

“An Organisation of Militants”

The Federación Anarquista Uruguaya

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Author's Note

A number of years ago I chanced upon a pamphlet, *The Federación Anarquista Uruguaya; Crisis, Armed Struggle and Dictatorship 1967–1985*, compiled by Paul Sharkey, at an anarchist bookfair. The contents were fairly interesting. Presented was an anecdotal, inconsistent history of an anarchist organisation in a small South American country. By all accounts the group had been involved in some intense periods of struggle, both in the labour movement and with guns in hand. There are impressive anecdotes about strikes amongst meat workers, the expropriation of a historic monument (a flag), and a number of tales of torture and loss. Uruguay may be a small nation, but it attracted the attention of US imperialism and fell foul of Operation Condor. I shelved the information in the back of my mind, curious but at the time too focused on other issues to dig deeper into the history.

A few years later, I came across the name Abraham Guillén in Scott Napalos' pamphlet critiquing Democratic Centralism. Guillén sounded like an interesting theorist. Born in rural Spain, he fought in the Spanish civil war as part of the CNT and FAI militias, before a dramatic escape to South America. Here he became a journalist and economist, even influencing the Argentine government's resistance to US imperialism at one point. But far more dramatically, Guillén became the most prominent theorist of urban guerrilla warfare. I subsequently wrote an introduction to his life and ideas, based on the one book and two pamphlets available in English, plus a little shoddy translation. It seems Guillén as a theorist, almost unknown in the anglosphere, had a rather dramatic impact upon Latin American politics. Why this is relevant is that Guillén expressed clear admiration of the FAU and their input into the Uruguayan armed struggle. He was, however, critical of the other groups he is usually associated with; the Uruguayan pan-leftist *Tupamaros*, the Argentine Peronist *Uturuncos* and *Tacuaras*, and the Brazilian *Action for National Liberation*. The FAU, and its armed wing the OPR (*Organización Popular Revolucionaria-33* or *Popular Revolutionary Organisation*), had a very different way of doing armed struggle. (Lawson, 2020) The few notes presented by Guillén further piqued my interest.

The third time that the FAU caught my attention was when I put two and two together, and realised that they are responsible for the development of *Especifist* (or, "Specific") anarchism. In the time since Guillén and the Uruguayan struggle against the dictatorship, *Especifist* anarchism has become relatively popularised across the globe. As a branch of anarchism it is extremely similar to what is more commonly known in the anglosphere as *Platformism* or *Dual Organisationalism*. However, it clearly developed in its own context, and bears such stamps as a political philosophy.

The most popular work of *Especifist* anarchism is the pamphlet *Social Anarchism and Organisation* by the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ). It lays out clear lessons about how, and why, to organise a specific anarchist organisation. The FARJ is quite successful, as is the federation they are part of, the Anarchist Coordination of Brazil. While their active involvement in social struggle is strong, it does not have the depth of history of the FAU. Wanting to understand the context of how *Especifismo* and a pamphlet like *Social Anarchism and Organisation* developed, I began to look deeper into the history of the FAU. I had hoped to present a sizeable pamphlet presenting not only the FAU's ideas but putting them into the context in which they developed.

However, such a task has proven not only quite difficult, but superfluous. I made contact Troy Kokinis, a comrade from the USA who has published two extremely useful articles on the FAU

already, and has a book lined up with AK Press. Troy spent time in Uruguay with the FAU, and is fluent in Spanish. As it stands, very little regarding the FAU has been translated. Virtually every work available in English will be referenced through the course of this text. As it stands, over the last few years, Black Rose | Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation in the USA has translated and published a number of works by the FAU. There are also texts such as Felipe Correias interview “*The Strategy of Especificismo*” with Juan Carlos Mechoso, a FAU militant which has been translated using Deep L.

Furthermore, in 2021, an anarchist group formed in Brisbane, Australia. Immediately after making themselves public, the FAU reached out to Anarchist Communists Meanjin (ACM), offering solidarity and to assist in their development. The FAU is extremely committed to sharing the lessons of their history across the globe and seeing the spread of an international movement. They sent ACM more translations of historic FAU works. Since the start of 2021, more anarchist groups have appeared in Australia, including the one I am a member of, Geelong Anarchist Communists. All of our groups have held discussions with various anarchist groups across the globe, including the FAU. 2021 was also the 65th Anniversary of the FAU, and as such a comrade from ACM published a brief article introducing their history. It is by far the most accessible text in English on the history of the organisation.

In 2021 I also contacted the FAU on a personal basis, hoping to fill in gaps in my knowledge about their history, looking for clearer answers on certain matters of theory and information regarding their practice today. Our comrades willingly obliged. Given that a comprehensive and far more detailed book will be released by AK Press soon enough, my ideas for a pamphlet, as I already mentioned, had been rendered obsolete. Nor was a very introductory article now needed. So the idea struck me to release the interview, more or less as it stands. However I thought that by tying in information I have already gleaned from all the texts available in English and adding further context to some of the questions I asked it may still be enjoyable and of use. I add context in between questions as some might seem quite or not quite linked; after all I was asking questions specifically to fill in gaps in my own research.

The interview is broken into three sections: history, theory and contemporary. I hope that I have managed to accurately portray the words of our Uruguayan comrades, that the interview is enjoyable to read, and that I have managed to tie the information together appropriately for the reader. Though the timeline skips around a little due to the nature of the questions, by the time the reader has finished I hope they will have formed a fairly coherent picture of events discussed.

Questions I have asked will be in Bold and Italic plus marked by “TL”, answers will be marked by “FAU:” All plain text between questions will be my notes. The lessons that can be drawn from the history of the FAU are not only incredibly relevant today, but will possibly be more so as the world enters new stages of crisis. The struggles of our comrades in the FAU have been nothing short of inspirational, and we remember those who gave their lives in the struggle for socialism and liberty.

Thankyou to Nathaniel from the FAU for taking the time to answer my questions, and to Troy for sharing his works and knowledge of the FAU with me.

Arriba los que luchan! Up with those who fight!

History

There are a few basic facts that should be understood about Uruguay to help understand the context of Uruguayan anarchism. Uruguay is a small country of several million citizens, located on the *Rio de la Plata* (river of silver) which includes parts of Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil. It was one of the last countries to be colonised by the Spanish. Its capital, Montevideo was established by the Spanish, and an overwhelming majority of Uruguayans live in cities. Historically, the country has been far more urban than its neighbours. In the early 1800s, the Spanish were overthrown by forces led by Jose Artigas, who established a federalist Republic. In a broad sense, the Republic has been considered fairly progressive and liberal. Uruguay was one of the first countries in the world to grant universal suffrage and the 8 hour day. An early president, José Batlle y Ordóñez, established broad social safety nets between 1903–1915, including lifting the literacy level to 95% and making university free (Fairbanks, 2015). Even in contemporary sense, Uruguay was also one of the first countries in the world to legalise gay marriage and marijuana (Andavolu, 2014). Today the nation even draws 97% of its energy from renewable sources (Bertram, 2020). Through the Second World War, Uruguay sold large quantities of meat and wool to the Allies, and to the Americans during the Korean war, succeeding as a strong export based economy. The economic success paid for a strong welfare state, nicknamed the “Switzerland of Latin America” (Zuzenko, 2021). Uruguay then has long been (relatively speaking) composed of a well educated, highly unionised working class.

