

# Interview with the Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Federation

Thierry Libertad

February 2008

## **Thierry Libertad: What is the FARJ and since when has it existed?**

Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Federation (FARJ): The FARJ is a specific anarchist organisation, which was founded on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2003 as the result of a process of organisation and struggle in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, that was initiated decades earlier. The objective, at the time of founding, was to consolidate an anarchist organisation that was seeking to contribute towards the resumption of the social vector, lost in Brazilian anarchism in the decade of the 1930s. At the time of founding we published our “Founding Manifesto” that already affirmed our will to struggle for organised anarchism, inspired by the history of anarchist resistance in Rio de Janeiro. We also published our “Statement of Principles”, in which we define the principles which orientate all of our actions: freedom; ethics and values; federalism; internationalism; self-management; direct action; classism; political practice and social insertion; and mutual aid.

## **- T.L.: What do you mean by “resume the social vector”?**

FARJ: We call the social vector of anarchism its presence and influence in the popular movements and in the class struggles. In reality, anarchism never disappeared in Brazil as a convincing and consistent ideological proposal but, during the 1930s, it lost its first great social vector – represented, in that epoch, by revolutionary syndicalism. This happened, in large part, for reasons of the harnessing of the unions by the state, of the repression committed by the authorities and of the Bolshevik offensive. As Malatesta recommended, the anarchists should be in all of the camps that articulate the contradictions of capitalism, making sure that they function in the most libertarian way possible; and this was the orientation of the anarchists when they searched for insertion in the unions. Another factor that contributed to this loss was the fact that many people believed in syndicalism as an end in itself and therefore abandoned specific organisation as a goal. Brazilian anarchists, as was the case with José Oiticica, had already noticed that this strong movement that was formed from the beginning of the twentieth century was not enough in itself, but it could be a field for the actions of anarchists, in which they would have to act organised politically and ideologically in a specific anarchist organisation. When the problems above affected syndicalism, the fact that the anarchists were not more ideologically organised caused them to fail to find another social vector. With the loss of this vector, the Brazilian an-

archists were found in anti-clerical leagues, in cultural and social centers, schools, editorial and drama collectives etc. These spaces were – and are – interesting and vital proposals, but which are more effective when linked to a real social movement. Unlinked to concrete social practice, these initiatives were not able to promote the propaganda and agitation in the way that those companions wanted. For us, since the problems with syndicalism, anarchism has failed to find another social vector and our objective has been to contribute to the fight to find other social movements that permit this “reinsertion” of anarchism.

**- T.L.: Whose initiative was the foundation of the FARJ?**

FARJ: In 2002 our idea was to study the possible models of anarchist organisation and found a federation with the objective of coordinating and reinforcing the results of anarchism from Rio de Janeiro. In the Fábio Luz Social Library (Biblioteca Social Fábio Luz – BSFL) we started a study circle in which we discussed the classic texts of Bakunin, Malatesta, Fabbri; documents like the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, and the specific (from the model of the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation – FAU) and synthesist (from the model of the Francophone Anarchist Federation – FA) organisational models. At the end of this process there were a series of divergences within the group, causing the departure of a few members which decided to create another organisation. The group which remained until the end of the discussions of the cycle of debates was that which founded the FARJ.

**- T.L.: And what was the model of organisation chosen?**

FARJ: We opted for the specific model – known by other names as “especificismo” or organisational anarchism – in large part inspired by the FAU. Through the discussions that we had we arrived at the conclusion that it would be essential to work with popular social movements and that, for this, we should create an organisation with an emphasis on militant commitment. In this way an organisation defends certain clear positions: the organisation as active minority, the emphasis on the necessity of organisation; theoretical unity and unity of action; the production of theory; the necessity of social work and social insertion; the understanding of anarchism as a tool for the class struggle in pursuit of a libertarian socialist project; the differentiation between the levels of political action (the anarchist organisation) and social action (the popular movements); and the defence of a militancy that is strategically made. Obviously the organisation was not born functioning with all of these concepts, but we have improved our work in this direction, over the years.

**- T.L.: Is it possible to detail more about how these ways of organisation function?**

FARJ: This model of organisation maintains that the function of the specific anarchist organisation is to bring together and co-ordinate the forces stemming from militant activities, building a tool of solid and consistent struggle, that seeks a finalist objective: social revolution and libertarian socialism. We believe that work without (or with little) organisation, in which each one does what they want, poorly articulated or even isolated, is inefficient. The model of organisation we advocate seeks to multiply the result and effectiveness of militant forces. In this model, the specific anarchist organisation works as an active minority, i.e., a group of anarchists that, organised on the political and ideological level, is party to actions on the social level – social movements, unions, etc. In this work, the organisation of active minority works to influence the movements and struggles in which it is involved, in order that they function in the most libertarian ways possible. Always acting on the social level, the active minority does

