Especifismo

The specific anarchist organisation

ANARCHISM & ORGANISATION I.

In tribute to:

Juan Perez Bouzas (1899-1958)

Featured anarchist cobbler of Galician origin that, with unusual talent and determination, highlighted the necessity of the deepening of the struggle. In 2008 we remember the fiftieth anniversary of his death

Ideal Peres (1925-1995)

That, with sensibility and ample vision of the political horizon, guaranteed the maintenance of the social axis of anarchism and the connection of generations of militants.

Plínio Augusto Coêlho (1956)

Tireless in giving substance to our dreams, connecting them to the long thread that binds us to those who preceded us in the quiet or turbulent act of revolution.

Original Texts:

- Adam Weaver, *Especifismo: The anarchist praxis of building popular movements and revolutionary organization* (2006).
- Federación Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU), *Huerta Grande* (1972). Originally published in Spanish. English translation taken from Black Rose Anarchist Federation, published as *Theory, Ideology and Political Practice: The FAU's "Huerta Grande"*.
- Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro (FARJ), *A organização específica anarquista* (2008), aus *Anarquismo Social é Organização* (2008); published as a broschure for the first congress of the FARJ at 30th & 31st August 2008. This broschure was published in English as *Social Anarchism and Organisation.*

This last broschure offers a couple of more texts on the topic of anarchist organization worth reading.

"Decolonizing means giving revolutionary internationalism serious attention."

Inhaltsangabe

I.

Foreword

As part of the search for viable revolutionary organisational models, in South America people have for decades worked on the so called "Especifismo" (loosely translated as "specificism"), an anarchist current that points to the necessity of specifically anarchist organisation.

Although the notion of this necessity is nothing new in itself, the purposeful and explicit development of the specificist method is. Although it has to be said, that this is already happening since the 1970s, is. In Europe however, and thus also in the German-speaking area, there is little written material on this anarchist current. Only *Libertäre Aktion Winterthur* has translated and disseminated some of the more important texts. This despite the fact that Especifismo has occupied a prominent place in the South American anarchist movement for years. With the translations collected here, we hope to contribute to giving Especifismo the attention it deserves.

"Why now of all times?", the reader might ask. The answer to that question is quite simple: anarchist practice in Northern Europe hasn't succeeded in bringing social revolution closer in recent decades, despite sufficient social contradictions and civil unrest. On the contrary, after the economic crisis of 2008, capitalism has even stabilized through severe austerity measures, the dismantling of workers' rights and the hardening of European borders so that exploitation and plundering by the capitalist class can continue. And in its wake, almost everywhere in Europe, contrary to revolutionary and internationalist perspectives, nationalism has grown strongly. Nationalist movements are eager to assert themselves in a new round of violent perpetuation of current crisis and under the guise of pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric.

The last decade politics of the anarchist movement and the radical left in general have been mainly reactive – meaning that our politics have limited themselves to reaction to the actions of our adversaries. Factually such politics are not sustainable. At best, such a strategy maintains the status quo; but since we cannot win every dispute, we would always lose in the long run. It is

therefore absolutely and urgently necessary to develop our own perspectives.

To turn that tide we must go on the offensive, to claim the world from there and lay the foundation for a sustainable world where we can live together in freedom and solidarity. The challenges along the way are major (climate change, economic inequality, nationalism), but we are by no means starting from scratch. The concepts of our comrades in South America, which have been developed under the name of "Especifismo", can help us on our way. „Especifismo" offers not only a vague call for self-organisation, but actual models that make the practical implementation of self-organisation possible in the here and now.

The texts below are a rough introduction to Especifismo by Adam Weaver, an elaboration on *"Huerta Grande"* by the *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya* (FAU) and a guide to *"The Specific Anarchist Organisation"* by the *Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro* (FARJ). Huerta Grande, contrary to what I stated earlier, has a somewhat philosophical character. The however text elaborates on one of the important foundations of Especifismo – the relationship between theory, practice and ideology – which runs like a thread through the organizational method of specificism. The text *"The specific anarchist organisation"*, on the other hand, goes into more detail on how the FARJ understands its basic organisational values, its method of "social insertion" and its position regarding social movements.

To this day, Especifismo, similar to platformism, has a fairly authoritarian reputation within the anarchist milieu. This has to do in particular with certain taboos that are systematically broken by both platformists and especifists. Breaking such taboos always leads to criticism (this is of course issue of a taboo). Prejudice and misinterpretations play a role here too in my opinion. For example, specificist texts often speak very clearly about the responsibility to fulfill agreements. Without trying to polarize, I think that even within more informal circles, cooperation comes to its limits the moment someone does something different from what was agreed upon. The way in which these agreements are reached is what is relevant, they should be based on voluntariness.

Another aspect of specificism that is often misinterpreted is the concept of "social insertion", which aim it is to influence social movements. Influence is a very controversial term, that certainly bears some dangers in itself. Sure, anarchists want to influence other people; that is the core of political change. But social movements (and people in general) can be convinced in multiple ways: by persuasive arguments but also authoritarian or manipulative means.

Therefore it is important for us anarchists to maintain integrity and not betray our core values, when working to change society. Inspiring and strengthening social movements, as suggested by specificism, should therefore not be equated with taking power or control (e.g. by taking positions of influence, as in the Trotskyist method of "entryism"). Social insertion is primarily aimed at strengthening the capacity for self-organisation within social movements, advancing revolutionary perspectives and protecting movements from manipulation by authoritarian and reformist forces.

However, breaking taboos and naming sore points of revolutionary movements are not the only things criticised about Especifismo. A text of major influence on the development of Especifismo, *"The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists"* from 1926, has some serious issues that are to be pointed out. For example, the original text calls for *all* anarchists to unite in their proposed *General Union*. Combined with a call for "tactical and theoretical unity", this leaves little room for two elementary aspects of anarchism: the right to free association and federalism. Interestingly, this problem or misunderstanding is clarified in the *"Supplement to the Organisational Platform"* (1926), which fortunately recently has been translated into German, but wasn't available for a long time.

The publication of the following texts does not mean that we as a group endorse everything being stated in them. We need to keep developing our ideas and must not forget is that we always have be careful not to dogmatically apply ideas from other eras and geographical contexts to the here and now.

I therefore recommend reading the texts critically as well as with an open mind and look for applicable points of reference for our revolutionary endeavours here and today. If one or the other formulation triggers discomfort, it is relevant to ask oneself: "is this merely one of the taboos mentioned above, or does it actually contradict or does it actually contradict my own views?"

Tommy Ryan, Februar 2020

II.

Especifismo: the Anarchist Praxis of Building Popular Movements and Revolutionary Organization

By Adam Weaver

First published in The Northeastern Anarchist #11 in Spring 2006, "Especifismo: The Anarchist Praxis of Building Popular Movements and Revolutionary Organization" broke new ground as the first English introductory article on the concept of Especifismo. While being short and limited in scope, it has since become a standard introductory text which has been translated into multiple languages and is now used by Latin American political organizations. The piece was based on early translations and exchanges by Brazilian-American anarchist Pedro Ribeiro but since it's publication new translations have further deepened and enriched the understanding of Especifismo. These include the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya's 1972 theoretical piece "Huerta Grande" and the multi-chapter booklet "Social Anarchism and Organization" by the Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro (FARJ).

Especifismo: a brief introduction

Throughout the world anarchist involvement within mass movements as well the development of specifically anarchist organizations is on the upsurge. This trend is helping anarchism regain legitimacy as a dynamic political force within movements and in this light, Especifismo, a concept born out of nearly 50 years of anarchist experiences in South America, is gaining currency world-wide. Though many anarchists may be familiar with

many of Especifismo's ideas, it should be defined as an original contribution to anarchist thought and practice.

The first organization to promote the concept of Especifismo—then more a practice than a developed ideology—was the *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya* (FAU), founded in 1956 by anarchist militants who embraced the idea of an organization which was specifically anarchist. Surviving the dictatorship in Uruguay, the FAU emerged in the mid-1980s to establish contact with and influence other South American anarchist revolutionaries. The FAU's work helped support the founding of the *Federação Anarquista Gaúcha* (FAG), the *Federação Anarquista Cabocla* (FACA), and the *Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro* (FARJ) in their respective regions of Brazil, and the Argentinean organization Auca (Rebel).

While the key concepts of Especifismo will be expanded upon further in this article, it can be summarized in three succinct points:

1. The need for specifically anarchist organization built around a unity of ideas and praxis.
2. The use of the specifically anarchist organization to theorize and develop strategic political and organizing work.
3. Active involvement in and building of autonomous and popular social movements, which is described as the process of "social insertion."