It should be no surprise then that in such a country, radical ideologies have found a solid basis. This includes anarchism, which has a long history in Uruguay. As early as 1872 there was a section of the First International established in Montevideo. It considered itself “federalist” and “anti-authoritarian”, and was comprised of roughly 2000 members. By 1875 the section published a pamphlet declaring itself inspired by Bakunin and anarchist ideas. By 1876, the section was influential in establishing the FORU (*Federación Obrera Regional Uruguaya – Regional Workers Federation of Uruguay*) which published its own paper. By 1882, specifically anarchist newspapers were in circulation. These would continue over the coming decades, largely focused on labour struggle and internationalism. Uruguay was home not only to descendents of Spanish colonialism, but a large Italian migrant population. Some anarchist periodicals even appeared in both Spanish and Italian. (Cappelletti, 2017) While the majority of Uruguayan anarchists focused their attentions on the labour movement, this period after all being the heyday of anarcho-syndicalism, Uruguay also felt the impact of so called ‘expropriator anarchism.’ Though it was a much larger phenomenon in Argentina, expropriation tactics spread across the Rio de la Plata into Montevideo. Infamous ‘expropriators’ such as Roscigna, hid in Montevideo, bringing their ideas around violent direct action with them (Bayer, 2015). Sometimes this resulted in bloody conflict within the anarchist movement between the syndicalists and the expropriators. But lines also blurred and unionists found themselves involved in direct action, such as members of the “Sociedad de Resistencia de Obreros Panaderos” or Bakers Union, who were involved in a violent attack on the owners of the Estrella del Norte bakery in 1927 (Cuesta, 2020).¹

¹ A number of these anarchists were arrested, and ended up jailed in Punta Carretas, Montevideo. They made a miraculous escape using a tunnel dug by other comrades. In the 1970s, members of the FAU and Tupamaros made an escape from the same prison using a new tunnel dug by OPR members. The old and new tunnels intersected, where the escaping FAU members left a note pinned to the wall “Two generations, one struggle: FREEDOM.” At the time, the escape was the largest jail break in history.

Some lessons from the expropriators were carried forward into the new Uruguayan anarchist movement post-Second World War. In 1956, a number of anarchist groups came together for a national conference. These included anarcho-syndicalist groups from a number of industries, students from a university Fine Arts faculty plus an anarchist workers collective in a Faculty of Medicine, the Comunidad del Sur (an experimental community), and a few educationalists gathered around Luce Fabbri.² The subsequent result was the establishment of the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya. (Sharkey, 2009) Within a few years the FAU would split, with the more programmatic, labour-oriented anarchists retaining the name. But that will be dealt with later.

Since the establishment of the FORU, there have been a number of splits in the labour movement. Several mass union bodies were formed on a largely ideological basis. These included anarcho-syndicalist unions, Christian unions, and a body controlled by a pro-Moscow Communist Party. During a wave of strikes in the 1950s the labour movement found itself fractured. Conferences were held establishing a new, unitary labour federation (Kokinis, Forthcoming).

[TL]: In the early 1950s there were a number of Uruguayan union federations; FORU, USU, UGT, CSU and the conservative unions. These were succeeded in the 60s by a new Federation – the CNT. As I understand the history, the FAU played a significant role in the establishment of the CNT. Can you explain what the “autonomous unions” that existed before the CNT were, how they came to be, and why they cohered into a new union body. Why did the FAU choose to help establish new unions rather than fight “from inside”?

[FAU]: No, FAU does not create new unions. FAU makes a proposal and works to generate in the union, unity of all unions in a “coordinating center”. This proposal was made in 1956 from the Meat Federation (union of workers in the refrigeration industry), where FAU had an impact, but was not a majority in that union, most of the union leadership were “Batllistas”, as was the unions base also (sector of the Colorado Party³ of a certain “progressive” tendency in those years). But there was a strong experience and fighting spirit. For more than a decade there were important strikes (of the meat in 1943, of the seafarers in 1947, of the public companies in 1951) and in each of them the support and solidarity of other unions was deployed.

We can say that in those years there were three tendencies or currents within the labor movement: 1) the autonomous unions, many of those who came from the anarcho-syndicalist tradition or the FORU, both already in decline; 2) “yellow” or pro-employer unions and 3) the current of the Communist Party with its “central” under the aegis of Moscow.

The FAU shared the proposal by various militants in the trade union movement about the need to unite to face the coming crisis and repression. This [the crisis and subse-

² Luce was the daughter of the famous Italian anarchist Luigi Fabbri. The family escaped fascism in Italy to live in Montevideo, where Luigi died in 1935. Italian anarchism had a huge influence across the Rio de la Plata. A small example; Errico Malatesta drafted the statutes for the first union in Argentina. That union was the Bakers Union, and the influence of anarchists is still evident culturally. Many sweet treats sold at bakers in Argentina are still nicknamed after anarchist themes.

³ Uruguay has two historically dominant parties. For a period, the dominance of the parties was even part of the constitution. The Colorado party is the more ‘liberal’ of the two.

quent repression] was already manifesting and a strong and developing trade union movement was needed.

When the CNT was formed in 1964 it took place within the framework of a broad process of debate in the union bases; it was not a discussion of leadership, but factory by factory and workplace by workplace. That is why at the same time it was decided that if a coup d'état were to take place, the trade union movement would respond with the General Strike with occupation of the workplaces, as happened in 1973.⁴

The unions adhering to the Communist Party only joined the CNT in 1966, when the union unification congress was held. It should be noted that the pro-employer unions ceased to exist, after extensive work by anarchists and a combative militancy in general.

Within the new CNT, the FAU played a leading role by establishing the so-called “Combative Tendency”, which united radical unions, far-left political organisations and rank and file workers around a functional shared platform. Anti-capitalism, direct action and rank and file control were the core principles.

[TL]: The FAU was key in establishing the “Combative Tendency” inside the CNT, made up of minority factions that supported more radical forms of worker democracy and direct action. What other organisations made up the bulk of the Tendency and how did the FAU relate with them?

[FAU]: The Tendency not only brought together small minorities or factions, but entire unions and federations such as the Federation of Meat, Textiles and FUNSA (tire manufacturing). Groups of those unions where the majority orientation was the Communist Party also participated.

Practically three political groups participated within the Tendency: 1) FAU and our public expression from 1968, the ROE; 2) the GAU (unifying action groups), Christian and Marxist grassroots groups, combative at the time; 3) the militants linked to the MLN Tupamaros, with little organic relationship among themselves but who coordinated in the Tendency.

The relationship was normal, natural let's say. Not without controversy, but fraternal. The Tendency actually worked for general things of the trade union movement, but the agitation and daily task of supporting conflicts and mobilizations were made by ROE.

Above, the ROE is mentioned for the first time. The Resistencia Obrero Estudiantil (Workers-Student Resistance) was founded in 1968, as a means to bring together disparate militant groups in Uruguayan society and channel them towards combative struggle. Furthermore, the FAU, along with other groups associated with the journal *Epocha*, had been declared illegal in 1967. The existence of ROE gave the FAU space to do above-ground work. The ROE was simultaneously based amongst secondary (high school) teachers, arts and medical students, and a number of rank

⁴ In 1973, the military finally overthrew civilian rules and established a dictatorship. This had been threatened for quite a few years beforehand, but a ‘civilian dictatorship’ (i.e. authoritarian democracy) had been uneasily maintained.

and file unions also affiliated to the Tendencia Combativa. It also published its own journal, *Rojo y Negro* (Schmidt, 2020).

[TL] In the 1960s the FAU established a mass organisation – the Student-Worker Resistance (ROE). Can you explain the reasons for building a mass worker-student organisation? What was it’s role?

[FAU]: For this there are two reasons:

1. FAU is outlawed at the end of 1967 and a “legal” or public face was needed that could issue an opinion, propaganda be on the street with a political line.
2. Bring together the growth that was taking place at that time and the great social explosion that meant the year 1968, both at the union and student level. A whole generation of young (very young) militants of Secondary and Technical Schools appears who join the struggle and it was necessary to bring that together, organize it and carry out a whole political-ideological work with that militancy. It is a time of great growth. A new stage was opening.