not seek positions of privilege, does not impose its will, does not fight for the social movements, but with them, thus differentiating itself from the Marxist-Leninist “vanguard”. Thus the ideology within the social movements, and not the reverse. We understand theoretical unity as necessary because the organisation cannot work with any theory, or with multiple theories; this leads to a lack of articulation, or even to the articulation of a set of conflicting concepts which leads, without doubt, to incorrect, confusing or very inefficient practice. This unity is always achieved collectively and in a horizontal way within the organisation. Theoretical unity goes together with unity of action. Through it, the organisation works to implement the actions that were established within the strategy of struggle. Having defined a theoretical and ideological line and a strategic programme, all militants — hence the organisation as a whole — have an obligation to carry out the tactical actions established by the strategic programme. In short, everyone should be “rowing the boat in the same direction”. This model of organisation is characterised, still, by giving emphasis to the necessity of social work and of social insertion. Social work is the activity that the organised anarchists realise in the popular social movements; and social insertion is the insertion of libertarian ideas and concepts in these movements. If we want to struggle for a society without exploitation and domination, there is no consistency in doing this without the involvement of those that are the biggest victims of capitalist class society: the exploited and dominated people. Taking this position does not mean idolising the people or believing that they are revolutionary in essence, but only agrees with the idea that the struggle against exploitation has to be made with the involvement of those that are the most exploited. Hence, we strongly encourage action in autonomous and combative popular social movements of their own creation. We believe that, for anarchism to flourish, it must be used as a tool for the class struggle. Another characteristic of this model of organisation is the differentiation between the levels of political and social action. We do not believe that there is a hierarchy of political organisation over the social movement (as it is for the authoritarians); for us, this is a complementary and dialectic relationship, essential to both. Thus, the political level of the anarchist organisation must act at the social level, the social movements organised around pragmatic issues of improving the conditions of life for the exploited class. To do so with consistency, strategy is developed within the anarchist organisation: it is in this context that economic analyses are made; in the international, national and regional contexts; that you analyse the popular movements and forces in play, their influences, potentialities; the questions of institutional policies that have influences over the environments in which we propose to act. In this same context of the specific organisation, reflections on the long-term goals take place, we forge our conceptions of the social revolution and of libertarian socialism itself. After this, the most complicated; to think of a proposal for action in search of attaining these goals, or at least to make them become more tangible. The strategy will have to answer the following question: how to get from where we are to where we want to be? This “macro” line (of diagnostics, short, medium and long-term goals) we call strategy and the major goals, the strategic goals. The strategy, then, is detailed in a more “micro” line, or tactics, which determines the actions that will be put into practice by militants or groups of militants who seek to achieve tactical objectives. Obviously, the realisation of tactical objectives brings us closer in an important way to the strategic objectives. Thus, this choice of organisation requires a high level of commitment from the militants.

**- T.L.: Who are the members and how does it operate?**

FARJ: The FARJ is an organisation of individuals that has organic militants and which we could call a “network of support”, composed of people who help us in different ways. We are divided, the organic militants, into what we call “the work fronts”, or “fronts of insertion”. Until the year 2007 we were working with two fronts: one of urban occupations the other community. From 2008 we have had our third front: agro-ecological. There is a policy determined collectively by the organisation that is applied to the fronts, which have certain autonomy to make this application work. Similarly, the guidelines of what is done in the fronts are reported to the organisation, which discusses them collectively. The result of this process of determining policy, discussion and implementation of policy in areas of insertion, observation, analysis and discussion of the results of this practical implementation of these policies is what constitutes our basic operation.

**- T.L.: How is the FARJ situated in the history of the Brazilian libertarian movement?**

FARJ: We are linked to a history that has much connection with the militancy of Ideal Peres. Ideal was the son of Juan Peres Bouzas (or João Peres), an immigrant anarchist and Spanish shoemaker, who made an important participation in anarchism from the end of the 1910s. He was an active militant of the Alliance of Craftsmen in Footwear and of the Workers Federation of São Paulo, and featured on numerous strikes, pickets and demonstrations. In the 1930s he was also active in the Anti-Clerical League and in 1934 made decisive participation in the Battle of the Cathedral – when the anarchists rejected the integralistas (fascists) under bursts from machine guns, with the participation of the National Liberator Alliance (Aliança Nacional Libertadora – ANL), a coordination that supported the anti-fascist struggle, combating imperialism and latifundia. Ideal Peres was born in 1925 and began his militancy in 1946, participating in the Libertarian Youth of Rio de Janeiro; in the periodicals “Ação Direta” (Direct Action) and “Archote”; in the Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Union; in the Anarchist Congress which took place in Brazil; and in the Brazilian Union of Libertarian Youth. He had relevant participation at the Professor Jose Oiticica Study Centre (Centro de Estudos Professor José Oiticica -CEPJO), site of a series of courses and lectures with an anarchist “background”, and that was closed by the dictatorship in 1969, when Ideal was jailed for one month in the former Department of Political and Social Order (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social – DOPS). After the arrest Ideal organised, in his home even in 1970, a study group that had as its objective to approach youth interested in anarchism in order to, among other things, put them in contact with older militants and establish links with other anarchists in Brazil. This study group would be the germ of the Libertarian Study Circle (Círculo de Estudos Libertários – CEL), designed by Ideal and his partner Esther Redes. The CEL functioned in Rio de Janeiro from 1985 to 1995, having near to (or even inside) itself the formation of other groups like the José Oiticica Anarchist Group (Grupo Anarquista José Oiticica (GAJO), the Direct Action Anarchist Group (Grupo Anarquista Ação Direta – GAAD), the 9<sup>th</sup> of July Anarchist Student Collective (Coletivo Anarquista Estudantil 9 de Julho – CAE-9), the group Mutirão (Effort); as well as publications like “Libera...Amore Mio” (founded in 1991 and which still exists today), the magazine Utopia and the newspaper Mutirão. Moreover, CEL promoted events, campaigns and dozens (if not hundreds) of lectures and discussions. Today in the FARJ there are companions who arrived at the time of the study group in Ideal’s house and companions who arrived at the time of CEL. With the death of Ideal Peres, CEL decided to honor him, modifying its name to the Ideal Peres Libertarian Study Circle (Círculo de Estudos Libertários Ideal Peres – CELIP). CELIP has given continuity to the work of CEL, being responsible for adding to the militancy of Rio de Janeiro and continuing in the improvement of its theory. Moreover, CELIP followed with the publication of “Libera”, made