A Brief Historical Perspective

While only coming onto the stage of Latin American anarchism within the last few decades, the ideas inherent within Especifismo touch on a historic thread running within the anarchist movement internationally. The most well known would be the Platformist current, which began with the publishing of the "Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists." This document was written in 1926 by former peasant army leader Nestor Makhno, Ida Mett and other militants of the *Dielo Trouda (Workers' Cause)* group, based around the newspaper of the same name (Skirda, 192-213). Exiles of the Russian revolution, the Paris-based Dielo Trouda criticized the anarchist movement for its lack of organization, which prevented a concerted response to Bolshevik machinations towards turning the workers' soviets into instruments of one-party rule. The alternative they proposed was a "General Union of Anarchists" based on Anarchist-Communism, which would strive for "theoretical and tactical unity" and focus on class struggle and labor unions.

Other similar occurrences of ideas include "Organizational Dualism," which

is mentioned in historical documents of the 1920's Italian anarchist movement. Italian anarchists used this term to describe the involvement of anarchists both as members of an anarchist political organization and as militants in the labor movement (FdCA). In Spain, the Friends of Durruti group emerged to oppose the gradual reversal of the Spanish Revolution of 1936 (Guillamon). In *"Towards a Fresh Revolution"* they emulated some of the ideas of the Platform, critiquing the CNT-FAI's gradual reformism and collaboration with the Republican government, which they argued contributed to the defeat of the anti-fascist and revolutionary forces. Influential organizations in the Chinese anarchist movement of the 1910's, such as the Wuzhengfu-Gongchan Zhuyi Tongshi Che (Society of Anarchist-Communist Comrades), advocated similar ideas (Krebs). While these different currents all have specific characteristics that developed from the movements and countries in which they originated, they all share a common thread that crosses movements, eras, and continents.

ESPECIFISMO ELABORATED

The Especifists put forward three main thrusts to their politics, the first two being on the level of organization. By raising the need for a specifically anarchist organization built around a unity of ideas and praxis, the Especifists inherently state their objection to the idea of a synthesis organization[1] of revolutionaries or multiple currents of anarchists loosely united. They characterize this form of organization as creating an,

> *"exacerbated search for the needed unity of anarchists to the point in which unity is preferred at any cost, in the fear of risking positions, ideas and proposals sometimes irreconcilable. The result of these types of union are libertarian collectives without much more in common than considering themselves anarchists." (En La Calle)*

While these critiques have been elaborated by the South American Especifistas, North American anarchists have also offered their experiences of synthesis organization as lacking any cohesiveness due to multiple, contradictory political tendencies. Often the basic agreement of the group boils down to a vague, "least-common-denominator" politics, leaving little

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1. The concept of the 'anarchist synthesis' developed like the Organisational Platform in the mid 1920's in France. In contrast to the Platform, it actualy tried to develop an anarchist theory which and organisation that tried to unite anarchists of different tendencies: anarcho-individualism, anarcho-communistim und anarcho-syndicalism. Today this concept is at the foundation of the International of Anarchist Federations (IAF/IFA).

room for united action or developed political discussion among comrades.

Without a strategy that stems from common political agreement, revolutionary organizations are bound to be an affair of reactivism against the continual manifestations of oppression and injustice and a cycle of fruitless actions to be repeated over and over, with little analysis or understanding of their consequences (Featherstone et al). Further, the Especifists criticize these tendencies for being driven by spontaneity and individualism and for not leading to the serious, systematic work needed to build revolutionary movements. The Latin American revolutionaries put forward that organizations which lack a program,

> *"which resists any discipline between militants, that refuses to 'define itself', or to 'fit itself', … [are a] direct descendant of bourgeois liberalism, [which] only reacts to strong stimulus, joins the struggle only in its heightened moments, denying to work continuously, especially in moments of relative rest between the struggles." (En La Calle)*

A particular stress of the Especifismo praxis is the role of anarchist organization, formed on the basis of shared politics, as a space for the development of common strategy and reflection on the group's organizing work. Sustained by collective responsibility to the organizations' plans and work, a trust within the members and groups is built that allows for a deep, high-level discussion of their action. This allows the organization to create collective analysis, develop immediate and long term goals, and continually reflect on and change their work based on the lessons gained and circumstances.

From these practices and from the basis of their ideological principles, revolutionary organizations should seek to create a program that defines their short- and intermediate-term goals and will work towards their long-term objectives:

The program must come from a rigorous analysis of society and the correlation of the forces that are part of it. It must have as a foundation the experience of the struggle of the oppressed and their aspirations, and from those elements it must set the goals and the tasks to be followed by the revolutionary organization in order to succeed not only in the final objective but also in the immediate ones. (En La Calle)

The last point, but one that is key within the practice of Especifismo, is the idea of "social insertion." It stems from the belief that the oppressed are the most revolutionary sector of society, and that the seed of the future revolutionary transformation of society lies already in these classes and social groupings. Social insertion means anarchist involvement in the daily fights of

the oppressed and working classes. It does not mean acting within single-issue advocacy campaigns based around the involvement of expected traditional political activists, but rather within movements of people struggling to better their own condition, which come together not always out of exclusively materially-based needs, but also socially and historically rooted needs of resisting the attacks of the state and capitalism. These would include rank-and-file-led workers' movements, immigrant communities' movements to demand legalized status, neighborhood organizations' resistance to the brutality and killings by police, working class students' fights against budget cuts, and poor and unemployed people's opposition to evictions and service cuts.

Through daily struggles, the oppressed become a conscious force. The class-in-itself, or rather classes-in-themselves (defined beyond the class-reductionist vision of the urban industrial proletariat, to include all oppressed groups within society that have a material stake in a new society), are tempered, tested, and recreated through these daily struggles over immediate needs into classes-for-themselves. That is, they change from social classes and groups that exist objectively and by the fact of social relations, to social forces. Brought together by organic methods, and at many times by their own self-organizational cohesion, they become self-conscious actors aware of their power, voice and their intrinsic nemeses: ruling elites who wield control over the power structures of the modern social order.

Examples of social insertion that the FAG cites are their work with neighborhood committees in urban villages and slums (called Popular Resistance Committees), building alliances with rank-and-file members of the rural landless workers' movement of the MST, and among trash and recyclables collectors. Due to high levels of temporary and contingent employment, underemployment, and unemployment in Brazil, a significant portion of the working class does not survive primarily through wage labor, but rather by subsistence work and the informal economy, such as casual construction work, street vending, or the collection of trash and recyclables. Through several years of work, the FAG has built a strong relationship with urban trash collectors, called catadores. Members of the FAG have supported them in forming their own national organization which is working to mobilize trash collectors around their interests nationally and to raise money toward building a collectively operated recycling operation.[2]

Especifismo's conception of the relation of ideas to the popular movement

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2. Eduardo, then Secretary of External Relations for Brazilian FAG. "Saudacoes Libertarias dos E.U.A." E-mail to Pedro Ribeiro. 25 Jun 2004

is that they should not be imposed through a leadership, through "mass line," or by intellectuals. Anarchist militants should not attempt to move movements into proclaiming an "anarchist" position, but should instead work to preserve their anarchist thrust; that is, their natural tendency to be self-organized and to militantly fight for their own interests. This assumes the perspective that social movements will reach their own logic of creating revolution, not when they as a whole necessarily reach the point of being self-identified "anarchists," but when as a whole (or at least an overwhelming majority) they reach the consciousness of their own power and exercise this power in their daily lives, in a way consciously adopting the ideas of anarchism. An additional role of the anarchist militant within the social movements, according to the Especifists, is to address the multiple political currents that will exist within movements and to actively combat the opportunistic elements of vanguardism and electoral politics.

Especifismo in the context of North American and Western Anarchism

Within the current strands of organized and revolutionary North American and Western Anarchism, numerous indicators point to the inspiration and influence of the Platform as having the greatest impact in the recent blossoming of class struggle anarchist organizations world-wide. Many see the Platform as a historical document that speaks to the previous century's organizational failures of anarchism within global revolutionary movements, and are moved to define themselves as acting within the "platformist tradition." Given this, the currents of Especifismo and Platformism are deserving of comparison and contrast.