It is worth expanding a little here. While at one level, the much larger ROE (at its peak roughly 10,000 members) developed its own theory and culture outside of FAU bounds, on the other it really was an expression of class struggle and solidarity. The ROE was effectively a “rearguard” to the “vanguard” that was the CNT, and in particular the *Tendencia*. The ROE recognised that its function as a social movement was to help those not involved in the union movement find a way to fight. In Kokinas’ article *An Anarchy for the South*, he quotes from a 1970 ROE communique:

“There are many people... who do not belong to unions but who are prepared to fight... We should develop the coordination of activities amongst groups who share our tendencies within the same zone or neighbourhood... non-unionised factory or shop workers, students, the unemployed, and housewives all deserve the chance to participate in the fight.” (Kokinis, Forthcoming)

And fight they did. In 1969, during a meatpackers strike, the ROE established roadblocks and ‘toll booths’ to collect money from drivers to fund the strike. Students carried out raids on supermarkets to feed families. Unions from the Tendencia (with significant ROE caucuses) established donation boxes and refused to transport goods on trains that would undermine the efforts. When trucks were used to help shift produce instead, they were set on fire. The entire struggle escalated into near insurrectionary proportions, with children in the neighbourhoods pelting police with slingshots from the rooftop as the workers faced the police down in the street (Kokinis, 2020).

[TL] Did the ROE act as a “legal” or “above ground” organisation for the FAU to pursue it’s politics while the FAU could remain clandestine?

[FAU]: The FAU was outlawed and therefore operated underground. ROE is broader than FAU; it includes a lot of non-FAU militancy. There are libertarian militants, others who are not decidedly so. But there were an interesting number of colleagues who are going to join FAU over time. They train and make their first weapons in ROE, especially the younger ones.

The FAU-ROE-OPR 33 triad can be said to be an articulated set, with different levels and responsibilities of the militants, but where all the tasks were relevant to the joint development of the tasks of revolutionary intention.

The OPR-33, or Popular Revolutionary Organisation, was the militant complement to the FAU's strategy. The strategy known as the Las Dos Patos (two feet), aimed to escalate the class conflict via means of direct action, creating a revolutionary subject amongst the workers and challenging US imperialism along the way. With FAU at the political core, the OPR-33 was subjected to the anarchist party's political line and use as an auxiliary support for social struggles. Unlike Che Guevara's *focoism*,⁵ so popular in Latin America at the time, the armed apparatus was never considered a vanguard.

[TL]: I have read that the ROE was directed by a “clandestine... technical support and liaison committee” of FAU militants named Alejandra. How did this function, or is it a misrepresentation? Isn't it anti-democratic to have a mass organisation directed by a secret minority?

[FAU]: Alejandra was the part of FAU in charge of the task of ROE and everything strictly popular (union, student and neighborhood). It was not directed vertically, or from the “party to the masses” as in Marxist logic, but a collective construction where FAU had weight because its militancy was present one hundred percent in ROE. In addition, FAU had militants in the union leadership of important unions such as FUNSA.

ROE was an area of turmoil, that was its main task. Support for conflicts, propaganda, sale of the newspaper (“Companion”) and tasks related to the agile and dynamic situation of the moment. ROE worked through groups of each place of insertion (factory, high schools, union or guild, neighborhood) and there was debate about the tasks to be carried out and also about the policy to be developed. Some general plenaries were held from time to time, where the line of action for the moment was marked and then debated. The meeting places of ROE were often the FUNSA union and the bakers' union.

Everyone who participated in ROE knew that it was a FAU project and that it was in turn linked to OPR33. No one considered the operation undemocratic because ROE had its own life, its own dynamics.

Returning to the answer about Alejandra: it was the part of FAU, composed of various groups, which was in charge of ROE and all the social and public activity in those planes. And Alejandra's activity was coordinated in the Federal Board of FAU through its managers with the other activities (armed activity of OPR and general policy of FAU). Let's say, FAU was an organization with two “legs”: the armed OPR and the social-political, ROE.

After this first discussion of the OPR, ROE, and Alejandra I asked the comrades a number of specific questions about the armed struggle. This is related to some of my research on Abraham

⁵ See Guerrilla Warfare, Che Guevara.

Guillén (who will come up in the discussion) and trying to discern both some of the technical aspects of the struggle, and the differences between the FAUs approach to armed struggle and that of other Marxist and anti-imperialist groups at the time. The FAU was, of course, influenced by the wave of armed struggle that swept the continent during the period. In its formative years the FAU had expressed “critical support” for the Cuban Revolution. Not so much for the regime, but for the process and the opportunities it opened up in Latin America. The world had entered a stalemate between the USA and the Soviet Union. On a continent oppressed by American imperialism, the breakthrough of the Cuban Revolution had a huge impact on popular consciousness. Despite the ambiguity around Cuba, the FAU was immediately critical of the *foco* strategy. This did not, however, stop them from participating in pan-revolutionary-left efforts. They joined a coalition named *El Coordinador*, Uruguay’s first armed struggle group. It included the Peasant Support Movement (MAC), Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), the Artigas Union of Sugarcane Workers (UTAA) and the FAU. The FAU participated in the infamous raid on the Swiss Rifle Club, where the armed struggle began in earnest.⁶ The FAU left shortly thereafter, arguing that the *foco* theory would fail. The other organisations went on to form the basis of Uruguay’s famous Tupamaros (Kokinis, Forthcoming).

[TL]: Next I want to ask about the OPR-33 and Violencia-FAI. Anarchism has a history of mass armed struggle – such as the Insurrectionary Army in the Ukraine, the armed struggle of the Bulgarian Anarchist-Communists, and the Defense Committees of the CNT. However, the armed struggle of the FAU is quite unique. For a start, the OPR & V-FAI were subordinate to the political organisation (which was also at odds with focoist theory at the time), unlike the RIAU. The CNT defense committees were theoretically subordinate to a mass trade union. In terms of theory and history the OPR-33-/V-FAI experience has also been analysed more clearly than the prior struggles. During the formation of its armed wing, did the FAU reference previous attempts at mass armed struggle by Anarchists?

[FAU]: Of course. The reference was always in the CNT, the Spanish Revolution, the Machnovistchina, the anarchist expropriators of the Río de la Plata... Anarchism here has a long tradition of direct action. All this was part of it and we can say that there is a continuity in that sense.

It is true that the organizational form and conception is different, since we are Especifists. Therefore, armed action depended on the Political Organization. OPR only had tactical autonomy to carry out equipment operations, but in reality, all operations (bank expropriations, kidnappings, etc.) were carried out according to political criteria, that is, at the decision of the Organization. OPR was in charge of their planning and carrying it out, but the political decision to carry them out was made by FAU.

An attempt was even made to avoid any militaristic deviation, which was very common at the time in the other guerrillas. The comrade of OPR was not a soldier, he was a fellow anarchist committed to the revolutionary struggle. There were no military

⁶ For an enjoyable history of the armed struggle in Uruguay, see the episode “Christmas non-Bastard: The Tupamaros of Uruguay” of the Behind the Bastards podcast.

degrees but “responsible”. The term “commander” was not used, only in jest. This whole question of a militaristic sign was avoided. Periodic evaluations of the militants were carried out and work was carried out on their political formation. Each group of OPRs discussed the same thing as the groups of “Alejandra”, of course, perhaps with more emphasis on armed tasks and everything that this concerns because of their specificity, but they also discussed general politics and the struggles of the moment.

In the same way the comrades of “Alejandra” discussed the armed activity.

What was the difference between the OPR-33 and the V-FAI?

The FAI Violence groups were part of an intermediate level, between ROE and FAU-OPR, since they were dedicated to a type of agile action and allowed the fogeo of militants to later join OPR.