through relationships with groups around the country and from abroad. It has brought forward important libertarian ideas on subjects that were on the agenda in Brazil and the world at that time and served for the dissemination of texts and stories of diverse groups around the country. The lectures and debates continued, bringing new militants, and the relations that some militants had with the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) ended up significantly influencing the model of anarchism which was being developed within CELIP. This was co-organiser of the State Meeting of Libertarian Students of Rio de Janeiro (Encontro Estadual de Estudantes Libertários do Rio de Janeiro – ENELIB) in 1999; participated in the International Meeting of Libertarian Culture, in Florianópolis in 2000; and helped with the activities of the São Paulo Institute of Libertarian Culture and Action (Instituto de Cultura e Ação Libertária de São Paulo – ICAL). It also took up the struggle in the category of oil workers, resuming ties between anarchists and trade unionists from the oil industry – ties which dated to 1992/1993, when together they occupied the Petrobrás Headquarters Building (Edifício Sede da Petrobrás – EDISE), in the first occupation of a “public” building after the military dictatorship. In 2001 this struggle of anarchists and oil workers was resumed, culminating in a camp of more than 10 days in 2003, of anarchists and oil workers which struggled for amnesty for companions politically dismissed. This among other things. In 2002 we started the study group to verify the possibility of the construction of an anarchist organisation and, as we said above, the outcome of this group was the founding of the FARJ in 2003. For us, there is a direct link between the militancy of Ideal Peres, the constitution of the CEL, its operation, the change of name to CELIP, and the subsequent founding of the FARJ.

**- T.L.: What are your ideological references, both national and international?**

FARJ: At the national level we can say that, since the especifista current was not in fact realised in its fullness in Brazil, our ideological references relate to some initiatives of the past and others that we believe to be signatories of the same current in the more recent history of the country. We understand that since the first years of the twentieth century, anarchists linked to “organisationism” (name of the period, which correlates to especifismo), particularly followers of Malatesta, worked for the purpose of organising a number of possible companions with visions to form an organisation with common strategies and tactics, based on tactical agreements and a clear understanding of the group. It was these who were responsible for realising the First Congress of Brazilian Workers in 1906, and for the initiatives of the most breathtaking national anarchism. These anarchists prepared the conditions that would allow for the full integration of libertarians into trade unions, into social life, with the formation of schools and theatre groups, beyond reasonable production records. It was also, to a large extent, the “organisationalist” current which eventually helped in the preparation of the Anarchist Rebellion of 1918, the creation of the Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Alliance, in the formation of the Brazilian Communist Party – with libertarian features – in 1919, and in the events that distinguished the anarchists from the Bolsheviks in the 1920s. In this first phase the names of Neno Vasco, José Oiticica, Domingos Passos, Juan Peres Bouzas, Astrojildo Pereira (until 1920) and Fábio Luz stand out. Later, after the slumber of social anarchism for almost two decades, part of the organisationalist tradition resurfaces in the journal Direct Action and, with the consummation of the Military Coup of 1964, we again lose our main force in that field, represented by Ideal Peres and the students of the Libertarian Student Movement. Externally, more specifically in Latin America, we can say that we have many affinities with the historical legacy of Magonism, the stage of radicalisation of the Mexican Liberal Party, in particular the period that goes from 1906

to 1922. In that period, the phenomenon that received the name of its most active militant, Ricardo Flores Magón, — in exile — undertook several guerrilla actions and was able, even in spite of the limitations of Mexican anarcho-syndicalism, to go beyond appearances and, in a symbiotic form, approximate the ideology of the historical demands of the Mexican peasants, thus becoming a key vector of a radical revolution. Remember that, in the midst of bloody revolutionary war, there was an important approximation between Magonistas and Zapatistas. Aside from this, there are influences from the model of the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU), particularly with regard to the type of Bakuninist/ Malatestan organisation and its action in fronts (student, community and trade union), with priority on the question of social work / insertion and differentiating the levels of action. Inevitably we have a great influence from the classics Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and from the anarchist presences in the Russian and Spanish Revolutions.

