

Reading FARJ's Social Anarchism and Organisation

A Short Review on Especificismo

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Social Anarchism and Organisation by the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) is a practical elaboration of the popular anarchist tendency of *especificismo* in South America. *Especificismo* takes its ideological roots from traditional anarchists and communists such as the 19th Century Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and the 19th and 20th Century Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, who theorised the foundations of anarcho-communism alongside debates about organised anarchist involvement in the labour movement. Organisationally *especificismo* is inspired by Platformism, a controversial program written by Ukrainian anarchists articulating the need for a specific anarchist organisation after the military defeat of the anarchists by the bolsheviks in Ukraine in 1921, adapting it for a 21st century context within South America. *Especificismo*, inspired by the history of anarcho-communists and platformists, calls for the creation of a specific anarchist organisation dedicated to a social revolution against the capitalist system and replacing it with a system of libertarian socialism. What *Social Anarchism and Organisation* details is discussions concerning the historical context of the tendency's emergence, its definition of the exploited classes who may be the agents of revolution, the methods by which anarchists can influence social movements, and how a proposed specific anarchist organisation should function.

Especificismo in South America emerged as a political and organisational response to the loss of what FARJ describe as 'the social vector of anarchism', namely, the social movements or popular organisations through which anarchist ideals spread and eventually become popular or hegemonic within. In the early twentieth century, revolutionary syndicalism, similar to that which had begun springing up in Europe, became a force in South America as well, where the anarchist ideals of federalism, labour neutrality, decentralisation, anti-militarism, anti-nationalism and the general strike were adopted at the First Brazilian Labour Congress. Alongside this, other cultural organisations sprang up such as schools, social centres and theatres that held the same principles of class struggle with the unions. However, from about 1920 onwards, there was intense union and anarchist suppression as European factories had reopened for export, damaging the need for industrial factories in South America, and the Communist Party in Brazil turned away from the unions and allied itself with reformists. Likewise, currents within anarchism itself began to turn

away from a revolutionary perspective, where syndicalism was no longer seen as a means to an end but became an end in itself, losing sight of its revolutionary purpose.

Especifismo seeks a return to this social vector of anarchism in a 21st century context to provide the means for a social revolution. It adheres to the 'classical', class-oriented form of anarchism against some modern currents of anarchism we might call lifestyle anarchism, or small-a anarchism. Occupy Wall Street is a good example of how, like syndicalism without a revolutionary perspective, a means is turned into an end which loses any agitational quality. Occupy's obsession with consensus, horizontalism without structure and lack of political project is what drained its energy and led to its defeat. It is against these kinds of anarchist currents that especificismo defines itself, however we will see that in contemporary settings the social vector of anarchism is to be located elsewhere as opposed to in syndicalism in the start of the twentieth century.

Given especificismo strives for revolution against capital by the exploited classes by recovering the social vector of anarchism, this develops an immediate question: who are the exploited classes? FARJ defines the exploited classes by their relationship between what they call the centre and the periphery. FARJ's definition of periphery classes is broad. It includes peoples completely removed from the economic activity like remote Indigenous groups, those threatened by the centre such as peasants and small farmers, those fallen out of the centre such as precarious workers and the unemployed, those in the centre but alienated in a social, cultural or political sense which here FARJ locates the working class as well as minorities like women, LGBT people, etc. FARJ also defines centre periphery relations as reaching across imperial and imperialised states, such that capital intensive national economies like the US are the centre to labour intensive national economies in the global South. The goal of defining exploitation by a centre/periphery relationship is to pit anarchism against not only the current domination and oppression of the centre on the periphery under contemporary capitalism, but to contest alternative arrangements that reorganises society around a new centre, notably Leninism which would promote the party to the centre to manipulate the periphery.