Aspects of the answers above led immediately into what I wanted to ask next; I wanted to know about the relationship between Abraham Guillén and the OPR-33. Guillén had also advocated that armed groups make efforts to undermine the ‘militarisation’ of the organisation. In his time, Guillén identified as an anarchist, but had more to do with Marxist groups in Latin America. (Lawson, 2020) So did Guillén merely observe the FAU and comment upon their activity? Or did he directly advise the FAU and were their military activities based upon his ideas? Or were the points of convergence in their practice and ideas the results of a shared anarchist ideology?

[TL]: In his “El pueblo en armas: estrategia revolucionaria”, Abraham Guillén recommends that guerrillas delegate and rotate command, that all efforts should be made to avoid a cult of personality. All actions should be discussed by the fighters before undertaking them. That guerrillas do not take hostages unless demands can be met by the enemy and that they always aim to arouse public sympathy, and avoid assassinations unless absolutely necessary. Also he advocates the organisation is made up of proletarians rather than peasants or petty-bourgeois revolutionaries. Did the OPR-33 operate by these principles? Did they help avoid authoritarian degeneration?

[FAU]: Guillén gave talks here in Uruguay and made contributions to various groups. But in addition to Guillén’s concern, these problems were always a concern of anarchist militancy, also of FAU.

As we said, military grades were not used, there were managers of the Teams, which could be changed. In addition, [there were] periodic evaluations of militants, [we wanted those who] prioritized solidarity, modesty and ability to deliver first; then the technical-operational aspects.

OPR was first formed with militants from the working class. When the OPR work was established, only students entered. Other guerrillas in Uruguay, such as the MLN, were formed mainly on the basis of students and the petty-bourgeoisie, which gave it not only another social component, but also ideological.⁷ The task was not simple or romantic, but arduous, complex and full of sacrifices, among other things,

⁷ The Tupamaros for example were established by middle class intellectuals.

passing through the hands of the enemy and suffering torture and prisons. We had to keep fighting in each of these situations, even. It was far from believing that the revolution was just around the corner.

For a fascinating case study on the everyday activities of OPR-33 guerrillas, see *The Women of Casa Emma: Social Subversion and the Lives of Armed Anarchist Militants in Uruguay, 1967–1974*, by Troy Kokinis in Vol 108 of *Histoire Social*.

[TL]: Can you tell me about Abraham Guillén’s relationship with the FAU? He gave military advice, but just how close was he to the organisation?

[FAU]: In the period he was here in Uruguay he collaborated with various tasks, but he did not give courses, he did do some talk. I consulted comrade Juan Carlos Mechoso and he tells us about Guillén: “With Guillén there was a good fraternal relationship, he came to the FAU premises almost every day, he lived near the premises. He told us about many general topics, his time in the Uturuncos in Argentina etc. *He had no collaboration with the OPR*. What he did do was a kind of course on strategy with Fomento (Federal Board of FAU at that time). This same course he did with the Tupamaros. We believe that it was a good course, in addition its proposals in aspects that mattered a lot to us were related, urban guerrilla issues and work at the level of “masses”.

About “Guerrilla Urbana” he then made a brochure that we put together and printed ourselves in the Coopograf cooperative that we had at that time. Then he brought a volume like 500 pages that we couldn’t do right away and left the original with us. When an Argentine historian came, some time ago, who is currently writing about the history of Guillen, we gave it to him to see.⁸ He thought he had read everything published by Guillén, but in another booklet we had here he found the reference to a couple of books he didn’t know.”

During the period of armed struggle, militants moved back and forth between Uruguay and Argentina. Argentina did not fall to its military dictatorship until after Uruguay, meaning that many OPR-33 and FAU militants escaped across the borders. During the US *Operation Condor*, dozens of militants were rounded up, kidnapped, tortured and executed. An example is Gerado Gatti. Gerado had been a popular leader in the FAU and in Uruguay’s trade union movement. He was the first secretary of the CNT when it was established in 1964.⁹ After the coup, he escaped to Argentina where he and his daughter were kidnapped and taken back to Uruguay. Gerado at least, was seen at the Orletti motor factory, where he was tortured. The military kidnapped another FAU militant, Washington Perez, who they brought to the factory to see Gerado. They thought they could extort the FAU for several million dollars that they had expropriated from banks. Gatti told Perez that it was a trap, and not to return with the money. Perez was released, but Gatti was never seen again.

In Argentina, a number of anarcho-sindicalists established a clandestine organisation called *Libertarian Resistance*. They had a base in the textile, rubber, dockworkers, woodworkers, graph-

⁸ A biography of Abraham Guillen was recently published in Spanish.

⁹ Leon Duarte, another FAU militant, was also on the CNT secretariat when it was established.

ics and teachers trade unions, where they worked to prepare workers for resistance to the imminent dictatorship. Libertarian Resistance activists also helped smuggle FAU and OPR militants across the border.

[TL]: Libertarian Resistance in Argentina also had armed sections. I've seen references to them as "syndicalist cells" and that they were tasked with "defending factories" but I haven't come across any more details in English.¹⁰ Could you explain that period of armed struggle in Argentina and how it was also connected to the FAU?

[FAU]: Libertarian Resistance was a clandestine organization, due to the very context in which it arises. There was a very close bond with FAU, but also a good level of compartmentalization. All the work of FAU failed in Argentina in 1976, within the framework of the Condor Plan, and Libertarian Resistance was dismantled in 1978.

Libertarian Resistance was an organization with important insertion in some union sectors and armed action similar to that of FAU. They were also critics of foquismo. It should be borne in mind that their actions were very small compared to larger armed groups such as Montoneros and the PRT-ERP.

[TL] The OPR period is long past. In the past the FAU has been very critical of the focoist strategy, as evidenced by documents like COPEI. How does the FAU today analyse the successes and failures of the armed struggle, especially having been through the experience itself?

[FAU]: COPEI sums up this analysis in a very good way. It presents the condensed criticisms of *foquismo* and everything that generated that way of acting, or the import of pre-established models, which had worked in other places. It was about elaborating theory for the here and now of Uruguay. And Cuba was not Uruguay, nor was Argentina Uruguay.

The role of the armed struggle was clearly delineated by the FAU. The apparatus was not expected to make the revolution; it was only useful to complete certain tasks in relation to it. The expropriations and kidnappings were only undertaken to further the class struggle. OPR activists intervened in a number of strikes after they had reached a standstill. For example, a dispute at the Seral shoe factory in 1971 dragged out for months. The boss ignored all the workers demands and actions, and even called in local fascists to intimidate the workers. After the ROE caucus in the workplace requested assistance, OPR militants kidnapped the boss's son and issued a list of demands including backpay, school supplies for local school children, clothing for children in a local slum and publishing the agreed upon terms in the national press. All conditions were agreed to and the strike was won. The FAU-ROE-OPR connection meant that a solid basis in the working class was the priority, only undertaking action that assisted popular struggle.

Despite the existence of a small armed section under the control of the anarchist organisation, it was never doubted the insurrection would be made by the mass of workers. As the eve of the dictatorship approached, the Tendencia became even more popular amongst the workers, and the FAU escalated it's work in preparation for the confrontation.

¹⁰ Besides a number of very small personal biographies, I still haven't found a comprehensive history of Libertarian Resistance. If anyone reading this text knows of such a work, please get in contact.

[TL]: In 1972 the FAU and ROE called a mass meeting of CNT “base committees” circumventing the CNTs bureaucracy. How much power and autonomy did the unions’ base committees have? Are the unions still structured this way today?

[FAU]: Yes, that organizational form is maintained, although there is always the struggle against the centralism of the reformist and bureaucratic currents. The Combative Tendency as a whole had influence on a third of the trade union movement. It was no minor influence. But above all, each conflict was somehow a concrete experience of struggle and solidarity and the possibility of expanding the margins of political positions.