**- T.L.: How does the FARJ situate itself in the old debate between synthesis and platform?**

FARJ: Our model of organisation is not defined in any of these models. Firstly, we believe that there is not one unique formula to resolve the question of anarchist organisation, and, as we said earlier, it must be adjusted to the “necessity that the militants have demonstrated to make anarchism recover its original place in the field of the class struggle.” For us, the organisation must be adapted to the context in which it intends to act, and to the social forces at play. In short we could say, to us, this need to make anarchism resume its social vector, or its place in the class struggle, means that synthesis is not enough for us. Its conception to have within the same organisation all those who believe they are anarchists, with “unity” around their criticism of the system (capitalism, state, representative democracy), some affinity in relation to long-term objectives and no affinity on the questions of “how to act”. This model, for us, means that many efforts are spent without necessity (work without coordination, conflicts, long attempts at consensus — which can often be manipulated by a minority — and discussions on points “of departure” like “must anarchists work socially?”, “do we believe in class struggle?”, etc.). The fact that classic synthesis includes the individualists within the anarchist organisation is very complicated for us. As to the Platform, it must be understood in the context in which it was written and based in the experiences of the Russian Revolution, where Makhno, Archinov etc. were involved. It supports an organisational model for a revolutionary moment, and it should be taken into account that we are not in such a moment. For us, the model of organisation at the level put forward in the Platform need not be strictly applied in non-revolutionary situations. We believe that the Platform has brought significant contributions to the discussion on militant commitment, criticism about the problem of disorganisation and lack of commitment in some sectors of anarchism, its criticism of individualism and the exacerbation of egos. We must recognise that there were anarchist groups that in some areas completely distorted the meaning of the Platform, used it to justify authoritarianism within anarchism, something that seems to us completely misplaced if we look at the anarchist action / conception of Makhno and the other Ukrainians who were in the Russian Revolution and then formed Dielo Truda. It seems to us that, at present, we must think about how to restore the social vector lost to anarchism and that every anarchist organisation with this interest must seek a form of organisation that brings it more success (always within the anarchist ethic) in this contract, and which corresponds to the social reality in which it is acting.

**- T.L.: In what projects is the Occupations Front involved and what are its activities?**

FARJ: This front is involved in working with urban occupations, which in Brazil have a character a little different from other places in the world. Here the occupations are made by poor people, who are suffering from police violence and/or drug trafficking in the slums or are even living under bridges and on the street, a situation very common in the major Brazilian centers. Families that do not have a place to live end up occupying spaces that are not being used, giving them a social purpose. Today, this front works with five urban occupations, the result of work that has existed since 2003 – in a more organised way and as front of the organisation – since we already had experience working in urban occupations by the end of the 1990s. We were organising within the Internationalist Front of the Homeless (Frente Internacionalista dos Sem Teto – FIST), which we create with other companions and which came to have 11 occupations. However, we recently left FIST and we are now working directly (FARJ-occupation) with those occupations that were more receptive to libertarian ideas and practices. We gained a lot of recognition in this work, both as occupations and as social movements in Rio de Janeiro. For this work, we have a daily involvement in the occupations (some of them have/ had militants of the organisation who are residents); we work with assistance on the part of organisation; and, in assemblies, we encourage self-organisation, direct action, direct democracy, etc. We also seek to connect the occupations with the other social movements in Rio de Janeiro. We have relations with the Popular Council (co-ordination of social movements); participated in the 2007 occupation of the National Petroleum Agency (Agência Nacional do Petróleo – ANP) with other social movements and we have militants in contact with the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST), including one of them giving training courses in the Florestan Fernandes school (in São Paulo state) and also here in Rio de Janeiro. To meet an important demand, we headed a “transversal” project, in which all fronts operated, called the Popular University. This proposal is deployed, in fact, as an initiative of anti-capitalist popular education focused on the transformation of society, having as a tactic political training within the popular movements.

**- T.L.: And the Community Front?**

FARJ: It is responsible for the management of our Fabio Luz Social Library (BSFL), which has existed since 2001 and has more than 1000 books on anarchism and many others of varied themes. There is a very large archive of contemporary anarchist publications from around the world. This front is also responsible for the management of the Centre of Social Culture of Rio de Janeiro (RJ-CCS), an open social space that we maintain in the area north of the city and that hosts a number of activities: recycling work that is done by a companion that produces chairs, sofas, objects of art, etc. with objects collected from the garbage; strengthening education and preparation for entry into university, done for needy youngsters in the community of the Morro dos Mocacos, theatre workshops, cultural events, celebrations and meetings of various kinds. Under the BSFL functions the Marques da Costa Research Nucleus (Núcleo de Pesquisa Marques da Costa – NPMC) that, founded in 2004, aims to produce theory for the organisation in addition to researching the history of anarchism in Rio de Janeiro. We also have a “public body” that is CELIP, which is not very active at the moment, but that is intended to hold lectures and discussions to bring new interest to anarchism.

**- T.L.: I know that the Agro-ecological Front is new, but could you talk a little bit about your activities?**

FARJ: Our latest front was formed from the Germinal Center for Food and Health, established in 2005. Germinal is a self-run group, concerned with issues of food and ecology, which aims to support existing experiences of agriculture and stimulate the emergence of new ones, always from a libertarian perspective. To do so, it structures itself around the area Ay Carmela! and the Pedagogical Workshops, acting in the consolidation and rescue of agriculture, agro-ecology, social ecology, eco-literacy and economic solidarity, focusing these on workers, militants of the social movements and students. It also organises vegetarian lunches (Almoços Dançantes Vegetarianos), which occur periodically at the CCS-RJ. Constituting itself as our third front, it now seeks to define its activities of priority, areas of insertion etc. We hope to have new and good results with the creation of this new front.