The authors of the Platform were veteran partisans of the Russian Revolution. They helped lead a peasant guerilla war against Western European armies and later the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, whose people had a history independent of the Russian Empire. So the writers of the Platform certainly spoke from a wealth of experience and to the historical context of one of their era's pivotal struggles. But the document made little headway in its proposal of uniting class struggle anarchists, and is markedly silent in analysis or understanding on numerous key questions that faced revolutionaries at that time, such as the oppression of women, and colonialism.[3]

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3. Here must be said, that the Platformist tendency has not been standing still eighter. At the end of 2018 there was also an initiative to launch the organisation 'Die Plattform'. This initiative has taken feminist principles, environmentalist positions etc. into the foundation of their principles. (For more on this, see their foundin paper: https://www.dieplattform.org)

While most Anarchist-Communist oriented organizations claim influence by the Platform today, in retrospect it can be looked at as a poignant statement that rose from the morass that befell much of anarchism following the Russian Revolution. As a historical project, the Platform's proposal and basic ideas were largely rejected by individualistic tendencies in the Anarchist movement, were misunderstood because of language barriers as some claim (Skirda, 186), or never reached supportive elements or organizations that would have united around the document. In 1927, the Dielo Trouda group did host a small international conference of supporters in France, but it was quickly disrupted by the authorities.

In comparison, the praxis of Especifismo is a living, developed practice, and arguably a much more relevant and contemporary theory, emerging as it does out of 50 years of anarchist organizing. Arising from the southern cone of Latin America, but its influence spreading throughout, the ideas of Especifismo do not spring from any call-out or single document, but have come organically out of the movements of the global south that are leading the fight against international capitalism and setting examples for movements worldwide. On organization, the Especifists call for a far deeper basis of anarchist organization than the Platform's "theoretical and tactical unity," but a strategic program based on analysis that guides the actions of revolutionaries. They provide us living examples of revolutionary organization based on the needs for common analysis, shared theory, and firm roots within the social movements.

I believe there is much to take inspiration from within the tradition of Especifismo, not only on a global scale, but particularly for North American class-struggle anarchists and for multi-racial revolutionaries within the US. Whereas the Platform can be easily read as seeing anarchists' role as narrowly and most centrally within labor unions, Especifismo gives us a living example that we can look towards and which speaks more meaningfully to our work in building a revolutionary movement today. Taking this all into consideration, I also hope that this article can help us more concretely reflect on how we as a movement define and shape our traditions and influences.

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III.

Theory, Ideology and Political Practice: The FAU's "Huerta Grande"

Huerta Grande, or "Large Orchard"*, was written in 1972 as an internal discussion document of the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, after the Tupamaros, a Guevarist[1] group, had failed in their armed strategy of foquismo[2] and right before the brutal military coup of June, 1973. The piece looks at the nature of theory and strategy asserts that an essential aspect of revolutionary political organization was having a deep understanding of material reality informed by practical theory and political praxis. This may not seem new or novel but the implications of this have since had a profound impact on Latin American anarchism and become a seminal document of the Especifismo current.*

The Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, known as the FAU, was founded in 1956 and was the first organization to promote the organizational concept of Especifismo (for more on Especificismo see "Building a Revolutionary Anarchism" and "Especifismo: The Anarchist Praxis of Building Popular Movements and Revolutionary Organization in South America"). The FAU envisioned the purpose of their organization as the coordination of militants towards strategic "social insertion," which is the mobilization of militants to work with a common strategy both within and in building mass organizations. The intermediate goal being the construction of popular power of mass organizations and ultimate being the creation of a wide scale libertarian movement which could create a

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1. Guevarism; derived from Guevara; a political current basing its idea's on the marxist guerilla leader Ernesto ‚Che' Guevara in Cuba, originating from Argentina.

2. Foquismo oder Focalism is a guerilla-conzept, based on the experience of the Cuban Revolution. It follows the principle of a vanguard, existing of small mobile paramilitary groups, who form a focal point for the public discontent with the ruling government, trying to trigger and then lead a general uprising. The concept was originally developed for rural and mountainous areas, where governments have lesser influence and pressence. In the late 1960's however, after some structural changes, the theory was used by many urband guerilla movements of its time.

rupture with the state. In the decade of the 1960s the organization was crucial in the creation of the Uruguayan CNT, a national trade confederation which united 90 percent of organized workers; the Worker-Student Resistance or ROE, a federation of militant workplace and student groups which numbered around 12,000 members; and the FAU's armed wing, the OPR-33. More recently in the last two decades the FAU has aided in the creation of several similar anarchist organizations in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile and has inspired other anarchist organizations around the world.

Note: The use of the term "party" here is consistent with how the term is used by Errico Malatesta as a synonym for political organization: "by the word 'party' we mean all who are on the same side, that is, who share the same general aspirations and who, in one way or another, struggle for the same ends against common adversaries and enemies."

Original English translation: Pedro Ribeiro (2009, Amanecer: For A Popular Anarchism, California), revisited translation by Gabriel Ascui (2018, SOL, Chile).

"Huerta Grande"

To understand what is going on (the conjuncture), it is necessary to think correctly. To think correctly means to order and adequately treat the data that is produced about reality in huge bulks.

To think correctly is an indispensable condition to correctly analyze what is going on in a country in a given moment of this or another country's history. This demands instruments. For our task, the instruments are concepts and to think coherently, a series of concepts coherently articulated between them is required. Thus, a system of concepts, a theory, is required.

Without a theory one runs the risk of examining every problem individually, in isolation, starting from points of views that can be different in each case, or examining them based on subjectivity, guesses or presentation, etc.

The party was able to avoid serious mistakes because we have been able to think based on concepts that have an important level of coherence. It has also made serious mistakes due to insufficient development of our theoretical thinking as an organization.

To propose a program, we must know the economic, political and ideological reality of our country. The same is necessary in order to create a political line that is sufficiently clear and concrete. If we have insufficient or incorrect knowledge, we will not have a program but only a very general line, difficult to implement at all the places the party is inserted. If there is no clear line, there is no efficient political practice. The political will of the party then runs the risk of getting diluted, "voluntarism" in action ends up becoming just doing whatever comes up out of sheer good will, but does not determine the outcome of events, based on its inaccurate previsualization. We are determined by them [the events] and by them we act spontaneously.

Without a line for the theoretical work, an organization, no matter how big it is, will be bewildered by circumstances that it cannot affect nor comprehend. The political line requires a program, understood as the goals to be achieved at each stage. The program indicates which forces are favorable, which ones are the enemy and which ones are only temporary allies. But in order to know this, we must know profoundly the reality of the country. Therefore, to acquire this knowledge now is a task of the highest priority. And in order to know, we need theory.

The party needs a clear picture in order to be able to think coherently about the country and the region and the struggles of the international workers movements throughout history. We must have an efficient framework to organize and rank the growing mass of data regarding our economic, political and ideological reality.

We must have a method to analyze this data, to see which is more important, which ones must come first and which ones later, in order to correctly marshal our forces in this insertion front. A conceptual scheme that allows us to connect one thing to another in a systematic and coherent order is vital to our goals as militants of our party. Such a scheme must be able to draw examples of how to act using these concepts for others that act in other realities.

But this work of knowing our country we must do it ourselves because nobody is going to do it for us.

We are not proposing inventing theoretical schemes from scratch. We are not going to create a new theory and all of its ramifications. The reason for this is the general backwardness of the milieu and its specialized institutions and our lack of availability to take on this task.

Therefore, we must take theory as it is elaborated, critically analyzing it. We cannot just accept any theory with blind eyes, without criticism, as if it was a dogma.

We want to realize a complete transformation of our country and will not

adopt as a way of thinking theory created by the bourgeoisie. With bourgeois conceptions, we will think as the bourgeoisie wants us to think.

We want to study and think about Uruguay and the region as revolutionaries. Therefore, amongst the elements that are part of the different socialist currents, we will adopt always those elements that aid us in doing exactly that: to think and analyze as revolutionaries, the country, the region, and other regions and experiences.

We will not adopt a theory just because it is fashionable. To live repeating "quotes" that others said in other places, in another time, regarding other situations and problems is not theory. Only charlatans use it like this.

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 it is not capable to produce new helpful knowledge for our political practice, theory is absolutely useless, it is only a theme for idle babble, for sterile ideological polemics.

Someone who buys a big modern machine instead of working on it, that spends all day talking about it, is playing a bad role, is a charlatan. Just like the one that, having the machine available and would rather do it by hand, because "that's how it was done before…"

Some Differences Between Theory and Ideology

It is important to point out a few differences between what has commonly been called theory and ideology.

Theory aims for the elaboration of conceptual instruments used to think rigorously and profoundly understand the concrete reality. It is in this sense, that we can refer to theory as an equivalent to a science.