[TL]: In June, 1973 Bordaberry launched his coup and established a dictatorship. In response the CNT launched a 15 day general strike, including factory occupations. Can you tell us more about this strike? How broad was it amongst the class? Did workers restart production under their own control? Why did it fall apart?

[FAU]: The general strike against the coup d’état was decided by the whole trade union movement in 1964, nine years before it took place. In 1964 the coup d’état took place in Brazil and there were already rumors of a coup in Uruguay. Therefore, the workers’ movement, while the formation of the CNT is ending, debates the need for a general strike with occupation of the workplaces if there is a coup d’état.

This previous debate is what allows the massiveness of it and that the whole country is paralyzed for 15 days. The strike was important even in some cities in the north of the country. Let us take into account the great concentration of population – and of industries at that time – in Montevideo, the capital of the country. They even occupied and organized workers from factories that had not been unionized until that time.

The repression was very harsh and it evicted several factories during the strike, but the next day they were occupied again. Some factories were occupied up to 7 times after the evictions.

Of course, the reformist sectors linked to the Communist Party did not want the development of the strike, they tried to stop or minimize it, but they could not face the decision of the workers. The strike was extended and developed while there was a conviction that this was the resolution taken to confront the coup d’état.

Essential services (health, energy) were kept functioning but only as necessary and obviously with busy work premises. The oil refinery was paralyzed.

If there is no doubt that the general strike was a massive and unprecedented phenomenon, it was made possible by the degree of development of the workers’ movement and because there was a strong sector within it that promoted class independence and practiced it. Logically, within the framework of a trade union and student movement that fought daily and resisted the repressive policy harshly. Undoubtedly, the general strike was possible due to the process of union unity that allowed all the unions to be brought together in a “Convention”.

The strike fell because it was becoming very difficult to sustain it, the continuous evictions of the repressive forces were maintained, and also some sectors began to lift the strike gradually such as transport. There are also several debates in that regard about what to do with fuels before the strike is lifted, for example.

Some sectors of reformism (some leaders of the Communist Party) were negotiating with the military, in turn. And in turn, the general strike only had the workers' and popular forces, there were no levels of armed action of a massive nature that could turn that strike into an insurrection or move on to another stage of struggle with such characteristics.

When the CNT decided to lift the strike, two unions (FUNSA workers and drink workers) voted against it, and the federation of private health workers abstained. These three unions draft the 3F Document (it was three trade union federations that proposed it) and in it a strong criticism of the method of reformism was made, and it [reformism] was pointed out as responsible for having lost the strike. This method, which operated in the long term and accustomed a large part of the trade union movement to a struggle within the frameworks established by law and the political system, meant that the workers' unions did not develop previous experiences of advanced struggle.

Let us say that just as [we were] critical of foquismo at the level of armed action, so it was with reformism in trade union and political action.

There are two important documents available in English regarding the FAUs intervention into the trade union struggle before the coup. These are titled "7 FAU Letters and Two Trade Union documents", available on the Anarkismo website. As we know, the entire country was aware that a military coup was on the way. The question was how to prepare for that. While other left organisations put their hope in the electoral *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front), the FAU focused on preparing the mass of workers, through a culture of direct action, to immediately challenge the state. The Tendencia was their means of doing this. (Lawson, 2021)

The dictatorship eventually gave way to democratic elections in 1984. But in the years between 1972–84, thousands were jailed and tortured, and hundreds executed. Usually in torture camps in Argentina. This included a disproportionate number of FAU activists. After the return to democracy, the CNT was re-established, though it is now the PIT-CNT. Syndicalist influences can still be seen, particularly in unions that had strong ROE and FAU influence. In particular amongst teachers and the FUNSA tire factory union.

Theory

"Theory is an instrument, a tool, that serves a purpose. It exists to produce the knowledge that we need to produce. The first thing that we care about knowing is our country. If theory is not capable of producing new helpful knowledge for our political practice, [the] theory is absolutely useless, it is only a theme for idle babble, for sterile ideological polemics." (Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, 1972)

Since Uruguay returned to bourgeois democracy, the FAU has rebuilt itself. By all accounts it still maintains several premises, a printing press, and radio stations. (Sharkey, 2009) The ROE also still exists, although it is not as large as it was during the 60's-70's. Given that any organisation will reflect on its past, I wanted to ask a few questions about theoretical developments the FAU has made in the last few generations. While core documents like Huerta Grande have been translated, contemporary ones have not. The impressions I get however, are that the organisation once dubbed as "anarcho-marxist" or "neo-anarchist", for their rejection of all individualist tendencies in anarchism have moved towards a more subjectivist analysis of the world, closer to strands of autonomist Marxism (at least in terms of conceptualisation, if not in terms of organisation) than their previous Bakuninist roots.

It should be stated however that questions of theory were not the core focus of my interview, so there are less questions and less elaboration than in other sections. I was well aware that theoretical concepts can be the most difficult to translate correctly, and I think that's better left to people more fluent in both languages. If comrades want to know more about the FAU's theoretical conceptions, I suggest that it can be best gleaned from reading all the texts in English, including Felipe Correas interview with Juan Carlos Mechoso, "The Strategy of Especificismo."

[TL]: The FARJ document "Social Anarchism and Organisation" has been studied in Australia by all the anarchist-communist groups over the last few years. In it the FARJ propose a model of "center-periphery" relations that steps away from the traditional Marxist and anarchist understanding of class, and places equal importance on peripheral social groups as opposed to the traditional conception of the proletariat in a revolutionary process. Given the FAU has been such an influential source for the Brazilian anarchists, does the FAU propose a similar model of Society?

[FAU]: Usually the concept center-periphery was used in the economic theory of dependence, a current of Latin American economists to explain the relations between poor or dependent countries and the first world. FAU used this concept in that sense, it still uses it today, although it requires some adaptation according to the new world reality.

As far as social classes are concerned, we escape from any consideration based on the economic seat of the class or on an economic interpretation. We define not only social classes by their place in production but by their ideology and social practices. We understand those essential elements to understand classes and their relationships. By ideology we mean a set of notions, worldview, concepts, feelings, belonging, that social groups develop and that are a substantial part of their group life as a class. The working class, for example, is not only an economic situation but a set of practices and notions that make these workers live in a certain way, and this includes their organizations and their struggles, their concrete experiences in that sense.

That is why FAU focuses its attention on the set of oppressed classes, including within them the unemployed, part-time and temporary workers, peasants, indigent people, etc. All these organized sectors should be articulated as we understand in a Front of Oppressed Classes, which articulates their experiences and struggles and advances in a process of rupture.

In short, we no longer use the classic concept of “proletariat” as a global concept that points to the whole class, but we understand that the proletariat is a part of the working class.

How does this translate into militant terms? We organise both at the union and neighborhood level, developing a task as global as possible in the set of oppressed classes in all those places where they are. We also organise at the level of the student movement, housing cooperatives, etc.

In the case of Uruguay, the historical and current weight of the trade union movement in the popular movement is undeniable, but we do not neglect tasks on other fronts of insertion that allow us to organize with other oppressed sectors, ones that are not framed in union work.

[TL]: Documents like Social Anarchism and Organisation (by the FARJ) also give the impression that Especifist groups consider “Marxism” (as a whole) as it’s more crude Marxist-Leninist (Stalinist) forms. (Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro, 2008) But what is the FAUs relationship with the ideas of Marx himself? Or tendencies like the Council Communists and so called Left Communists?

[FAU]: We reject the categories of Marxist analysis, its mode of analysis and its militant methods. Stalinism was not a deviation, it is implicit in the Marxist-Leninist conception, therefore, we do not try to rescue Marx and his conceptual body because he about thinks the world, capitalist society and revolutionary processes from a purely economic conception. The history of humanity is more than just the history of the class struggle and it is a fantasy to believe that the capitalist system itself is marching towards its destruction by creating its own gravediggers. A revolutionary process requires the organization and will of the people, it is not a scientific process but a political and social one. Marx believes he does science when what he does is ideology or doctrine, he makes an ideological proposal for the interpretation of society. For us the sphere of theory refers to the theoretical tools of analysis, the field of theory is the field of science in our conception.