**- T.L.: Are there any projects of FARJ itself which do not relate specifically to any front?**

FARJ: There are issues that concern the whole organisation, such as publications. We edit the journal Libera; the magazine Protesta! (together with our companions of Terra Livre Anarchist Collective from Sao Paulo) and books like Social Anarchism by Frank Mintz, Anarchism Today by the Rhone-Alps Regional Union and Ricardo Flores Magón by Diego Abad de Santillán. We are doing the internal work of theoretical leveling and preparation of militants with regard to training. We are also reworking our external relations. Finally, there are many things.

**- T.L.: What are your goals and perspectives?**

FARJ: We consider ourselves a revolutionary organisation, hence, our compass (long-term goal) is the social revolution and the construction of libertarian socialism. The goals for the year of 2008 (short term) are: continue and strengthen our work in occupations, work with political training in occupations under the project of the Popular University, maintain relations with and integrate other social movements in Rio de Janeiro; maintain CCS-RJ, the Fabio Luz Social Library, rethink / increase the work inside CCS-RJ, set up a cooperative of Faisca Publications in CCS-RJ, consolidate the work of the agro-ecological front, look for other areas of activity, obtain more militants for the organisation, continue internal training, external relations and publications. In a more general way this is it.

**- T.L.: Currently, in what state do you find the Brazilian libertarian movement?**

FARJ: From our point of view there is not a “Brazilian libertarian movement”, because the idea of “movement” implies a more or less well made articulation between these groups, which does not exist. We had a “resurgence” of anarchism in the 1980s with the end of the military dictatorship and now, some people who were distanced or worked with the resistance (mainly in the cultural sphere) “returned to being active”, and others were added. Anarchism, at that time, generated a lot of interest from the “general public”, until the end of the dictatorship. From the 1990s there was a process of deepening of libertarian positions and many of the anarchists, who had common affinities and were in different cities and states, began to discuss in more detail the issues of organisation, priorities of an anarchist group/organisation, etc. and, of course, this led during the 1990s and early 2000s, to fragmentation. The groups started to act, each one, with those with which they had more affinity. A specific tendency surges (also in 1990), inspired by FAU, which would launch the proposal of the Brazilian Anarchist Construction (Construção Anarquista Brasileira), and would be responsible for the generation of virtually the entire especificista movement of Brazil; there is also a more synthesist tendency, inspired by the model of the French Anarchist Federation, which formed many groups; and finally a more individualist/ post-modern line that grows mainly in the 2000s. Today, there is



a very fragmented anarchism in Brazil. We were together with this especificista tendency until 2003, when there was a split in the formation of our organisation (during the study group) and the groups that discussed the formation of the Forum of Organised Anarchism (FAO) which preferred to include the rival organisation which was formed in Rio de Janeiro (and which would then be expelled from the FAO), preventing our entry. Since then, we began to focus our work on internal issues and fundamentally on our social work, because we believe that this should be a priority. Now, with more developed internal and social work, we are starting a moment of rethinking relations in Brazil. Today, in addition to the especificista tendency, there is also a more synthesist tendency (or what we might call non-specific), which is very diffused and has worked the hardest on the issue of anarchist propaganda, with publications, cultural centers and so on. It is not possible to explain exactly why, but there is more of a synthesist tradition than that of especificista in Brazil, so that – when there is not a more in-depth discussion about this – the groups that arise place themselves within this more synthesist (or non-specific) trend. There is still a third line that led individualism and “lifestyle anarchism” to the latest consequences and that today have some representation (Stirnerists, primitivists, etc..).

**- T.L.: What kind of relations does the FARJ have with these tendencies?**

FARJ: After the problems that we had with the other specific organisations in constituting the FAO, we began not to work with them any more. We also believe that there is no possible work to be done with the individualists, which defend this “lifestyle anarchism,” not aimed at social struggle. Accordingly, we searched within the non-specific organisations, groups that agree with a slightly broader concept that we have come to defend: that of “social anarchism.” With these groups we began to do publications, events and other activities.

**- T.L.: And what, for you, is this “social anarchism”?**

FARJ: Social anarchism is a concept a little wider than “especificismo” and seeks to overcome the division between the classical currents of anarchism (anarcho-communism / anarcho-syndicalism / anarcho-individualism). It is a concept that seeks to group within itself the tendencies of anarchism committed to social issues (struggles, popular movements, etc.) and libertarian socialism. It is a current that we believe carries the legacy of various traditions – anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, council communism – plus a series of practical experiences that have happened since the nineteenth century until today. This “social anarchism” excludes individualistic and non-socialist tendencies of anarchism, namely, anarchism that is not focused on social struggle, anarchism that does not want to be a tool to change society. This social anarchism advocates an organised return to the popular struggles, stimulating anarchist presence with the oppressed, in the search for emancipation and freedom. It advocates, therefore, the concepts of organisation and social work/insertion.