The centre/periphery dynamic is by far the theoretically weakest claim by the FARJ. Perhaps something was lost in translation, but their definitions are far too broad and diffuse to apply consistently to complex political questions. FARJ takes the anarchist position that there are many groups of people who may spark revolution, as opposed to the orthodox Marxist point of view that it will be the industrial working class, which should be supported as a way to harness the power of popular movements where they arise. However, it's unclear what utility there is in the claim that the working class is in 'the centre', as opposed to seeing the economic centre as the landlords and the owners of the means of production, with the workers and oppressed united against them. Nor does it clarify how anarchists should approach the question of national liberation of imperialised states. Should national liberation struggles be supported because they are in the 'periphery', even if these movements are led by the national bourgeoisie? Perhaps there are fair responses to these questions that have or can be addressed through the FARJ's or other especificista organisations' theoretical analysis, so this criticism should be understood as developing space for elaboration rather than a denial of the theoretical frame entirely. From these categories, FARJ claims that a number of these groups will provide the fertile ground for revolutionary agitation – and as well make the claim that they are *more important* than the industrial working class. FARJ work within agro-ecological, student and union spaces as the popular movements they engage in social insertion with. Despite some opaqueness, what we

must take from these definitions is then the interaction of anarchists within these groups and their struggles, and define the anarchist principle of social insertion.

Social insertion is a strategy employed by an anarchist organisation in places where it identifies fertile struggle against capitalism to support the struggle and win over the masses to the ideas of anarchism. The principle of social insertion, in its most basic form, is to propagate direct action and direct democracy. It opposed the concept of a vanguard in that it propagates structures that directly put power into the hands of the workers or exploited peoples. They allow them their own autonomy, not posing as a vanguard that possesses theory or knowledge that 'speaks for the people'. Via direct action, the worker is not demanding to reform an institution to which they are subordinate, they are making demands on their own terms; as Malatesta put it, to seize reforms the way an army seizes territory. Via direct democracy, their voice is always guaranteed in the organisation they belong to, such as a union. Through this praxis, rather than being 'taught' by an intellectual vanguard, the contradictions of capital and labour would become clear through struggle and workers arrive at a revolutionary perspective through argument, example, and experience. For social insertion to achieve serious blows against capitalism, it must either encourage a movement to be agitational, or insert themselves into a movement that is already agitational in nature. Without agitation towards the state and capital, processes of direct democracy would be instead purely prefigurative, having no goal to end capitalism. We see the failure of 'prefiguration' without agitation in such organisations like co-ops. As these groups operate in a capitalist system, eventually they always must concede to the demands of the market and engage in exploitation.

The specific anarchist organisation is key to social insertion within popular movements. It also serves to support struggle through the auxiliary and complementary functions such as the production and reproduction of theory, collective strategic intervention into struggles, and the production of propaganda. What the specific anarchist organisation demands is ideological and theoretical unity, and there is good reason to believe this is necessary. Anarchists do not require, on the social level, for movements they socially insert themselves into to have all members be anarchists or hold a complete set of anarchist principles. Their agitation towards a revolution that brings about libertarian socialism is what matters. But within a specific anarchist organisation, which is on the political level, this theoretical unity is key. This is the same way we look at the need for collective organising against capital. If labour out-organises capital, it wins. The same should apply to arriving at political lines and theoretical positions within anarchism. If the organisation has differing theories coexisting within it, it will fall into disorganisation and loss. This theoretical unity must be informed by the local context of popular movements anarchists engage in, and the struggles of exploited classes. The theoretical line therefore, in Australia, would look different to that of South America. This is what holds the political organisation grounded to its real context, whilst giving it the strength to win its goals in agitating towards revolution.

Despite some elements of the political analysis of *especificismo* needing clarification in FARJ's *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, the text is an incredible manual on how to revive a classical, communist, class struggle anarchism that enjoyed great popularity in the early twentieth century, whilst revising its political and organisational errors. By calling for revolution, and clearly outlining what a world might look like after it, *especificismo* brings something to the political landscape which has mostly been lost: an actual vision of the future. Our political imagination in society, for the most part, is a dead one. Liberal incrementalism sees no real way to improve

people's lives, it just defines itself out of fear of a creeping right (that it allows to creep further). Neoconservatives and fascists see threats and scapegoats everywhere, create them from thin air, and propose nothing positive but a psychotic destruction of an imaginary enemy. And small-a anarchism, individualism or lifestyle anarchism sees not much for society, no agitation, and not much outside of one's self. A better world must be imagined, and importantly, especificismo is one the few tenets that actually does.

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