Councilist ideas have not had much influence here, although they were known about in the 60’s and we read them, but their proposals arise from Marxist conceptions. They have also been a concrete influence on certain processes. We are moving away from attempts to synthesise between Anarchism and Marxism. We debated this in the organisation in the 60’s and rejected it. They are two different ideologies that start from a different basis. There was a reason for the debates between Bakunin and Marx. As for the FAU, we take much of our theory from Bakunin and Malatesta.

[TL]: Juan Carlos Mechoso makes several references to Michel Foucault in interviews. This is somewhat surprising as most anarchist [communists] don’t use Foucault’s ideas for analysis, given the often ambiguous nature of his theories. What did the FAU gain from studying him?

[FAU]: We gain an infinite number of things. Foucault is one of the most important thinkers and theorists of the twentieth century. His analysis of power allows us to place it in a series of relationships and understand power not merely as something

that is imposed but as something that is built and disseminated throughout the set of social relations. This allows us to speak of the Construction of People's Power as a capacity for action and organization of the people in their different grassroots organizations and their articulation from the bottom up, in a federalist way.

On the other hand, we take from Foucault a good part of his tools of analysis that have helped us to think and interpret capitalist society and power relations, precisely quieting the centrality of economic processes and placing the emphasis on other spheres of domination. It has allowed us to better ground this concept of Domination, which also refers to our interpretation of capitalism and classes in this society.

We do not consider his theories to be ambiguous, but have been taken ambiguously by some of his followers. Foucault works on power, knowledge-power relations and the processes of subjectivation (formation of the subject, let's say) and on the construction of theoretical tools and analysis of a scientific nature. He is one of the most interesting structuralist and poststructuralist authors and precisely his structural analysis seems appropriate, inscribing the contributions of this current as important for our theoretical analyses since the '60s.

That is, in FAU we not only study or read the classics of Anarchism or the left in general, but we pay fundamental attention to authors of these currents from which we can take concrete elements. This does not mean that we become faithful reproducers of an author or a current, but that we take those concepts that we consider to be inscribed within our conception and conceptual framework and collaborate in the development of theoretical tools for our analysis of reality and political proposals.

The pointed question about Foucault relates to part of a modern text jointly produced by the FAU and the Argentine FAG where the organisations address issues of domination, power and ideology. They state:

“The ideological-cultural aspect presents its own problems. First of all, how does one establish the relationship between body and ideology or ideologies, domination and ideology, practice-ideology? Here Foucault’s concept of the social construction of the subject seems to be of primary importance. In other words, the subject as a historical construction. By ideology we mean, as we have already pointed out, not only ideas, representations and behaviour. If ideology is composed of internal systems which also have their “relative autonomy”, ideas-practices, technologies of power, representations and behaviours, it would be necessary to see how the concept of disciplining can be articulated for the more direct functioning of the system in general and for specific behaviours.” (Galazara & Tavarez, 2019)

While by no means abandoning an analysis of class society, the FAU appear to be interested in asking deeper questions around the construction of a revolutionary subject, unsatisfied by answers previously supplied by Marxist thinkers. The construction of revolutionary subjects is linked to the means of practicing direct action on a mass scale, as in the days of the FAU-OPR-ROE-CNT connection. This is what Especificists mean by the slogan “build Popular Power.” For more on the concept of Popular Power see Felipe Corrêa’s essays *Create a Strong People* and *Anarchism, Class, Power and Social Change*.

[TL]: What is the FAUs general view of the revolutionary transition? The establishment of “Soviets”, or of “factory councils”, or are the unions the basis of the new organs of workers power? Or is it something else?

[FAU]: We have developed this theme in our Declaration of Principles, we have dedicated an entire chapter to it, which shows the importance of the subject for us. This does not mean that we have a “manual” or “recipe book” to follow faithfully about popular organizational forms. We understand that it is a complex process, that it is not passed from one day to the next to Libertarian Socialism, that the social revolution enables a “leap” but that leap is not magical and definitive, that many political forces will be operating and the class enemy too, the same imperial foreign forces.

The bodies that are created at the popular level in the run-up to the final insurrection will be the ones that will have to be organized in a federative way. We do not have an a priori about these organisms, whether they are councils, collectivities or whatever they are called, but it will be the organisms that take into their hands certain functions of society. There must also be a general political body, of a federal nature as we said. There should also be territorial bodies that guarantee services and distribution of goods, for example, as well as the use of the territory. Revolution is not merely an economic fact, it encompasses all spheres of human life.

Of course, the history of revolutionary processes marks the creation of councils or similar organs, but in general we prefer to speak of grassroots popular organizations, leaving open the possibility of creation and experimentation in this sense throughout the long journey towards social revolution.

[TL]: Your organisation has a sophisticated understanding of the relationship and differences between theory and ideology. Could you explain how the FAU understands each and how they relate?

Yes, theory refers to the field of science, of the categories of analysis. Ideology refers on the one hand to our doctrine (Anarchism), on the other to the set of social values and notions that the people can build in a long process of struggle and that many of them already exist today because they have a long historical journey. The role of the Political Organization is to enhance the positive values of the oppressed classes and to support the ideological struggle against the values of contrary ideologies, especially the one produced by the system.

Theory is a specific field of Political Organization. It is the study and elaboration of concepts to apply them to the interpretation of reality and, obviously, linked to the militant activity of the Organization.

We can say that theory and ideology are separate but articulated fields. Only Marxism can claim to build a “scientific socialism.” Socialism is not science, it is the will to change the people, to destroy an unjust society in order to implement a just and egalitarian society. Socialism is an aspiration, a utopia in the clearest and best sense of the word. Science is the construction of concepts. Marxism has sold its ideology as a science to validate it against other ideologies that it revalued, debated with them from contempt, not from polemics.

We reiterate, the theoretical task carried out by the Organization is not for intellectual dalliation, but out of militant necessity and analysis of our concrete social reality, of the conjunctures and certain issues or problems that we find in a process of revolutionary intention.

When it comes to understanding the question of theory and ideology, so far as it relates to the FAU, it is worth quoting at length from Juan Mechoso in his interview with Felipe Corrêa:

“Theory points to the development of conceptual instruments that think about all that can be known, in a rigorous and profound way, of a concrete social conjecture.... In this sense one can speak of theory as the equivalent of science, and this is how it should be understood.

Ideology on the other hand, has elements of an unscientific nature that contribute to dynamising and motivating action based on circumstances that, although related to the existing social conditions, do not derive from them in a strict sense; action is not determined by what... has been called objectivity... the expression of motivations... Aspirations, ideal goals, utopias, hopes, hatred and desires also belong to the ideological domain.

Rigorous analysis of a concrete situation is thus a theoretical analysis, which should be as scientific as possible. Theory needs and conditions the circumstances of political action... An ideology is more effective as a motor for political action, the more firmly it is supported by contributions of theory.” (Mechoso & Corrêa, 2020)

Contemporary

In this final section of the interview, I took into account the FAUs history and theory, and the global spread of Especificist ideas. On the basis of what I had already come to understand about the organisation I wanted to ask the FAU about their internal processes, relations with other tendencies and organisations, and what concrete undertakings the organisation is involved in today.

[TL]: Especificist organisations are known to require a high level of theoretical and practical development before someone can become a member. What does the process of joining the FAU look like?

[FAU]: FAU is an organization of militants, not the “masses.” It is not in our interest to affiliate people as the Communist Party does, for example. But it is in our interest that the comrade who joins FAU has the minimum theoretical and political elements to develop their militancy within the framework of the Organization and develop their political project. Obviously, militants are being formed in the Organization day by day.