**- T.L.: How do people perceive your action? Is there a good reception of your ideas in the popular classes?**

FARJ: People, groups and social movements have received us well in all the work that we have been developing. We believe that for any work worthy of respect and receptivity, we have to escape from authoritarianism – which is present even in anarchist groups – and have enough humility to learn to listen, to build together, without wanting to impose our way of thinking to others. We are convinced that a lot of frustrated work is the result of certain arrogance, presumption and even of a certain authoritarianism of groups or people who can not follow these

fundamental ethical concepts. For us, ethics is a non-negotiable principle and one of the pillars of our organisation; we believe that working with ethics, we achieve/ will achieve increasingly more receptivity and respect. An example of this could be our relationship, as an anarchist political organisation, with the social movement. Tired of people who only come to harness them, telling them what to do, to make them swallow their projects whole, to address them, many of these movements are calling for the presence of the FARJ, that is, view us with respect and are receptive to our ideas, primarily by the ethical way in which we relate the political (anarchist) with the social (of the social movements). Our proposal is to fight with the people and not for them or in front of them. Contrary to the authoritarians that mean to be a vanguard that illuminates the path of the people, we find that there is no light that is not collectively lit. We can not go ahead in front, lighting the way for the workers, while they themselves come behind us in darkness. Our goal is to stimulate, being together shoulder to shoulder, providing solidarity when it is necessary and requested. We understand that receptiveness and respect increase in the same proportion in which we work with this ethic; essential and not negotiable in our view.

**- T.L.: What are the sectors in which anarchism is more developed: workers, students, people in marginalised areas...? Does a particular profile of the Brazilian militant exist (ethnic or social origin, belonging to which class, age, level of education, type of employment, gender...) or do people of all types participate?**

FARJ: Here the vast majority of anarchist groups and organisations is composed of students and workers. The profile is not homogeneous, but we can give some indication: there are more whites than blacks and virtually no other ethnic groups (indigenous, etc.). There are more middle-class and lower middle class militants than from low/ very low classes, age ranges a lot (in FARJ, for example, we have members from young people of 20-and-a-few-years of age to older militants more than 50 years old), there are more militants with university level education than without, occupying the most diverse jobs, and there are more men than women .

**- T.L.: From what I see, but perhaps I'm wrong, it seems that current Brazilian anarchism is more of an urban phenomenon. Is there work (propaganda, organisation...) directed towards, or even that arises in/ from the agricultural workers, from the landless peasants, from indigenous communities?**

FARJ: Your are right. Brazilian anarchism has always been much more urban than rural. That does not mean that groups seeking social work do not have contact with the landless, with indigenous communities or even with other people in rural areas. Ourselves, as we said above, are in contact with the MST through a companion who is doing the political training course and bring anarchism through there. According to the information we have, the MST (fundamentally the base) has a lot of receptivity towards anarchist ideas, especially for Magón and the Mexican Revolution. Nevertheless, this rural influence is much more restricted than the urban influence.

**- T.L.: Do you have any kind of relations with the Brazilian extreme left? Do you sometimes work together?**

FARJ: It depends what you mean by "extreme left". We have no relations with Trotskyist or Bolshevik parties, but in the social field, we often relate with social movements of different influences/ tendencies. We have relations or contact with, for example, the Front of Popular Struggle (Frente de Luta Popular – PLF), the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST), Homeless/ Roofless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto – MTST) and the Unemployed Workers' Movement (Movimento dos

Trabalhadores Desempregados – BAT). Often, we have signed letters or flyers with non-anarchist organisations who are also on the broad field of what we might call the left, as was the case, for example, in the demonstrations against the implementation of the San Francisco river and in defense of the life of Bishop Cappio, in the occupation of the National Petroleum Agency (ANP) or the manifestation of the “Cry of the Excluded”. We are non-sectarian and have tried, where possible, to interact with people and organisations of different ideology, always maintaining our principles and being aware of the ideological differences that distinguish us.

**- T.L.: How does the government respond to the action of the FARJ and other Brazilian anarchists? Do you suffer state repression?**

FARJ: The government does not necessarily represses “anarchism.” When anarchism is trapped in a ghetto, serving as a “lifestyle”, a form of friendship, aesthetic freedom and of philosophical thought, it therefore does not offer any possibility of social change, is not involved in social struggles, and is therefore tranquilly “tolerated” by the State. The repression responds in exact proportion to the amount of social work that anarchists do. The more work, more mobilisation, more struggle, then certainly more repression. For us it is no different. Anarchism is not repressed as a current of thought, but as a tool of struggle.

**- T.L.: What economic situation is the FARJ in?**

FARJ: We always have difficulties, because all the funding of our activities is done only through donations from militants. Today, the accounts of the CCS-RJ consume a large part of our money. Libera, even with its reduced schedule, is also edited and across Brazil and the world by means of the resources of some militants and a few contributions from readers. The publications (Protesta! and books), consuming a significant amount of money, make the money back when they are sold. In any case, the logic is always the same: the militants donate (when the money does not come back) or lend (when it will come back). This always falls short of our needs.

**- T.L.: Do you have to face other difficulties?**

FARJ: Certainly. Especially in terms of resources, both economic and “human”, i.e. of militants. Our militants are always fewer than the demand for work that we have and, hence, to resolve this problem (or at least minimise it) is one of our major objectives for 2008. We still have to defend ourselves from the accusations and disqualifications that a large part of Marxism (or even some part of anarchism) makes against us. Moreover, we know that the task we have set ourselves, to change the world, is certainly not an easy task. But we believe that with humility and great desire, it is possible to contribute to it.

