Platformism and Especifismo

(Alternative translation)

Liza — Plataforma Anarquista

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Two Traditions, Same Strategic Problem

In the contemporary debate on organized anarchism, two terms often appear that are sometimes presented as opposing currents: platformism and especifismo. However, a more detailed historical analysis reveals that both stem from a common concern: how to ensure anarchism has political organization, strategic coherence, and a legitimate presence in the struggles of the exploited classes. Rather than two opposing worldviews, they're more like two distinct responses to the same problem, situated in different historical contexts.

The Platform and the Problem of Organization

The so-called "Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists" was drafted in 1926 by the Dielo Truda group, composed of Russian anarchist militants who had gone into exile after the Russian Revolution following their defeat and the consolidation of Bolshevik power. The text sought to answer a question that the authors themselves considered central: why anarchism had been unable to intervene effectively in a revolutionary process of such enormous magnitude.

Their answer was an organizational proposition, not a doctrine. The Platform advocated the creation of a General Union of Anarchists based on clear principles: theoretical unity, tactical unity, collective responsibility, and federalism. For the authors, the main problem with the anarchism of their time wasn't a lack of activists or ideas; it was organizational and strategic fragmentation within the anarchist movement.

The document immediately sparked intense debate internationally. Figures such as Volin and Sébastien Faure responded by proposing the so-called anarchist synthesis, which sought to bring together the various currents of anarchism—libertarian communists, anarcho-syndicalists, and individualists—under a single organization without requiring a common political line.

The confrontation was bitter, and the attempt to create an international network around the Platform ultimately failed. Still, the debate left a lasting mark, most significantly, by bringing attention to the issue of a specific anarchist political organization, a topic that would resurface decades later in other contexts.

The Latin American Experience of Especifismo

Thirty years later, in a very different historical context, the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) emerged in Uruguay, founded in 1956. Although it wasn't initially aware of "the Platform", the FAU developed a concept of organization with a lot of similarities, most significantly the need for a coherent anarchist political organization with strategic unity based on a clear program, capable of intervening in social movements in an organized way.

From its political practice in the labor, the student, and the territorial movements, the FAU developed a strategic conception that would later become known as especifismo. This tradition subsequently spread to other Latin American countries and had a decisive influence on the development of organized anarchism in Brazil.

Researchers such as Felipe Corrêa, from the Institute of Anarchist Theory and History, have pointed out that both platformism and especifismo can be understood as part of the same historical family of anarchism: the tradition advocating organizational dualism, the existence of a

specific anarchist political organization that intervenes in social movements without replacing them or acting on their behalf.

In Brazil, this tradition has crystallized in contemporary organizations such as the Organização Socialismo Libertário, which claim the legacy of both Latin American especifismo and classical platformism.

Two Movements That Emerged Without Knowing Each Other

This historical overview helps us understand something important: platformism and especifismo didn't emerge as rival currents in opposition to one another. They weren't a reaction or response to each other but arose at different times, on different continents, and in profoundly different social contexts. While their differences largely reflect the particular historical conditions in which they developed, their similarities are due to the fact that both sought to address the need for anarchist political organization.

The Platform was a reflection born out of the failure of the European revolution between the wars. Uruguayan especifismo took shape in the Latin American context of the second half of the 20th century, a period marked by different social structures, different traditions of struggle, and different political landscapes than the ones in Europe. Understanding this is important to avoid a common mistake in the history of the left: turning strategies into universal formulas.

Our Use of the Term "Platformism"

In the case of Liza, the adoption of the term "platformism" stems in part from this concern. On the one hand, there was a sense that it was necessary to draw on the experience of the Dielo Truda group and its critique of the disorganization within anarchism. On the other hand, it seemed problematic to simply adopt the term "especifismo"—which originated in Latin America and is linked to a specific tradition—and transfer it directly to the European context.

Over time, a deeper understanding of the Latin American experience has reinforced that initial caution. It's not about denying the affinities between the two traditions, but instead about recognizing each as a response to a specific context.

