

The Especificismo Current in Anarchism

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Organization and Social Insertion

The specific anarchism affirmed by the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ), simply called *especificismo*, is a way of conceiving anarchist organization. Brought from Uruguay, the term “*especificismo*” refers to two fundamental axes that characterize the actualization of anarchism: organization and social insertion, this being based on two classic anarchist concepts, that there is a differentiation of action on the political and social levels (a concept from Bakunin) and the specific anarchist organization (a concept from Malatesta). The comrades of the Anarchist Federation of Uruguay (FAU) were the first to use this term, in reference to a form of organization that started to be developed in the 19th century and was refined during the 20th century. In their Declaration of Principles, FAU makes a connection between the concept of *especificismo* and organizational anarchism:

“Our critique and our project are not limited to uprisings, protests, and rebellions, but they mature in a model of society that is unmistakably socialist and libertarian, in a strategy of revolutionary rupture and in a combative militant style permanently agitating towards social transformations on a large scale. This project uses the *especificista* revolutionary organization as its means and is, therefore, organized struggle.”[1]

Not all anarchist currents defend organization and social insertion. We know that anarchism is especially expansive, and because of this, it is conceived in a variety of different ways, many of which are contradictory.

Especificismo defends a clear position in the historical polemic over the question of organization and the practice of anarchism. This is why it has organization as its first axis. Primarily, it is a defense of the idea that anarchists should organize themselves specifically, as anarchists, in order to work in the movement of society.

This organizational model endorses the idea that, in order to act effectively in the class struggle, anarchists have to be organized, on the political level, as a cohesive group, in political debates, with advanced ideology, with a well-defined strategy, in a way that strengthens them enough to be able to act in situations of conflict, in the struggles of social movements.

The specific anarchist organization, working on the political context, acts in the heart of the class struggle, in the popular movements of society which make up the social context. In this work, anarchists organized as an active minority exercise as much influence as they can, encouraging the movements to operate in the most libertarian way possible. Organized as a specific, unified group, anarchists add to the construction of a much stronger social force that can function as a dependably influential and persuasive element, serving to reduce the risk of being watered-down or “derailed” by a leftist party, by authoritarians of any type, by the church, and by individuals and groups that always try to use social movements for their own benefit.

The second axis of especificist anarchism is social insertion. The idea of social insertion is related to the search for the lost social vector of anarchism that used to connect it to the class struggle and the social movements. With the incidence of anarchists distancing themselves from the syndicalist movement in Brazil, which occurred between the years 1920 and 1930, the social vector was lost, and anarchism ended up organizing itself into cultural centers, associations, schools, etc. Social insertion doubles down on the idea that anarchists have to look primarily to have, beyond these things that pay tribute to and promote libertarian culture, relevant roles in the struggle of social and popular movements.

Many are suspicious of the term “social insertion” because of its association with the old “entryism” of the authoritarian left into movements, just for the purpose of molding them or making the movements function for their own benefit. In reality, this isn’t the case; the conception of social insertion by anarchists is only referring to an organized return of anarchists to the class struggle and to social movements. Not in the sense of a vanguard fighting for the movement but defending the active minority that fights with the movement.

There are some other ideas that go along with the concepts presented above. For example, the criticism of the lack of organization by the majority of anarchists, proposing as an alternative, a form of organized anarchism, oriented by the concept of the specific organization explained before. This is also a clear opposition to individualist anarchism and to the exacerbation of egos, proposing instead, a kind of communist or collectivist anarchism, that makes collective liberty its guiding strategy and considers it a requisite for making individual freedom possible. This way of organizing contrasts itself from the synthesist model, through the belief that it does not work to put a bunch of individuals and organizations together under a “big umbrella” of anarchism, only uniting around criticism – since generally there is only agreement around the critique of the State, of capitalism, of representative democracy – or even around the future society; this is why there is no unity in organizational terms or around constructive issues. There is no clear position about which organizational form is adequate, about “how” to act.

Many anarchists don’t even consider organization all that necessary, and others find it to be authoritarian. The especificist model of organization defends the idea of

working together with tactical and theoretical unity, which especially helps work being done on well-defined, strategically oriented projects, where everyone is working in the same way. Additionally, in this form of organization, matters related to responsibility and commitment play a superior role, which we will see in some detail to come.

