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The February Document

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Center for Especifismo Studies

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Just because it makes sense to follow single file, behind a designated leader, through some terrains of struggle, this does not put in question the entire set of ideological principles held by the organization. One of these principles is, after all, a high degree of trust amongst militants. This is as true for a militant fulfilling a leadership role as it is for the militants following their instructions.

Unlike ideology which remains steady as a dependable set of values, strategy and theory are refined through their relationship to practice. This means we have to “test the waters” so to speak, staying active and engaged on the social level with the short or medium-term objective of determining the best paths for ourselves, as an organization. And even if this social work begins on only one front, it must aim to expand to multiple fronts. If we put all our efforts into one mass movement or popular organization, what do we do when the momentum wanes and the activists burn out?

The most fertile terrain for the recovery of the social vector of anarchism may not always be where we want to be active; it may be where we effectively and ethically can be active. Addi-

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tionally, the best path in one context might not make sense in every context, after all the terrain of struggle is always in flux, and affinity changes and evolves over time. But none of this means that the political organization should articulate antagonistic stances toward other specific groups and their preferred modes of struggle. On the contrary, we should remain in constant contact with revolutionary groups in multiple struggles.

The learning that takes place through struggle should be mutual. Anarchist militants should be able to model and be modeled to. There would be no use in explaining to people that you know more about their struggle than they do. In addition to being unethical, it would be strategically absurd because people must liberate themselves and because every struggle has its own particular demands and context. When we say that everyone is a student and a teacher, we are referring both to the way that these two roles could be taken up at the same time by everyone involved in a discussion and to the way that these roles could be rotated through, allowing us to become students of others and allowing us to learn to be teachers in other contexts outside of the Center for Especifismo Studies.

The theory of the center-periphery relations of class is a distinct tool that allows us to analyze exploitation and domination in many different terrains of struggle. With this theory, we can better defend our own ideological values while committing to ethically respect the specificity of different struggles. This allows anarchists to be nuanced and precise in our understanding of class relations and to go beyond the strictly economic definitions of class that are common in Marxist tendencies.

In English, we could sometimes read the term “grassroots” as interchangeable with “peripheral” because it implies impetus from sources outside of the concentrated centers of power. This is why especifismo does not consider the established centers to be a means for the emancipation of the people. Gaining control of the center or moving a certain group, region, or leader to that center only perpetuates the center-periphery

of our movements. We don't need the input of authoritarians or moneyed interests regarding our work. Educating ourselves and others about how these struggles are connected spreads necessary knowledge and ensures that the narrative of history is also constructed in a way that defends the interest of the oppressed classes.

The mass liberatory movements in society must be driven by necessity, not our ideology or anyone else's. "A struggle for housing must be a struggle for everyone's housing." This is why we consider reforms to be short-term objectives to organize around and not strategies for long-term social transformation. This is also why we consider it essential to participate in spontaneous mobilizations and uprisings that demand specific reforms that address the needs of the people. There is an ethical obligation to participate in these movements and keep the momentum going. Militancy, for us, consists of collective direct action, meaning taking risks alongside those who struggle. It is a constant cycle of reassessing our actions and addressing our needs so that we may continue to fight.

power dynamics in a new form. This is true whether we are talking about political elites, the wealthy, technocrats, bureaucrats, vanguards, church leaders, con artists, or patriarchs. The need for popular grassroots movements is never avoided by winning over the center. Only the peripheral classes together can make up a social force capable of transforming society.

When we consider a specific situation (e.g., a racialized family with underemployed parents, minimal access to healthcare for the children, and ever-increasing costs of living), the theory of intersectionality has certain similarities to the center-periphery theory outlined by the FARJ. It is obvious that overcoming divisions among certain peripheries will inevitably be necessary to organize a truly massive revolutionary movement. However, it is also possible to use the centre-periphery model to understand how someone may be part of a dominant class in one context and part of a dominated class in another, making it clear that context matters a lot when analyzing class relations. A rural family in an imperial country may be closer to the center as it relates to global economics, but that doesn't mean they are close to the cultural centers of power in big cities, the political centers of power in the national government, or the economic centers of power where consumer goods are readily available. Even a credentialed professional may be distanced from various centers of power because of their race, religious beliefs, or immigration status.

Anarchism is a collective effort to resist the racist, sexist, and colonial complacency that flattens the differences between each of these struggles into an oversimplified schema. This again relates to "a model of performance" because, in *especifismo*, it is the specific anarchist organization that vigilantly engages in direct action to address the needs of the periphery, while simultaneously looking internally at the well-being and satisfaction of its own militants. In this way, the social level is a kind of "revolutionary gymnasium" where militants engaged in the class struggle do "revolutionary gymnastics". But the

political level is a kind of backstage, a “station in the struggle”, where we can analyze, evaluate, and improve our movement, with the honest feedback of our comrades, feedback that we must be able to trust.

We understand the phrase “station in the struggle” as referring to a physical or virtual location that we learn to navigate to and from. Militant study develops theories and practices for reliably finding these stations, during times of calm as well as times of unrest. It is in this way that we see the Center for Especifismo Studies as having an educational lineage that traces back from Militant Kindergarten and our own “pre-K” efforts, to the especifismo of the FARJ as articulated in *Social Anarchism and Organisation* and in their libertarian study circle in Rio de Janeiro, originally called CEL and later renamed as CELIP, and finally back to the militancy of Ideal Peres, in honor of whom it was renamed.