**- T.L.: At the international level, with whom do you have contacts and ties, first in Latin America and then in the rest of the world?**

FARJ: Here in Latin America, we are in contact (with different organic levels) with the following groups and organisations: Alianza Magonista Zapatista (AMZ) and the Colectivo Autónomo Magonista (CAMA), both from Mexico, Pró-Federação Anarquista from Costa Rica; Federação Anarquista Uruguaia (FAU) and the Colectivo pro-Organización Socialista Libertaria, from Uruguay, Red Libertária (Libertarian Network), the Organización Socialista Libertaria and the Frente Popular Darío Santillán, all three of Argentina, the journal El Libertário from Venezuela, and the group Qhispikay Llaqta from Peru. We are trying to make contacts with other organisations at this moment. About the organisations from Europe, we have relations with the CNT Vignoles, the Pierre Besnard Foundation and Anarchist Federation, all from France;

the CIRA, from Switzerland; the journal A Batalha from Portugal; you from Divergences... Our informative Libera has for many years been sent to dozens of groups, as we are now doing with Protestal, and these groups are sending us their publications, which enrich the body of our library. We believe — as we said in the part about contacts in Brazil — that as the work is going well, this is a good time to think about/ rethink and work relations.

**- T.L.: Can we talk about a resurgence of the anarchist movement in Latin America? In Brazil, what is your opinion?**

FARJ: Our impression is that the number of militants and of groups has not grown significantly, hence, we do not believe that anarchism in Latin America is making a quantitative growth. However, it is undeniable that these groups are increasingly more organised and the tendency is that this increases the strength and scope of anarchism, so perhaps this impression of “resurgence” is because of this. For us, there is a more qualitative than quantitative growth, in this sense.

**- T.L.: Can we consider that the Brazilian anarchist movement, and more generally Latin American, has a peculiarity, or its own traits, ideological considerations or practices that differentiate it from European anarchism?**

FARJ: We believe that there are some common features between Latin and European realities, but there is certainly a very different context and history. The ideological considerations are not very different. However, our challenge is thinking about how to apply anarchism, or these ideological considerations, in the context in which we are, dealing with a people that is the result of a history of colonialism, slavery and that has very diverse influences to European reality. We believe that this difference is more strategic than ideological. This difference of reality in which we work completely alters the diagnosis of the environment in which we act and has influences on our tactical and strategic objectives, seeing as the starting point is different. Some basic differences that we could cite are: difference in the performance and role of the state in society; revolutions which occurred in many countries in Europe and that did not happen here; levels of poverty, inequality, education are very different; movements of different perspective; organised crime; different influences of the process of economic “globalisation”, particular cultural traits; finally, a series of differences that require us to adapt our ways of acting.

**- T.L.: Most Latin American countries now have left governments, or which claim to be such. There is Lula in Brazil, Bachelet in Chile, Morales in Bolivia, Chavez in Venezuela... What is your position in relation to this situation? What is your analysis?**

FARJ: We understand this wave of progressive governments “of the left” as the result of the ebbs and flows of capitalism that, as we see, can allow these governments to be elected with a more progressive position, holding a more “popular” discourse and managing capital in favour of the economic elite. We are not saying that a dictatorship is the same thing as a government of this type — it would be complete non-sense on our part. However, what must be questioned is the fact that governments of this type tend to allay the most combative social movements, encouraging them to act within the State, as a progressive government “can give them institutional space.” With that, they leave direct action behind and begin to be co-opted and to believe that a government, such as that of Lula for example, is a “popular” government, which has space for the movements and is capable of realising the necessary changes. Lula, despite having increased social benefits for the most exploited class supports, at the same time, an economic policy that benefits the banks and transnational capital — a policy that is largely responsible for the situation of exploitation of the people. Finally, we believe that this new

environment requires a more sophisticated analysis on our part, because the contradictions of capitalism become more masked. This requires a greater training of militants.

**- T.L.: With the “anti-globalisation” movement, the model of “participatory democracy”, experienced in Porto Alegre has become well known. What is your opinion about this?**

FARJ: Anarchism advocates a model of self-management that is, first of all, deliberative. The model of participatory democracy in Porto Alegre is similar to the movement within the capitalist enterprises to improve the involvement of officials within the company and the financial results using, for this, participation in which the officials are heard in the decision-making of the managers and employers. For us, any system of “democratisation” — be it a company in the private sector, or an instance of the state (such as Porto Alegre) — must come from below, as a requirement of the most exploited class, so that the decisions are made in their favour. Porto Alegre maintains a consultive model of democracy, where the state comes from above and asks what its citizens want, without being obliged to implement what was decided and doing instead what it feels best. It's the same things as the company that decides to ask officials what to do to improve the work. This model is radically different to the models of mobilisation of the base that, from the bottom to the top, are organised to compel the state to guarantee a social benefit or to oblige the company to give a salary increase or anything of the sort. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that any model that promotes debate, and that may in one way or another fight against the culture of omission and political delegation, stimulating popular participation, has positive aspects. However, we encourage that this comes from below and, mainly, that it is considered as a means to something more, and not an end in itself.

