of trash and recyclables.

Through several years of work, the FAG has built a strong relationship with urban trash collectors, called *catadores*. Members of the FAG have supported them in forming their own national organization which is working to mobilize trash collectors around their interests nationally and to raise money toward building a collectively operated recycling operation.

Especifismo's conception of the relation of ideas to the popular movement is that they should not be imposed through a leadership, through "mass line," or by intellectuals. Anarchist militants should not attempt to move movements into proclaiming an "anarchist" position, but should instead work to preserve their anarchist thrust; that is, their natural tendency to be self-organized and to militantly fight for their own interests. This assumes the perspective that social movements will reach their own logic of creating revolution, not when they as a whole necessarily reach the point of being self-identified "anarchists," but when as a whole (or at least an overwhelming majority) they reach the consciousness of their own power and exercise this power in their daily lives, in a way consciously adopting the ideas of anarchism. An additional role of the anarchist militant within the social movements, according to the Especifists, is to ad-