Ethics and Responsibility

Together with the notions of organization and social insertion is the advancement of two principles: ethics and responsibility.

Ethics is always to be understood as a synonym of real anarchism, establishing itself as its “backbone”. It shouldn’t be understood as a system of ideas and theoretical values that are not applied, but rather as an applicable principle of values which incorporates all of our collective and universal interests and that defines principles of conduct. Anarchist ethics are, correctly understood, the need for coherence between our conduct and the principles that we defend, in the case of FARJ, for example, freedom, federalism, self-management, internationalism, direct action, class struggle, political practice, social insertion, and mutual aid.

Ethics is radically different from morality. Morality is something that is brought in from the outside, an unelaborated content that, for fear of coercion, you accept or, simply, submit yourself to. By contrast, ethics is something that comes from within and moves to the outside, something that is processed and reflected upon without coercion and that, afterwards, will orient behavior. Morality can be considered a victory over the individual whereas ethics is “victory with” (or *convincing***), the conduct being guided by ethics or resulting from elaborating on and dealing with ethical concepts.

Many, throughout the history of Anarchism, have tied ethics to the coherence between means and ends. This is the reason for defending a way of acting that is consistent with the desired end; this is what is referred to as coherence between means and ends. It is understood that if the struggle has liberation as its objective, it should have freedom as its foundation. This is applied in various different forms, from fighting against authoritarian means like the State in order to get freedom – the Marxist concept of socialism – to defending an action that is honorable, uncorrupted, and politically honest – very much the opposite of the stories of the militancy of Netchaiev, for example, who thought that everything that led to revolution was worth doing, even lying, deceiving, blackmailing, betraying comrades, etc.

In our own history of anarchism in Rio de Janeiro, there have been a lot of connections made to mutual respect, understanding ethics as a principle that demands and necessitates the reciprocal respect of comrades in struggle and the making of the political space into a place of solidarity, whether with older militants,

with comrades, or with those that are newly interested. So, we affirm respect for a plurality of ideas and a right to make one's voice heard, always treating people with the respect they deserve and repudiating anti-social conduct, infighting, and divisive behavior.[2]

Put in this way, ethics is related to responsibility, similar to Ideal Peres affirming that “a person that has libertarian ethics knows the reasons for fighting and is able to explain the ideological motivations for struggling, having the commitment and self-discipline to see tasks through to the end.” In making this connection, Ideal Peres, who always emphasized the values of ethics and responsibility, laid out the necessity for anarchist militants to be familiar with the motives behind struggle, or even, what to fight for and what to fight against, with the ability to ideologically justify the arguments. Commitment and self-discipline are fundamental for putting liberating ethics into practice, so the position, which is very common in the libertarian movement and defended by some anarchists, against responsibility and of non-commitment, is anti-ethical.

By seeing responsibility as something opposed to freedom, many of these anarchists render themselves unable to realize any serious activity, with even the most minimal objectives. Anarchists who defend the idea of responsibility consider it impossible to do any medium or long-term project without it, or even to put into practice a short-term project, to come up with a plan of action and realize it.

From this perspective, it is clear that, in order to carry out the various activities in an organization, there has to have been a preceding discussion, a strategic planning session that results in a tactical plan, with various actions that the organization will undertake. In order for this to occur, responsibilities must be divided, and every individual must do the tasks they have taken on. As FARJ recently wrote, “self-discipline is the motor of an organization that manages itself” [3], and it should function without slavish discipline, but in accordance with acceptable ideas, with the completion of assumed tasks, and with a serious sense of responsibility to the work of militancy and struggle.

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** Translator's note: the original text reads « “vencer com” (ou convencer) » which makes a play on words that is not evident in the English version. It hints that the mutually reciprocal idea of “winning with” is similar to “collectively convincing” or “vanquishing together”. It is maybe most similar to the English expression “win-win”.

[1] FAU. Declaración de Principios.

[2] CELIP. “Ética no CELIP”.

[3] FARJ. “Reflexões sobre a Responsabilidade, o Comprometimento e a Autodisciplina”.