**- T.L.: In France very little is known about Brazil. Besides the touristic “clichés” (Copacabana, Carnaval...), the most known are the slums and their relation with drug trafficking, violence, misery etc. How exactly is the situation in these places?**

FARJ: Brazil is a country of continental dimensions (in area, it is the fifth largest country in the world), has 26 “federated” states plus the Federal District, occupying almost half of South America, with a population of over 180 million people. Brazil has the largest economy in Latin America, with a GDP of more than 2.5 trillion Reais (more than 1.5 trillion Dollars). However, it is a country with serious social problems. Social inequality is extremely high; for example, the average income of the richest 10% of the country is 28 times higher than the average income of the poorest 40%. In the United States, the proportion is five times, 10 times in Argentina and 15 times in Colombia. 30% of the population in Brazil is very poor, while in other countries with the same income index it is 10%. Formally, there is 10% unemployment, nearly 40% are functionally illiterate (of these, almost 10% are completely illiterate), housing problems are very complicated, as well as there being a housing deficit. The country is full of buildings that, through speculation or other reasons, are not being used. Health is precarious, as well as the public transport system. In the end, it is a rich country, which retains a gap between a few who enjoy this wealth and the many who suffer the consequences. What you see about slums and drugs trafficking most probably occurs in Rio de Janeiro. The situation is not exactly like the rest of the country because poverty manifests itself in different ways. In São Paulo, for example, there is a process of “social cleansing” where the poor are driven out, every time further away, until they can no longer be seen. In Rio de Janeiro, the conformation of the city with the hills tends to show this situation to the middle and upper classes more, because it is different from other regions where the poor are increasingly far away. This problem of the state, which only works in terms of repression —

which, in an area of supposed “well-being” serves almost nothing — has created a space of power in the hills of Rio which was taken by trafficking — a kind of Brazilian mafia — with capitalist means and ends and extremely hierarchical and authoritarian organisation. Trafficking in the slums just gives the people some money, service or other type of thing, but at the same time oppresses, dominates and exploits them, even playing the role of “micro-state”.

**- T.L.: In these places, where the state hardly intervenes other than to punish, I imagine that the population has to use their creativity and capacity for self-organisation to directly resolve some of their problems. Is there not then space to articulate certain practices of self-organisation of the people with a self-managed libertarian project?**

FARJ: Not quite. It is not necessarily that, because the state is not in those areas, creativity and self-organisation come to the surface. The state is necessary to sustain capitalism, but being without the state does not mean that we are without capitalism and other forms of domination, so libertarian ideas and practices do not arise automatically. For us, to believe in this is a mistake. And neo-liberalism and the ultra-liberals are here to show that even with a criticism of the state and with an attempt to minimise its role, if this is not done together with very serious questioning about capitalism and other forms of domination there will be no creativity or self-management; in short, there will not be anarchism. There is an ideology, now transformed into culture, being transmitted by the most various of means and further development of domination that is part of the whole history of Brazil, and the world itself. We are supporters of the “proactive” anarchism of Malatesta and we believe that there are contradictions and fights in the relations of domination that occur in society. From there, we believe that the role of the anarchists is to be in those places that make explicit the contradictions of capitalism and the relationships of domination, constituting themselves as a tool of struggle; for us it is only in the midst of these contradictions of the system that anarchism is able to flourish. It is the idea of the Lusitanian anarchist Neno Vasco (who was part of the Malatestan organisationalists cited above), who said that we must throw our seeds on the most fertile ground. And for us, the seeds of anarchism must be thrown in the midst of the class struggle and where relationships of domination (mainly of capitalism) are very explicit. With a strong anarchist presence in these locations, when the contradictions and struggles present themselves, anarchism will be an alternative. If it is not widespread enough, anarchism will miss these moments and remain on the sidelines of events, it will miss the train of history. From our experience, when anarchism is being diffused among the exploited people, we have receptivity and can work with issues like anti-capitalism, direct action, direct democracy and self-management (or self-organisation). If we are not there, other ideas will appear and be responsible for the continuing domination and exploitation.

**- T.L.: To learn more about the FARJ, where can people find material or make contact?**

FARJ: Our contacts are at the end of the interview. We suggest you visit our site (though not quite complete) because there are some materials on our work there: the documents cited above; some articles, reports and interviews; some Libera; information about the books we publish, etc. People can also write to us and whoever is in Rio de Janeiro can make an appointment with us and see our activities personally. Other than that, there are materials of ours published on the websites: [anarkismo.net](http://anarkismo.net), [fondation-besnard.org](http://fondation-besnard.org), [divergences.be](http://divergences.be), [midiaindependente.org](http://midiaindependente.org), among others. People can search to find them easily.

**- T.L.: Finally, do you have a message for the companions from other countries?**

FARJ: We would like to have contact with groups / organisations and individuals who have affinity with our work and our points of view. Because we are convinced that the task of connect-

ing with all who are willing to work for social anarchism is urgent. Aside from this, we would like to say thank you for all the support we are receiving from groups / organisations from many different places!

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Thierry Libertad  
Interview with the Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Federation  
February 2008

Retrieved on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021 from [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)  
An interview with the Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Federation (FARJ). Carried out by Thierry  
Libertad for the virtual journal Divergences, between December 2007 and February 2008.  
Translation by Jonathan-ZACF.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**