Mechoso's Warning

In an interview, Juan Carlos Mechoso, a longtime militant of the FAU, noted that attempts to transplant political models from other contexts "in a more or less mechanical way"—replacing concrete analysis with imported frameworks—had been frequent within the Latin American left.

The warning is simple yet profound: there's nothing less strategic than copying strategies. While it's certainly true that ideas can travel, making sense of them requires reinterpreting them in relation to the specific social and political conditions of the new context.

The Problem of Popular Power in Europe

One of the clearest examples of these differences can be found in the concept of Popular Power, which occupies a central place in much of Latin American especifismo.

In general terms, Popular Power refers to the construction of a social power that serves as an alternative to capital and the State and that's based on the self-organization of exploited and oppressed sectors of society. In Latin America, this idea is often linked to the articulation of different social subjects: urban workers, peasants, informal workers, indigenous communities, residents of working-class neighborhoods, and other subaltern sectors. Under these conditions, the concept functions as a strategic tool to guide processes of popular organization and build social blocs capable of challenging power.

To put it simply, the European context is different. In our context, the social transformations of the past century have led to a much greater homogenization of these exploited classes. For example, the peasantry has virtually disappeared as an autonomous political force, indigenous groups no longer exist as a social category, and broad segments of the population have been integrated into the institutions of the welfare state for decades. In this scenario, when workers prefer to see themselves as middle class, the strategic challenge is different. The working class has to be reminded that it still exists.

Social Fragmentation and Hegemony

Another important factor comes into play in Europe where a lot of the current interpretations of Popular Power have already been influenced either by autonomist tendencies or by multi-class readings of intersectionality. This has often resulted in the proliferation of struggles in many different sectors, fragmented by different issues or varying identities, without a shared working-class vision for a future socialist society.

In this context, the concept of Popular Power could serve as a justification for supporting heterogeneous and politically indeterminate social fronts, instead of a tool for the working class to build revolutionary hegemony. When the question of class isn't central to the analysis, struggles tend to be limited to the parts of society that are already the most accepted or privileged.

It's worth pointing out that this question regarding the limits of Popular Power in Western contexts is currently an open debate within our tradition. Our platformist comrades in Australia are critical of the positions taken by especifismo coming out of the US, or more precisely, the effects those positions imply. We completely agree: using the concept of Popular Power in societies like those in the West, rather than helping us build a revolutionary subject, condemns us to multi-class fronts where the program is easily co-opted by the interests of the most privileged. This leads to a shift in the objectives, changing them from demands for the redistribution of the means of decision-making and production to the recognition of differences on the margins of the bourgeois system.

Reviving the Tradition of Struggle in Our Own Context

From this perspective, reviving the Platform in Europe today can be particularly significant. It isn't a matter of literally repeating things from a document written nearly a century ago, but

instead about reviving a political tradition that placed three fundamental issues at its core: organization, strategy, and class struggle. The critiques that Dielo Truda militants had of the anarchism of their time remain surprisingly relevant today: organizational fragmentation, lack of strategic coherence, and inability to sustainably intervene in the class struggle.

Reviving this tradition could also help us reframe strategic problems in terms of building Class Power, meaning a revolutionary hegemony based on the self-organization of the working class and oriented toward an anti-capitalist and libertarian communist horizon.

Two Traditions, One Shared Insight

Platformism and especifismo ultimately share the fundamental insight that without a specific political organization, no revolutionary strategy is possible. The differences between the two traditions stem primarily from the contexts in which they developed and the strategic tools each devised to operate within them. Recognizing this shouldn't be a source of fruitless controversy, but rather an opportunity to learn from both experiences.

Today, the strategic question remains the same as the one posed by the militants of Dielo Truda a century ago and later taken up by Latin American anarchists: how to build a revolutionary force capable of intervening in the real struggles of our class.

Translated by the Center for Especifismo Studies.

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