Ideology, on the other hand, is made up of elements of a non-scientific nature, which contribute dynamism to action based on circumstance that, although having something to do with the objective conditions, do not strictly emerge from them. Ideology is conditioned by objective conditions although not mechanically determined by them.

The profound and rigorous analysis of a concrete situation, in its real and objective terms, is a theoretical analysis as scientific as possible. The expression of motivations, the proposal of objectives, of aspirations, of ideal goals – all of that belongs to the field of ideology.

Theory refines and defines the conditioning elements of political action, as ideology motivates, impulses, and configures its "ideal" goals and style.

Between theory and ideology there is a very tight connection, as the proposals of the second are founded and supported by the conclusions of the theoretical analysis. The efficiency of an ideology as a motor for political action is as much as it's firmly based in the conclusions of theory.

The Reach of Theoretical Work

Theoretical work is always a work that is based and supported in the real processes, in what goes on in the historical reality, in what happens. Nevertheless, since it is work that is located completely in the realm of thought, and therefore, there are no concepts there that are more real than others.

It is important to point out two basic propositions:

1. The distinction between the existing, concrete reality, between the real, historical processes and on the other hand the processes acquired from knowledge and understanding of that reality. In other words, it is necessary to affirm the difference between being and thought, between reality as it is, and what we can know about it.

2. The primacy of being over thought, of reality over knowledge. In another words, the sequence of events is more important – it weighs more as a determinant –in what actually happens in reality than what we think or know about this reality.

Starting from these basic affirmations, it is important to understand the precise reaches of theoretical work, that is, the effort of knowledge guided by the purpose of acquiring rigorous, scientific knowledge.

Theoretical work is always based in a pre-determined raw material. [Theory] does not come out of the real concrete reality as such, but comes out of information, data and notion of that reality. This primary material is treated, in the process of the theoretical work, by certain useful concepts and certain instruments of thought. The product of this treatment is knowledge.

In other words, there are only real, concrete and singular objects (determined by historical situations, determined societies, determined times). The process of theoretical work seeks to know them.

Sometimes theoretical work aims towards abstract objects that do not exist in reality, that only exist in thought, and however are indispensable instruments, a pre-condition in order to know real objects (for example the concept of social classes, etc.). In the production of knowledge, raw material is transformed (superficial perception of reality) into a product (a rigorous

scientific knowledge about it).

The term "scientific knowledge" must be defined in its relationship with the social reality. Applied to reality, it alludes to its comprehension in rigorous terminology, the best approximation to reality as it is.

It must be said that this process of comprehending the social reality, as with any other real object of study, is susceptible to an infinite theoretical depth. As physics, chemistry and other sciences can infinitely deepen their knowledge about the realities that constitute their respective objects of study, in the same manner social science can indefinitely deepen knowledge about social reality. Therefore, it is inadequate to expect a "finished" knowledge of social reality in order to start acting on it in order to change it. Nor less inadequate is trying to change it without profoundly knowing it.

Rigorous scientific knowledge of social reality, of social structure, is only achieved through working with information, statistics data, etc., through the means of more abstract conceptual instruments, given and constituted in theory. Through practice of theoretical work we seek the production of these conceptual instruments, each time more precise and concrete, leading us to knowledge of the specific reality of our surroundings.

Only through an adequate theoretical comprehension, profound and scientific, can ideological elements be developed (aspirations, values, ideals, etc.) that constitute adequate means for the transformation of this social reality with coherence of principles and efficiency into political practice.

Political Praxis and Knowing Reality

An efficient political practice therefore demands: knowledge of reality (theory), the harmonious postulation of it with the objective values of transformation (ideology) and concrete political means for attaining such transformation (political practice). The three elements are fused in a dialectical unit that constitutes the effort for transformation that the party aims for.

One may ask: Should we wait for a finished theoretical development in order to start acting? No. Theoretical development is not an academic problem, it does not start from zero. It is founded, motivated and developed by the existence of ideological values and of a political practice. More or less correct, more or less incorrect, these elements exist historically before theory and motivate its development.

The class struggle has existed long before its theoretical conceptualization. The struggle of the exploited did not wait for the elaboration of a theoretical

work. Its existence precedes knowledge about it, it was there before being known about, before the theoretical analysis of its existence.

Therefore, from this basic statement, it becomes fundamental and essential to act, to have a political praxis. Only through [praxis], through its concrete existence in the established conditions of its development, can we elaborate a useful theoretical framework. A framework that is not a worthless accumulation of abstract statements with some coherence in its internal logic, but without any coherence with the development of the real processes. To theorize efficiently, it is precise to act.

Can we do away with theory with the excuse of practical urgency? No. There may exist, shall we say, a political praxis founded solely in ideological criteria, thus, unfounded or insufficiently founded in adequate theoretical analysis. That is common in our environment.

Nobody can argue that, in our reality or the reality of our [Latin] America region, an adequate theoretical analysis exists, that is a sufficiently conceptualized comprehension, not even close. This ascertainment also applies to the rest of our reality. Theory is only in its initial stages. However, for decades and decades there have been struggles, a confrontation. This understanding should not lead us to disdain the fundamental importance of theoretical work.

To the question previously asked we must then answer: The priority is praxis, but how effective this praxis is depends on a more rigorous knowledge of reality.

In a reality like ours, in the social formation of our country, theoretical development must start, as in everywhere, from a group of efficient theoretical concepts, operating on data as massive as possible, that will constitute the raw material for theoretical development.

Data on its own, examined in isolation, without an adequate theoretical conceptual treatment does not adequately represent reality. It simply decorates and dissimulates the ideologies in which service this data is functionalized.

The abstract concepts, in and of themselves, adequate background information, do not give further knowledge of reality either.

The theoretical work that exist in our country usually fluctuates between these two incorrect extremes.

IV.

The specific anarchist organization

"If [the revolutionary] lacks the guiding idea of their action, they will not be anything other than a ship without a compass."

Ricardo Flores Magón

"An anarchist organisation must be based, in my opinion, on full autonomy, on full independence, and, therefore, on the full responsibility of individuals and groups; free agreement between those who believe it to be useful to unite in order to co-operate with a common end; a moral duty to keep to the commitments accepted and not to do anything that contradicts the accepted programme."

Errico Malatesta

In this text we have sometimes discussed the specific anarchist organisation and our expectations in relation to it. As we have earlier defined, its objective is "to build the popular organisation and influence it, giving it the desired character, and to reach libertarian socialism by means of the social revolution". Further, we understand this as the political level of activity.

The specific anarchist organisation is the grouping of anarchist individuals who, through their own will and free agreement, work together with well-defined objectives. For this it uses forms and means in order that these objectives are achieved, or that, at least, it proceeds towards them. Thus, we can consider the anarchist organisation as "[...] the set of individuals who have a common objective and strive to achieve it; it is natural that they understand each other, join their forces, share the work and take all measures suitable for this task".[1] Through the anarchist organisation anarchists articulate themselves at the political and ideological level, in order to put into practice revolutionary politics and to devise the means – the way of working – that should point to the final objectives: social revolution and libertarian socialism. This political

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1. Errico Malatesta, "Anarchism and Organization", 1897

practice, which seeks the final objectives, should be carried out

> *"creating an organisation that can fulfil the tasks of anarchism, not only in times of preparing the social revolution, but also afterwards. Such an organisation must unite all the revolutionary forces of anarchism and immediately concern itself with the preparation of the masses for the social revolution and with the struggle for the realisation of the anarchist society."[2]*

This organisation is founded on fraternal agreements, both for its internal functioning as for its external action – without having relations of domination, exploitation or alienation in its midst – which constitute a libertarian organisation. The function of the specific anarchist organisation is to co-ordinate, converge and permanently increase the social force of anarchist militant activities, providing a tool for solid and consistent struggle, which is a fundamental means for the pursuit of the final objectives. Therefore,

> *"[...] it is necessary to unite and to organise: first to discuss, then to gather the means for the revolution, and finally, to form an organic whole that, armed with its means and strengthened by its union can, when the historical moment is sounded, sweep all the aberrations and all the tyrannies of the world away [...]. The organisation is a means to differentiate yourself, of detailing a programme of ideas and established methods, a type of uniting banner to embark in combat knowing those with whom you can count and having become aware of the force at one's disposal."[3]*

To constitute this tool of solid and consistent combat, it is essential that the anarchist organisation has well-determined strategic-tactical and political lines – which occur through theoretical and ideological unity, and the unity of strategy and tactics. This organisation of well-defined lines joins the anarchists at the political and ideological level, and develops their political practice at the social level – which characterises an organisation of active minority, seeing as though the social level is always much larger than the political level. This political practice takes shape when the anarchist organisation of active minority performs social work in the midst of the class struggle, seeking social insertion which takes shape from the moment that the anarchist organisation manages to influence the social movements with which it works.