At the same time, FAU works permanently on theory, the tools necessary for analysis, to read and interpret reality and to be able to develop our political proposals. It is not a finished work, it is done over time. The same as the training of militants.

The entry process takes a few meetings of reading and discussing documents and materials of the Organization, so that the colleague who enters does so understanding what we are talking about and the Organization also has the guarantees that the comrade joins in good faith and is prepared for the political project.

A long process of study and working with the organisation before becoming a fully committed member is standard for Especifist groups. The logic is that the Especifist group is not a vanguard, it is simply one of many groups of working class militants dedicated to socialism organising together. This makes us stronger and more effective, however Especifists realise that it is the mass organizations of the class that make the revolution, not the party.

[TL]: The FAU has been accused of being “democratic centralist” by other anarchists in the past. In Ricardo Rugai’s article “Anarchism and the Question of the Party” he describes a secretariat and a federal council with executive powers. (Rugai, 2014) This sounds surprising. The nature of executive power was one of the key points in the debate between Malatesta and Makhno over the platform. It also sounds like a departure from Federalism, one of the key defining features of anarchism. Of course, I believe the FAU reformed and changed its structures after the PVP split – so perhaps it operates differently. How do the broad structures of the FAU function today?

[FAU]: The Secretariat or the Secretariat of the organization or the body was never conceived as an executive power outside the decisions of the Organization. There are agencies in charge of complying with specific resolutions in the day to day of the Organization, but the maximum body for resolutions is the Congress, and of course then the federal agencies.

Yes, there may be specific responsibilities, but they are subject to the control of the federal and grassroots agencies of the Organization.

The Federal Council is the highest instance between Congress and Congress and there the entire Organization is represented. There the most relevant political decisions of the organization are made, including work plans.

A few notes are worth adding for context here: I actually had the notion of a PVP split wrong. Around 1974, in exile, the FAU absorbed a number of other far-left organisations, almost all exclusively Marxist. This included several small factions of the Tupamaros. The majority of the new organisation however was still Bakuninist, and maintained their roles in the ROE and OPR-33. With the dropping the tight Especifist program, they renamed the organisation the *Peoples Victory Party*. PVP cells in exile were established as far abroad as São Paulo, Paris and Stockholm. Within a year of its founding, every leading member of the PVP except one was kidnapped and murdered. (Partido por la Victoria del Pueblo, n.d.) When the country returned to bourgeois democracy, surviving members re-established the PVP. However, when the PVP began running in elections, the anarchists left and reestablished the FAU as an Especifist organisation. (Schmidt, 2020)

Secondly, the debate around the nature of the executive has been a long one in anarchism. Misunderstanding of the related language and intention was the source of the debate between

Malatesta and Makhno following the publishing of The Platform. Especificist and Platformist organisations will appoint a small body of members to undertake certain mandated and strictly limited roles. These are quite different to the central committee established in Marxist Leninist parties, as they retain no executive power. Power resides in organisational congresses, and in exceptional situations with small committees delegated to fulfil a particular task.

[TL]: In Australia the percentage of union membership has dramatically declined over the last few decades. Some Anarchist-Communists here place a specific emphasis on social insertion into the unions in the hope of rebuilding them, while other tendencies of anarchists focus almost exclusively on social movements. What does the union movement in Uruguay look like today? How does the PIT-CNT differ to the pre-dictatorship CNT? What is the FAUs relationship to it?

[FAU]: FAU maintains its union insertion and here all the unions are in the PIT-CNT. There are differences between PIT-CNT and CNT, different generations, different perspectives, even some renewing of older ultra reformist currents from the '80s and '90s, even more reformist than the most classic Stalinism of the currents of the Communist Party. But inside the body both class-struggle and combative sectors, and on the other hand, reformists or other sectors that have no interest in developing the capacity of organized workers.

Within the unions in which we are inserted, we try to form militant groups of tendency, which bring together the most class conscious and combative militants of the sector. There we try to develop a political line towards that guild, a political line that does not call itself anarchist, but tries to operate on the basis of solidarity, direct action, direct and grassroots democracy, etc., that is, with the principles that anarchist militancy promotes and to make a style and a method of these characteristics, but does not place a [singular political] label on the struggle of the oppressed.

[TL]: Does the FAU retain strong influence in any unions? What strategies does the FAU employ to strengthen the union movement today? Are there any particular sectors of industry that have maintained militant unionism?

[FAU]: Yes, there is an impact on the trade union movement. In general, labor unions have had a “renaissance” after the crisis of 2002, when the country was literally bankrupt. The industrial dismantling of the '90s was very hard and hit the unions hard as well. But today several industrial unions have a strong presence and prominence. We must bear in mind that the economic structure [creates] dependence in Uruguay, therefore, the industrial apparatus is not very extensive. It was greater until the '70s. The dismantling was completed in the '90s with the implementation of neoliberal policies, through the dictatorship and the subsequent governments.

[TL]: In the past, FAU militants took on leadership roles in the CNT. Does the organisation still allow militants to be elected to official roles by the workers or does the organisation focus on rank and file activism?

[FAU]: This depends on the moment and our strength. It is desirable to have a powerful militant body to face general responsibilities in the trade union movement

and towards that work we tend. The question is not to have a union leader who “lines” or makes beautiful speeches, but that this line and those speeches are an expression of a concrete construction and development of organizational forces of their own, of a tendency of their own in the labor movement.¹¹ In the '60s this was viable, but all this was built during decades of anarchism's incidence in the trade union movement.

As we have already seen, the FAU had significant influence on sectors of Uruguay's trade union movement. Leon Duarte, a militant from an anarcho-syndicalist background and leader of the militant FUNSA, was a particularly prominent figure. When the military took power, they offered to negotiate with Tendencia unions, namely the FUNSA. This was a clear attempt to win over a militant sector of the class. A meeting was held that was broadcast live on radio between the Generals and the FUNSA leadership. However the anarchists accepted on a false premise, during the meeting Miguel Gromaz shouted “what you want is a central [union body] of scabs! But you will not get us, we belong to the CNT!” the broadcast and the meeting were cut off. Miraculously, the military did not execute the leaders then and there. A few months later they offered Duarte the position of Minister of Labour, which he turned down. Within a few years he was caught and executed in Argentina.

[TL]: In the 1969 Cartas de FAU it is advised that when working in unions militants must “avoid isolation... this requires a stable and functional, broad and non-sectarian co-ordination of all those willing to fight.” What organizations do the FAU work alongside today? For example, are there particular Trotskyists groups or anarcho-syndicalist organisations that you work closely with?

[FAU]: We work in the same way, with those criteria. Here anarcho-syndicalism lost its footing (ceased to exist) practically in the 1950s, when it was already extremely weakened. That is, today it does not exist as a current.

There are several Trotskyist parties, the most relevant is the Workers' Party (PT), along the lines of the Argentine Workers' Party (altamira), with a very sectarian line, very reformist (focused on the electoral performance of its party, which is insignificant), and linked to quite bureaucratic sectors of the trade union movement, and its practice also has this bureaucratic component. It is very difficult to be able to coordinate with this sector. In addition, they have had a historical practice of singling out everyone as reformists and other epithets when they themselves develop those practices.

[TL]: Where does the FAU place its main emphasis on social insertion today? What are the largest social movements in Uruguay now?

[FAU]: The trade union movement is still the most important. Also at the neighborhood level, of work in the neighborhoods, with different tasks: popular pots, cultural tasks, talks, work with children, women and neighborhood organizations in general, etc.

¹¹ I believe what the FAU mean by this is that a leader creates a political 'line' and gives it to the workers. Rather than a leader who represents the bottom-up construction of a political position or line of struggle.