Properly organised as an active minority, the anarchists constitute a

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2. Nestor Makhno. "Our Organisation". In: Anarchy and Organisation. St. Paul, Libertarian Struggle, s / d, p. 31
3. Luigi Fabbri, "The Anarchist Organisation", 1907

much larger social force in the realisation of social work and have a greater chance of having social insertion. Besides social work and insertion, the specific anarchist organisation performs other activities: the production and reproduction of theory, anarchist propaganda, political education, conception and implementation of strategy, political and social relations and resource management.

So we can say that the activities of the specific anarchist organisation are:

- Social Work and Insertion

- Production and Reproduction of Theory

- Anarchist Propaganda

- Political Education

- Conception and Implementation of Strategy

- Social and Political Relations

- Resource Management

These activities can be performed in a more or less public way, always taking into account the social context in which it [the organisation] operates. We say more or less public because we believe that "one must carry out in public what it is convenient that everybody should know and in secret what it is agreed should be withheld from the public at large."[4] In times of less repression the anarchist organisation operates publicly, performing the greatest propaganda possible and trying to attract the largest number of people. In times of increased repression, if, "for example, a government forbids us to speak, to print, to meet, to associate, and we do not have the strength to rebel openly, we would try to speak, to print, to meet and to associate clandestinely."[5]

In this work, which varies according to the social context, the specific anarchist organisation must always defend the interests of the exploited classes, because we understand it as a political expression of these interests. For us, the ideas of anarchism

"[...] are nothing if not the purest and most faithful expression of popular instincts. If they do not correspond with these instincts they are false; and, to the extent that they are false, will be rejected by the people. But if these ideas

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4. Errico Malatesta. "Anarchist Propaganda" Excerpted from Pensiero e Voluntà, January 19, 1925. In: Vernon Richards. Malatesta: Life and Ideas, Freedom Press 1966, p. 169
5. Ibid. p. 169.

are an honest expression of the instincts, if they represent the true thought of the people, they will quickly penetrate the spirit of the revolting multitudes; and as long as these ideas encounter the way of the popular spirit, will advance quickly to their full realisation."[6]

The specific anarchist organisation, understood as a political expression of the interests of the exploited classes, does not act on their behalf and never places itself above them. It does not replace the organisation of the exploited classes, but gives anarchists the chance to put themselves at their service.

In this political practice of placing itself at the service of the exploited classes the anarchist organisation is guided by a Charter of Principles. The principles are the ethical propositions and notions, both non-negotiable, that guide all political practice, providing models for anarchist action. "The assumption of consistency with these principles is what determines ideological authenticity pertaining to anarchism."[7] In our case, the Charter of Principles of 2003[8] defines nine principles: freedom, ethics and values, federalism, self-management, internationalism, direct action, class struggle, political practice and social insertion, and mutual aid.

In first place we assert the principle of freedom, affirming that "the struggle for freedom precedes anarchy." Like Bakunin thought, we hold that "individual freedom [...] can only find its ultimate expression in collective freedom", and we reject, therefore, the individualist proposals of anarchism. The pursuit of libertarian socialism is thus the incessant struggle for freedom. Another principle absolutely central for us is that of ethics and values which causes us to base all of our practice on the anarchist ethic, which is a "non-negotiable militant commitment." Through ethics, among other things, we advocate the consistency between means and ends and mutual respect.

We assert federalism and self-management as principles of non-hierarchical and decentralised organisation, sustained by mutual aid and free association, assuming the premise of the IWA that everyone has rights and duties. Beyond this, it is these principles that will guide the management of the future society at all levels: economic, political and social management, performed by the workers themselves. Emphasising the need for struggles to be self-managed we affirm that "even if living with the current outdated system, [self-management] gives potential to the transformations that point towards an egalitarian society."

By asserting internationalism we highlight the international character of

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6. Mikhail Bakunin. "Mobilização do Proletariado." In: Conceito de Liberdade, p. 134
7. FARJ. "Carta de Princípios" (Charter of Principles)
8. Ibid. The quotation marks in the next seven paragraphs refer to this document.

struggles and the need for us to associate ourselves by class affinities and not those of nationality. The exploited of one country must see in the exploited of another a companion of the struggle, and not an enemy. Internationalism is opposed to nationalism and the exaltation of the state, as they represent a sense of superiority over other countries and peoples, and reinforce ethnocentrism and prejudice – the first steps towards xenophobia. Everyone, regardless of their nationality, is equal and should be free.

Direct action is posited as a principle founded on horizontalism and encourages the protagonism of workers, opposing representative democracy which, as we have already stated, alienates politically. Direct action puts the people in front of their own decisions and actions, "linking workers and the oppressed to the centre of political action."

In addition, we choose to base ourselves on class struggle, defining ourselves as a workers organisation of workers that defend the exploited, and fight for the extinction of class society and for the creation of a society in which slaves and masters no longer exist. Therefore, we recognise and give precedence to the class struggle. For us, there is a central need to combat the evils of capitalism head on, and for this it is essential to fight alongside the exploited, where the consequences of class society become more clear and evident.

The principle of political practice and social insertion reinforces the idea that it is only with the exploited classes that anarchism is able to flourish. Therefore, the anarchist organisation should seek to relate to all forms of popular struggle, regardless of where they may be taking place. We affirm that the interaction of the anarchist organisation with any manifestation "in the social, cultural, peasant, trade union, student, community, environmental camps etc., as long as inserted into the context of struggles for freedom," contemplates the concretisation of this principle.

As the last principle in the Charter mutual aid encourages solidarity in struggle, encouraging the maintenance of fraternal relations with all who truly work for a just and egalitarian world. It encourages effective solidarity among the exploited.

At the moment in which it performs social work the specific anarchist organisation seeks to influence the social movements in a constructive way, with proposals and, at the same time, keep away from them the negative influence of individuals and groups who – instead of defending the interests of the people, encouraging them to be the protagonists of their own emancipation – use them to achieve other objectives. We know that politicians, parties, unions and also other authoritarian organisations and individuals – like the

church, drug trafficking etc. – constitute obstacles to the construction of the popular organisation since they penetrate social movements, in the vast majority of cases, seeking to take advantage of the number of people present there to: find support in elections, constitute the base for authoritarian power projects, get money, conquer faiths, open new markets and so on. Authoritarian organisations and individuals do not want to support social movements, but use them to achieve their (the authoritarian organisations' and individuals') own objectives, which are not consistent with the objectives of the militants of the social movements – that is, the authoritarians seek to establish a relationship of domination over the social movements.

Any anarchist who has organised or even seen how working in social movements works knows that, if there is not a consistent organisation, capable of giving the necessary strength to the anarchists in the ongoing dispute over political space, the authoritarians become hegemonic and the work of the anarchists is completely lost. The anarchists, by not constituting the necessary social force, offer two possibilities: either they will be used by the authoritarians as workhorses (aka "sleeves") in carrying out their authoritarian power projects, or they will simply be removed. In the first case we speak of anarchists that are not specifically organised and go in the wake of events. When they are not organised, they do not exert the necessary influence to have even a little social force. While they do not interfere much they are allowed in the social movements. In the second case we speak of isolated anarchists who begin to exert some influence, or, in authoritarian understanding, they begin to interfere. In this case they are expelled, removed or vilified. They are literally "bowled over" by the authoritarians. Without the necessary organisation they cannot maintain themselves in the social movements and much less exert the desired influence.

This happens because when there is not a proper organisation of anarchists, it is possible to establish authoritarian, or less libertarian organisations. In addressing the permanent dispute over political space we are not saying that anarchists should fight for the leadership, supervision, or any position of privilege in the social movements. We talk, on the contrary, of the internal struggle that takes place when we want to influence social movements to use libertarian practices.

We believe that there is never a political vacuum, anywhere. Therefore, from the moment we cause our positions to prevail it necessarily means a decrease in the influence of the authoritarians and vice versa. For example, on seeing that some anarchists are struggling for a movement to use direct action and direct

democracy, politicians and party devices will be against it, and unless there is a strong organisation of anarchists, with social insertion and the ability to fight for these positions, the authoritarian positions will have greater chances to prosper. When we are properly organised as anarchists we will not lag behind events, but manage to mark our positions and exert our influence in the social movements, going on to have true insertion. It is through the specific anarchist organisation that we can manage to be properly organised for the work we want to perform in the most varying social movements.

> "The anarchist organisation should be the continuation of our efforts and our propaganda; it must be the libertarian adviser that guides us in our everyday combat action. We can base ourselves on its programme to spread our action in other camps, in all the special organisations of particular struggles into which we can penetrate and take our activity and action: for example, in the trade unions, in anti-militarist societies, in anti-religious and anti-clerical groupings etc. Our special organisation can serve equally as a ground for anarchist concentration (not centralised!), as a field of agreement, of understanding and of the most complete solidarity as possible between us. The more we are united, the smaller will be the danger that we be dragged into incoherence, or that we turn from our impetus for struggle to battles and skirmishes where others who are not at all in agreement with us could tie our hands."[9]

Thus, the anarchist organisation, besides being responsible for its political practice in different camps serves to increase the social force of the anarchists within them. Among the various forces present in these spaces anarchists should stand out and bring to fruition their positions.

This political practice in different camps requires that the anarchist organisation divides itself into fronts, which are the internal groups that carry out social work. Generally, organisations that work with this methodology suggests that three basic fronts are developed: trade union, community and student. Differently, we believe that the fronts should be divided, not according to these pre-stipulated spaces of insertion, but based on the practical work of the organisation. In our understanding there should not be an obligation to develop work in these three fronts and, in addition, there may be other interesting spaces that demand dedicated fronts.

Each organisation should seek spaces more conducive to the development of its social work, and from this practical necessity form its fronts. Thus, if there

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9. Luigi Fabbri. "The Anarchist Organization", 1907

is work in the student sector, there may be a student front. If there is union work, there may be a trade union front. However, if other work is developed, for example, with rural movements or with urban movements etc., the fronts should follow this division. That is, instead of having only one community front that works with rural and urban social movements, you could create a front of rural movements and another front of urban movements. In this sense, we support a model of dynamic fronts that account for the internal division of the specific anarchist organisation for the practical realisation of social work in the best way possible.

The fronts are responsible, in their respective area of work, for the creation and development of social movements as well as for ensuring that anarchists occupy political space – space that is in permanent dispute – and to exercise due influence in these movements.

In the case of our organisation we initiated social work divided into two fronts. The "community front," which combines the work of management of the Fabio Luz Social Library (Biblioteca Social Fábio Luz - BSFL), of the Centre of Social Culture of Rio de Janeiro (Centro de Cultura Social - CCS-RJ) and its community work, the Marques da Costa Centre for Research (Núcleo de Pesquisa Marques da Costa - NPMC) and of the Ideal Peres Libertarian Study Circle (Círculo de Estudos Libertários Ideal Peres - CELIP). The other was the "occupations front", which was involved with urban occupations and the Internationalist Front of the Homeless (Frente Internacionalista dos Sem-Teto - FIST). With the change in the situation we left FIST, continuing to work with occupations and have gone on to bring together a few occupiers, and many other unemployed in the Movement of Unemployed Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Desempregados - MTD). This movement took on great importance in this front. In this way the "occupations front" was renamed "urban social movements front." Likewise, because we deemed it necessary, we constituted a third front: the "agro-ecological front" (Anarchism and Nature) from practical work in rural social movements, of ecology and agriculture, which began to be developed by the organisation. In this way, we hold that the fronts are adapted to the practical context of work. We illustrate how this works in practice.

DIAGRAM 1
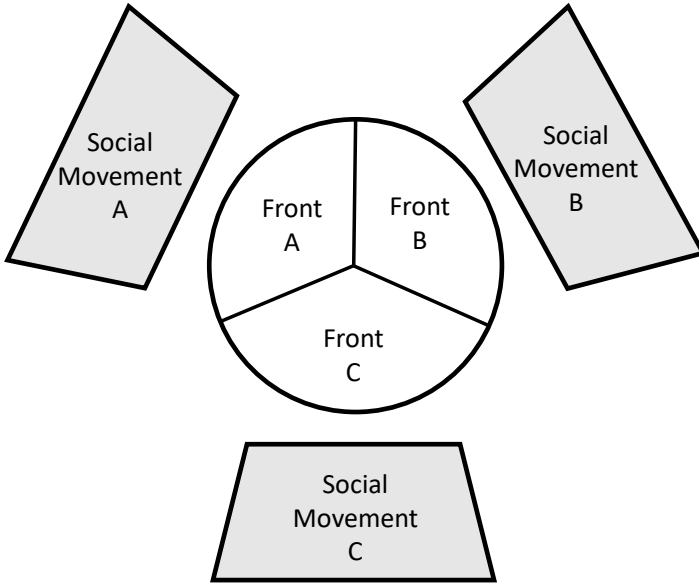
SAO being the specific anarchist organisation (divided into fronts A, B and C) and SM the social movements, the SAO is divided internally into the fronts which act, each one, in a determined SM or SM-sector. In this case, assuming that the SAO works with three SM, or with three SM sectors, it divides itself for the work in three fronts. Front A works with SMA or with sector A of a determined SM. Front B works with SMB or with sector B of a determined SM, and so on. Giving practical examples: the SAO can be divided into a syndicalist front (A), a community front (B) and a student front (C), and each one of them will act in a SM. Front A will act in the union, front B in the community and C in the student movement. In our case, our SAO is today divided into three fronts: urban social movements (A), community (B) and agro-ecology (Anarchism and Nature) (C). Each of these works in one or more social movements. Front A in the homeless movement and in the MTD, front B in the community movement and front C in the rural movements of ecology and agriculture.

Besides this internal division into fronts, which functions for social work, the specific anarchist organisations uses, both for its internal and external functioning, the logic of what we call "concentric circles" – strongly inspired by the Bakuninist organisational model. The main reason that we adopt this logic

of functioning is because, for us, the anarchist organisation needs to preserve different instances of action. These different instances should strengthen its work while at the same time allowing it to bring together prepared militants with a high level of commitment and approximating people sympathetic to the theory or practice of the organisation – who could be more or less prepared and more or less committed. In short, the concentric circles seek to resolve an important paradox: the anarchist organisation needs to be closed enough to have prepared, committed and politically aligned militants, and open enough to draw in new militants.

A large part of the problems that occur in anarchist organisations are caused by them not functioning according to the logic of concentric circles and by not implementing these two instances of action. Should a person who says they are an anarchist and is interested in the work of the organisation be in the organisation, despite not knowing the political line in depth? Should a laymen interested in anarchist ideas be in the organisation? How do you relate to "libertarians" – in the broadest sense of the term – who do not consider themselves anarchists? Should they be in the organisation? And the older members who have already done important work but now want to be close, but not to engage in the permanent activities of the organisation? And those that can only rarely dedicate time for activism? There are many questions. Other problems occur because there are doubts about the implementation of social work. Must the organisation present itself as an anarchist organisation in the social movements? In its social work can it form alliances with other individuals, groups and organisations that are not anarchist? In such a case, what are the common points to advocate? How do you carry out social work in a field with people from different ideologies and maintain an anarchist identity? How do you ensure that anarchism does not lose its identity when in contact with social movements? On this point there are also many questions.

The concentric circles are intended to provide a clear place for each of the militants and sympathisers of the organisation. In addition, they seek to facilitate and strengthen the social work of the anarchist organisation, and finally, establish a channel for the capture of new militants.

In practice the logic of concentric circles is established as follows. Inside the specific anarchist organisation there are only anarchists that, to a greater or lesser extent, are able to elaborate, reproduce and apply the political line of the organisation internally, in the fronts and in public activity. Also, to a greater or lesser extent, militants should be able to assist in the elaboration of the strategic-tactical line of the organisation, as well as having full capacity to

reproduce and apply it. Militants assume internal functions in the organisation – be they executive, deliberative or extraordinary – as well as external functions with regards to social work. The functions assumed by the militants within the organisation adhere to self-management and federalism, or to horizontal decisions where all the militants have the same power of voice and of vote and where, in specific cases, there is delegation with imperative mandates. The functions to be performed by the delegates must be very well defined so that they "cannot act on behalf of the association unless the members thereof have explicitly authorised them [to do so]; they should execute only what the members have decided and not dictate the way forward to the association."[10] Moreover, the functions should be rotated in order to empower everyone and avoid crystallised positions or functions.