[TL]: Historically the FAU has been well known for its anti-imperialist politics. In the past the USA directly intervened in South America, and many popular movements were united against the US. How does the FAU understand the modern dynamics of imperialism? What does today's anti-imperialism look like?

[FAU]: The United States remains the relevant imperialist power towards Latin America. Of course, today it is no longer the only capitalist power with imperialist pretensions and that generates changes in the situation and international alignment. We see it today in Afghanistan, clearly. But Latin America remains “the backyard” of the United States according to its conception, its area of influence, “natural” and closer. Here the US has operated in these last 20 years very aggressively. We can mention his participation in the coup d'état of Venezuela in 2002, the constant coup attempts in that same country or destabilization and economic bloc; the coup d'état in Honduras in 2009, in Paraguay in 2012 and Brazil in 2016 (parliamentary and judicial coups), the coup d'état in Bolivia in 2019.

All of them without counting the criminal blockade of Cuba that has been going on for 50 years. The U.S. finances different armies such as the Colombian, which has been massacring the people of that country for decades, and also finances different collateral institutions that amplify and develop the U.S. policy for the area. China, Russia and the European Union do not have the capacity to impose this type of policies in Latin America, but to develop important investments.

[TL]:The anarchist movement has historically placed huge emphasis on education. At one point, Luce Fabbri, who wrote a study on workers autodidacticism, was a member of the FAU. I believe FAU also still runs ateneos. Given most countries have a more integrated state-run education system, do these still play a vital role in the Uruguayan anarchist movement and the workers movement in general?

[FAU]: In Uruguay, the education system is currently widespread. Activities Educational today are not so central in that sense, but cultural ones in general. The Athenaeums continue to function, developing various neighborhood tasks. We can say that in terms of the “educational” there is no specific task, except school support or in times of strikes, teachers develop counter-courses to accompany students and in turn be able to keep them informed of the progress of the conflict.

Luce Fabbri left the FAU in 1963 with a group of colleagues due to debates of the moment. She held a pacifist position and opposed direct action at all levels as it had been proposed that gave rise to OPR-33. Her group will have almost no impact on social events and struggles from that date.

[TL]: What is the situation in Uruguay with the COVID-19 crisis? How has the FAU responded? Do anarchists focus on demands around safety at work, social provisions etc or are they focused on mutual aid efforts?

[FAU]: COVID 19 has had a very strong surge from the end of 2020 to June 2021. The vaccination campaign has made it possible to reduce the number of deaths and seriously ill people, the same as contagions. Here everything came a little later. That

was our first wave, while Europe and Australia were already going through the third wave. Here it has cost the life of a little more than 6000 people today. While there was no mandatory confinement, the government called for “staying at home” and reducing mobility. This occurred in different ways according to different moments. In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, the movement of people was greatly reduced; not so in 2021 when the peak was higher in terms of infections and deaths.

Mobilizations were not suspended, although there were few [participants] for fear of the contagion. Likewise, FAU called for the realization of its act prior to May Day and from our social spaces we call to commemorate May 20, the day of the missing detainees.¹² On the other hand, unions and different guilds mobilized throughout this period. All these activities were carried out under sanitary measures, of course.

Our main action was in the development of Popular Pots in the neighborhoods and unions. Providing a plate of food to the sectors that were left without jobs or without the possibility to continue performing their tasks. Informal work in Uruguay is very vast. A total of 400,000 people perform tasks informally (without legal protection) or are *monotributistas*.¹³ These are the sectors that were directly affected by the crisis when many economic activities were paralyzed. In various private areas, claiming unemployment insurance was massive, as was the loss of employment by many workers. It is estimated that there are currently 100,000 more poor people.

This whole situation is not only because of the pandemic, but also because of the recessive adjustments imposed by the government. We are facing the application of a fierce neoliberal policy in these moments, with a tendency towards deepening.

The demand for sanitary measures in the workplace also occupied part of the trade union activity, but usually such measures were taken by agreement with companies and the state, implemented something [together] in that regard, although it was not always adequate.

Returning to the experiences of the Popular Pots, we developed two things: one in the neighborhoods of the West of Montevideo (Cerro and La Teja). There the pot of the Ateneo del Cerro lasted a few months, then moved to a snack system for neighborhood children. In the case of La Teja the pot continues with a very good level of activity, in a sustainable manner.

Our coordination inside the unions has also managed to sustain something very concrete; a continued supply of several pots to various neighbourhoods.

[TL]: In Australia there has been a rapid growth of groups influenced by Platformism, especifismo etc. There is something of a debate about how we identify our particular tendency. At the moment, we use the title “Anarchist-Communist.” Most of us think that the idea of formally organised anarchist groupings goes back to Bakunin and Malatesta – in fact, we think that alongside Anarcho-Syndicalism, these ideas are the original forms of anarchism. What do you think? Does the FAU publicly identify as especifist,

¹² A memorial for comrades and civilians killed during the dictatorship

¹³ I believe this means self-employed.

Anarchist-Communist or anarchist? Do you think individualist ideas have a place in anarchist history?

[FAU]: FAU claims to be Especifist. We are in fact the creators of the term. This recognizes the need for anarchist political organization as a specific space of anarchist militancy. Logically, this tradition goes back to Bakunin and Malatesta. FAU puts this proposal into operation and places it in tune with the Latin American reality.

For us, there is no difference with the Platformist current. The text by Dielo Truda had not arrived before the FAU was formed, nor during the process of its formation. However, the text of the Bulgarian Federation did arrive, derived in some way from that experience.¹⁴ There is a lot of confusion with the text of the Platform from its circulation on the Internet of some analyses that are not consistent with reality. We do not find major differences between the Platform and Especifismo, they are two experiences that occurred in different places and at different times, but in which the comrades had the same concern: to politically organize the anarchist militancy to achieve progress in the struggle for Socialism and Freedom.

FAU maintains contacts with platformist and anarcho-communist organizations without any problems and works together. There are many things that unite us and are [held in] common. Of course, each organization and group of people has its own particular history and experiences and this is totally understandable and respectable. Nor do we sell a “recipe” about how the political organization should work or how it should be, if we can transfer a concrete experience.

We do believe that all organizations must advance in the theoretical development and analysis tools to interpret reality, a task that FAU has carried out since its inception and it is desirable that all anarchist organizations share and develop together.

In general we have no affinity with individualism. We try to take decisions collectively and to develop as militants collectively. We understand the Organization as a school of life. It is far from us to claim individual positions or individualistic proposals that do not build anything in the collective or promote the social struggle.

Recommended Readings

Introductions to Especifismo:

- Collective Action – Specifism Explained
- Adam Weaver – Especifismo
- Eugene Stroud – How do you say Especifismo in English?

¹⁴ The Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB) was the first organisation to formally adopt the model of the Platform. Formed in 1925, the FAKB played a substantial role in both the resistance to the right-wing dictatorship in the early 20s and the fight against fascism during the Second World War. In 1945, they adopted a modified version of the Platform as their own program. After WWII, the Communists broke the United Front and rapidly persecuted anarchists, sending many of them to labour camps. FAKB exiles ended up in Uruguay. Some also moved to Australia.

Central Texts:

- FARJ – Social Anarchism and Organisation
- Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici – Anarchist Communism
- FAU – Huerta Grande

Strategy:

- Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira – For a Theory of Strategy
- José Antonio Gutiérrez D – About the problems posed by the concrete class struggle and popular organisation
- Pabo Barbanegra – Towards Mass Movements
- FAU – COPEI
- FdCA – Anarchist Communist and the Mass Organisation
- FdCA – On the Transitional Period

Internal Debates:

- Charlotte Murphy – Reading FARjs Social Anarchism and Organisation
- Felipe Corrêa – Especificismo and Synthesisism

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