The specific anarchist organisation could have only one circle of militants, all of them being in the same instance, or it could have more than one circle – the criteria being collectively defined. For example, this may be the time that a person has been in the organisation or their ability to elaborate the political or tactical-strategic lines. Thus, the newer militants or those with a lesser ability to elaborate the lines may be in a more external (distant) circle, with the more experienced militants with a greater ability for elaborating the lines in another more internal (closer) one. There is not a hierarchy between the circles, but the idea is that the more "inside", or the closer the militant, the better are they able to formulate, understand, reproduce and apply the lines of the organisation. The more "inside" the militant, the greater is their level of commitment and activity. The more a militant offers the organisation, the more is demanded of them by it. It is the militants who decide on their level of commitment and they do or do not participate in the instances of deliberation based on this choice. Thus, the militants decide how much they want to commit and the more they commit, the more they will decide. The less they commit, the less they will decide.

This does not mean that the position of the more committed is of more value than that of the less committed. It means that they participate in different decision-making bodies. For example, those more committed participate with voice and vote in the Congresses, which define the political and strategic lines of the organisation; the less committed do not participate in the Congresses, or only participate as observers, and participate in the monthly assemblies where the tactics and practical applications of the lines are defined.

Thus, inside the specific anarchist organisation you may have one or more

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10. Ibid. p. 124

circles, which should always be defined by the level of commitment of the militants. In the case of more than one level this must be clear to everyone, and the criteria to change a level must be available to all militants. It is, therefore, the militant who chooses where they want to be.

The next circle, more external and distant from the core of the anarchist organisation, is no longer part of the organisation but has a fundamental importance: the level of supporters. This body, or instance, seeks to group together all people who have ideological affinities with the anarchist organisation. Supporters are responsible for assisting the organisation in its practical work, such as the publishing of pamphlets, periodicals or books; the dissemination of propaganda material; helping in the work of producing theory or of contextual analysis; in the organisation of practical activities for social work: community activities, help in training work, logistical activities, help in organising work, etc. This instance of support is where people who have affinities with the anarchist organisation and its work have contact with other militants, are able to deepen their knowledge of the political line of the organisation, better get to know its activities and deepen their vision of anarchism, etc.

Therefore, the category of support has an important role to help the anarchist organisation put into practice its activities, seeking to bring those interested closer to it. This approximation has as a future objective that some of these supporters will become militants of the organisation. The specific anarchist organisation draws in the greatest possible number of supporters and, through practical work, identifies those interested in joining the organisation and who have an appropriate profile for membership. The proposal for entry into the organisation may be made by the militants of the organisation to the supporter and vice-versa. Although each militant chooses their level of commitment to the organisation and where they want to be, the objective of the anarchist organisation is always to have the greatest number of militants in the more internal circles, with a greater level of commitment.

Let us give a practical example: lets suppose that an organisation has deliberated to work internally with two levels of commitment – or two circles. When the militants are new they enter at the level of "militant" and, when they have been there six months and are prepared and committed militants, move on to the level of "full militant". Let us suppose that this organisation has also resolved to have a level of supporters. The objective of the organisation will be to draw in the greatest possible number of supporters, based on the affinity of each one with the organisation, transferring them to the level of militant and, after six months – once prepared – to the level of full militant. We illustrate how this can work in practice.

Diagram 2
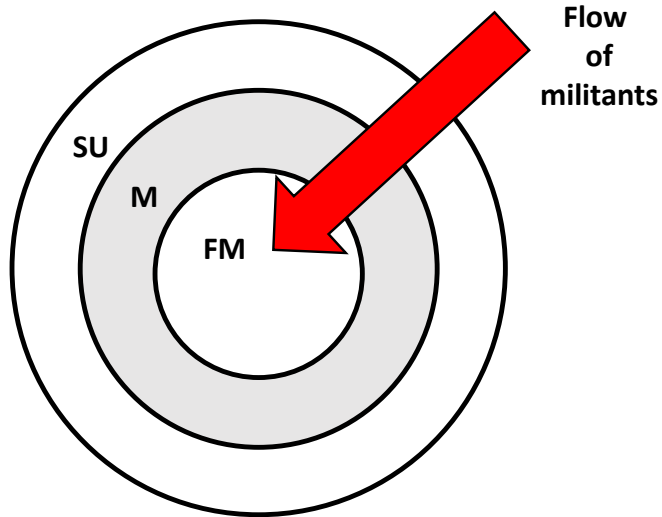
SU being the level of supporters, M of militants and FM of full militants, the objective is the flow indicated by the red arrow – to go from SU to M and from M to FM. Those who are interested can follow this flow, and those who are not can stay where they feel better. For example, if a person wants to give sporadic support, and no more than that, they may want to always stay at SU. The issue here is that all a person's will to work should be utilised by the organisation. This is not because a person has little time, or because they prefer to help at a time when it must be rejected, but because inside a specific anarchist organisation there must be room for all those who wish to contribute. "Accomplishments are the criteria for selection that never fail. The aptitude and efficiency of the militants are, fundamentally, measures for the enthusiasm and the application with which they perform their tasks."[11]

The logic of concentric circles requires that each militant and the organisation itself have very well defined rights and duties for each level of commitment. This is because it is not just for someone to make decisions about something

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11. Juan Mechoso. Acción Directa Anarquista: una historia de FAU. Montevideo: Recortes, p. 199. The quotations marks of the Mechoso book refer to documents of the *Uruguayan Anarchist Federation* (FAU).

with which they will not comply. A supporter who frequents activities once a month and makes sporadic contributions, for example, cannot decide on rules or activities that must be met or carried out daily, as they would be deciding something much more for the other militants than for themselves.

It is a very common practice in libertarian groups that people who make sporadic contributions decide on issues which end up being committed to or carried out by the more permanent members. It is very easy for a militant who appears from time to time to want to set the political line of the organisation, for example, since it is not they who will have to follow this line most of the time.

These are disproportionate forms of decision-making in which one ends up deciding something which others enact. In the model of concentric circles we seek a system of rights and duties in which everyone makes decisions about that which they could and should be committed to afterwards. In this way it is normal for supporters to decide only on that in which they will be involved. In the same way it is normal for militants of the organisation to decide on that which they will carry out. Thus we make decisions and their commitments proportionally and this implies that the organisation has clear criteria for entry, clearly defining who does and does not take part in it, and at what level of commitment the militants are.

An important criteria for entry is that all of the militants who enter the organisation must agree with its political line. For this the anarchist organisation must have theoretical material that expresses this line – in less depth for those who are not yet members of the organisation and in more depth for those who are. When someone is interested in the work of the anarchist organisation, showing interest in approximation, you should make this person a supporter and give them the necessary guidance. As a supporter, knowing the political line in a little more depth and having an affinity for the practical work of the organisation, the person may show interest in joining the organisation or the organisation can express its interest in the supporter becoming a militant. In both cases the supporter should receive permanent guidance from the anarchist organisation, giving to them theoretical material that will deepen their political line. One or more militants who know this line well will discuss doubts, debate and make clarifications with them. Having secured the agreement of the supporter with the political line of the organisation, and with agreement from both parties, the militant is integrated into the organisation. It is important that in the initial period every new militant has the guidance of another older one, who will orient and prepare them for work. In any event, the anarchist organisation always has to concern itself with the training and

guidance of the supporters and militants so that this may allow them to change their level of commitment, if they so desire.

This same logic of concentric circles works in social work. Through it the anarchist organisation is articulated to perform social work in the most appropriate and effective way. As we have seen, the anarchist organisation is divided internally into fronts for the performance of practical work. For this there are organisations that prefer to establish direct relations with the social movements, and there are others that prefer to present themselves through an intermediary social organisation, which we could call a grouping of tendency.

> *"Participation in the grouping of tendency implies acceptance of a set of definitions that can be shared by comrades of diverse ideological origins, but which share certain indispensable exclusions (to the reformists, for example) if seeking a minimum level of real operational coherence. (…) The groupings of tendency, co-ordinated with each other and rooted in the most combative of the people (…) are a higher level than the latter [the level of the masses]."[12]*

The grouping of tendency puts itself between the social movements and the specific anarchist organisation, bringing together militants of distinct ideologies that have affinity in relation to certain practical questions.

As we have emphasised, there are anarchist organisations that prefer to present themselves directly in the social movements, without the need for the groupings of tendency, and others preferring to present themselves by means of these. In both cases there are positive and negative points and each organisation must determine the best way to act. As the views that we advocate in the social movements are much more practical than theoretical, it may be interesting to work with a grouping of tendency, incorporating people who agree with some or all of the positions that we advocate in the social movements (force, class struggle, autonomy, combativeness, direct action, direct democracy and revolutionary perspective) and that will help us to augment the social force in defence of these positions.

In the same way as in the diagram above, the idea is that the specific anarchist organisation seeks insertion in this intermediate level (grouping of tendency) and through it presents itself, conducting its work in social movements in search of social insertion. Again we illustrate how this works in practice.

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12. Ibid. pp. 190, 192

Diagram 3
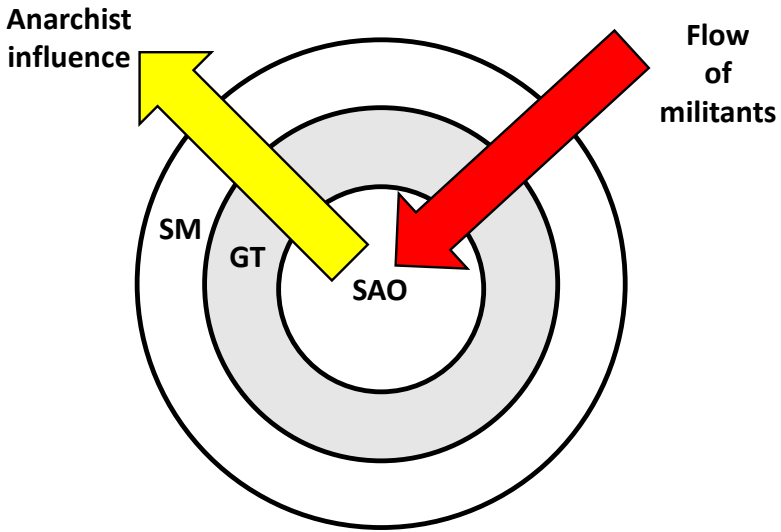
SAO being the specific anarchist organisation, GT the grouping of tendency and SM the social movement, there are two flows.

The first – that of the influence of the SAO – seeks to go through the GT and from there to the SM. Let us look at a few practical examples. The anarchist organisation that desires to act in a union may form a grouping of tendency with other activists from the union movement who defend some specific banners (revolutionary perspective, direct action, etc.) and by means of this tendency may influence the union movement, or the union in which it acts. Or the anarchist organisation may choose to work with the landless movement and, for this, brings people who defend similar positions (autonomy, direct democracy, etc.) in the social movement together in a grouping of tendency. By means of this grouping of tendency the specific anarchist organisation acts within the landless movement and, in this way, seeks to influence it.

This form of organisation aims to solve a very common problem that we find in activism. For example, when we know very dedicated activists; revolutionaries that advocate self-management, autonomy, grassroots democracy, direct democracy, etc. and with whom we do not act because they are not anarchists. These activists could work with the anarchists in the groupings of tendency and defend their positions in the social movements together.

The second arrow in the diagram shows the objective of the flow of militants. That is, in this scheme of work the goal is to bring people in the social movements that have practical affinity with the anarchists into the groupings of tendency and, from there, bring those that have ideological affinity closer to the anarchist organisation. In the same way as in the previous diagram, if a militant has great practical affinity with the anarchists, but is not an anarchist, they must be a member of the grouping of tendency and will be fundamental to the performance of social work. If they have ideological affinities they may be closer to or even join the organisation.

The objective of the anarchist organisation is not to turn all activists into anarchists, but to learn to work with each of these activists in the most appropriate way. While having mutual interests the militants may change their positions in the circles (from the social movement to the grouping of tendency or from the grouping of tendency to the anarchist organisation). Without these mutual interests, however, each one acts where they think it more pertinent.

The decision-making process used in the anarchist organisation is an attempt at consensus, using the vote when consensus is not possible. Unlike some libertarian groups and organisations we believe that consensus should not be mandatory. As we mentioned earlier, besides consensus being a very inefficient form of decision-making, becoming unfeasible the more the number of people involved in the decisions increases, it offers the serious problem of giving great power to isolated agents. In an organisation of 20 militants one could block consensus, or even if 19 were in favour of one position and one another, you would have to have a "middle ground" that would consider, in a very disproportionate way, the only dissenter. To give proper efficiency to the decision-making process and not to give too much power to isolated agents, we chose this model of an attempt at consensus, and when this is not possible, the vote. "If it were in the very bosom of the organisation that the disagreement arose, that the division between majority and minority appeared around minor issues, over practical modalities or over special cases [...], then it may occur more or less easily that the minority are inclined to do as the majority."[13] In the case of voting all the militants of the organisation, even those who are outvoted, have an obligation to follow the winning position. This decision-making process is used to establish theoretical and ideological unity and also for strategic and tactical unity. We will return to these later. At this point it is enough to emphasise that for the struggle we want to pursue, we must put an end to dispersion and disorganisation and "the way to overcome this is

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13   Luigi Fabbri, "The Anarchist Organization", 1907

to create an organisation that [... is based] on the basis of specific theoretical and tactical positions, and that leads us to a firm understanding of how these should be applied in practice."[14]

It is important to add, too, that the militants must use common sense at the time of decisions by vote. They should carefully observe the positions of militants who are closest to the issues that are being voted on, as these positions are more important than those who are not close, even though they have the same weight in voting. When voting occurs it can be easy for militants not involved in the issue being voted on to determine what others will have to do. Such situations demand caution and those in which all the members that would carry out what was deliberated on lose the vote, and are obliged to apply what was resolved by others, should be avoided.

Also in relation to decisions, at the time in which they are being taken "there must be a lot of space for all discussions and all points of view must be analysed carefully.[15]" After deliberation, "responsibilities [are divided], the members being formally responsible for their execution," since "the organisation does nothing by itself." Then "all the activities that are deliberated and which are the responsibility of the organisation will have, in one way or another, to be executed by its members" and, for this execution, there is the "need to divide the activities between militants, always looking for a model that distributes these activities well and to avoid the concentration of tasks on the more active or capable members". "From the moment in which a militant assumes one or more tasks for the organisation, he has an obligation to perform them and a great responsibility to the group [...]. It is the relationship of commitment that the militant assumes with the organisation."

Furthermore, we believe it to be relevant and reaffirm, once again, that "self-discipline is the engine of the self-managed organisation" and this also applies to the specific anarchist organisation. Thus, "each one that assumes a responsibility must have sufficient discipline to execute it. Likewise, when the organisation determines a line to follow or something to accomplish, it is individual discipline that will cause what is collectively resolved to be realised." We note:

> *we also ask for discipline, because, without understanding, without co-ordinating the efforts of each one to a common and simultaneous action, victory is not physically possible. But discipline should not be a servile*

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14. Dielo Trouda. "The problem of organisation and the notion of synthesis".

15. FARJ. "Reflections on the commitment ...". The unidentified quotes in this and the next paragraph refers to this article

discipline, a blind devotion to leaders, an obedience to the one who always says not to interfere. Revolutionary discipline is consistent with the ideas accepted, fidelity to commitments assumed, it is to feel obliged to share the work and the risks with struggle comrades.[16]

"We believe that in order for our struggle to bear promising fruit it is fundamental that each of the militants of the organisation have a high degree of commitment, responsibility and self-discipline."[17] "It is will and militant commitment that will cause us to go, day after day, towards the development of the organisation's activities such that we can overcome the obstacles and pave the way for our long-term objectives."[18] Finally, we should know that "responsibility and organisational discipline should not horrify: they are travel companions of the practice of social anarchism."[19]

This position introduces a relation of co-responsibility between the militants and the organisation, it being that the anarchist organisation "will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of each member, the same way as each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity"[20] of the anarchist organisation.

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16. Errico Malatesta. "Action and Discipline." In: Anarchists, Socialists and Communists, P. 24
17. FARJ. "Reflections on the commitment ..."
18. Ibid.
19. Nestor Makhno. "On Revolutionary Discipline." In: Organisation and Anarchy, p. 34
20. Dielo Trouda. "Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists

Especifismo is an anarchist organisational theory which was developed in the 1970s in South America. Especifismo can be roughly translated as ‚specifism‘. The theorie states that anarchists should not only engage in and with social movements, but should also organize their own organisations — the specific anarchist organisation. The theory continues on the ideas of Errico Malatesta, the ideas of the socalled Platformists and the experience of several revolutionary movements in both Europe and Middle and South America.

Withing the specifist theory the important relation between theory and praxis is being stressed. Theory should be based on and supportive of praxis and the other way around, it should refined and deepend by experience of that praxis. Separated from one another, they are useless.

This brochure brings together three important texts about and by the specifist movement. Together they form a good first impression of Especismo-theory and help strengthening anarchist organising efforts.