These comments from Ideal Peres are especially relevant to our own discussions about ideology:

“A subject who has a Libertarian Ethic knows why they are struggling and can explain the ideological reasons for the struggle, having the commitment and self-discipline to carry out the tasks assumed.”

Militant ethics keep an organization from making false promises. So, commitment and follow-through should be as fundamental to anarchist ideology as solidarity and mutual aid. Anarchists should be careful to only commit to do work that they know they can follow through on. It is important for the political organization to have a nuanced understanding of personal and collective limitations; these uncompromising requirements are determined by the especifismo militants for themselves and for their social work. And these strict lines must be able to be communicated clearly in order to anticipate potential problems with completing certain tasks.

form of resistance that occurs in one region or locale, only for “citizens” or “employees”, not for all the dominated and exploited classes.

The political organization acts collectively in a way that combines the social force of individual militants into an active, articulated resistance. Through increasing degrees of commitment to this articulated resistance, a militant core is organized and positioned in such a way that it maintains contact with peripheries. But what are the values of this militant “center”, and how will it keep from perpetuating ableist and exploitative conceptions of capacity?

We see a connection between social force and capacity. Both are part of center-periphery relations because while someone may be disabled by their conditions and environment, it is also possible for them to be empowered by them. It is wrong to assume that capacity is an individual trait since every individual’s capacity is the result of being supported by the work of others. Social force is the ability to act in relevant ways, and capacity is the degree to which someone has their needs met. Both are necessary for social work, but neither is an inherent characteristic of an individual. They refer to a combination of individual demands and collective support. So, in revolutionary politics, more social force and more capacity are benefits of being more closely aligned with the coordination of militants which is not a directing force but a small engine that helps sustain the struggles of dominated and exploited peoples.

This is different than the centers established by political parties looking to build a base of supporters because a counter organization would not benefit the State or the political class, just as it would not benefit capital, bosses, or union bureaucracy. Organizing the struggle is about creating spaces that are explicitly unwelcoming to capitalist insertion and cooptation. This is why there can be no open space for the creeping in of status quo ideology, especially when it comes to the history

In a libertarian socialist society, where production is based on need instead of profit, with everyone working in solidarity, and where there is no longer a capitalist class to extract the products of our labour, there is the very real possibility of less overall work being required from each person. Nevertheless, requiring a homogenous standard of functionality from everyone risks ableism, so we will also need to conceive of ways in which people with varying abilities, skills, and capacities could participate (also on their own terms) in the realization of necessary tasks. Under the capitalist system of exploitation, people that are disabled by the workplace do not have a say in what happens to them; however, in a self-managed workplace, they would because everyone involved would be part of the decision-making process, and that would include how the work is organized. So, the people doing the work could organize the jobs in such a way that the tasks of each job are explicitly achievable by the specific person that is responsible for completing them. This relates to our own discussions on the weighted decision-making power of the people who are most impacted by a particular decision. Individualism is more influential in a workplace where the workers aren't well organized because this situation makes everyone desperate to defend their own interests. By contrast, everywhere that we organize ourselves provides us a point from which to defend our own interests, removing the conditions that make individualism appealing in the first place.

In a passive sense, all consumers and workers are anti-capitalist. So, in an active sense, the work of revolutionary militants is to recognize and articulate the latent forces in these struggles. Our movements must move beyond passive resistance; the popular organization must become more than just friction that slows down capitalist production. Active resistance produces real consequences for the ruling class, forcing capitalists and the State to take notice. And for it to be effective, the popular organization cannot be an isolated

Transparency of capacity (of the individual militants and of the organizations) and transparency of intent should be norms in any autonomous, self-managed social movement.

But with all this social work and transparency, how do we prevent anarchist ideas and practices from being diluted and co-opted? This too is a group effort to be undertaken by the specific anarchist organization. Again, this work relies on relationships, which take a lot of commitment and mutual respect to build. Building those relationships along lines of liberatory practices respects where people are at, an effective way of relationship building that wins more people over in the long run.

For this reason, anarchist ideology is not only important to strengthen and refine on the political level but also to defend and propagate on the social level. This is exactly why *especificismo* argues for anarchist militancy, which aims to defend specific ideas in popular spaces, avoiding the trappings of "activism for activism's sake", which is only concerned with participating in popular spaces without necessarily trying to progress any specific ideological principle.

Anarchist ideology can address the fears of radicals about working with people who don't share their foundational interpretations of the world. By having a clear ideology, reinforced and expanded by comrades participating in large assemblies and by comrades working to spread emancipatory ideas through public education, anarchism becomes a driving force capable of linking peripheries through direct action.

In *especificismo*, the social revolution is the name for the destruction of the capitalist system and the division of classes, and libertarian socialism is the name for the construction of a new egalitarian society. But construction of a libertarian socialist society must take place before as well as after the revolutionary rupture because both the creative and destructive forces of social revolution are the result of mass movement and popular organization, not simply the slow evolution of humankind or the inevitable collapse of the capitalist system.

Today, in English, “revolution” tends to mean “BIG CHANGE”. Not a lot of people, anarchists included, seem comfortable discussing revolution as an actual possibility, no matter how remote it may seem at this time. When treated as just another word, revolution is weakened as an ideological concept. We want to propagate the meaning of revolution as a specific rupture with the whole system. The social revolution is the decisive conflict between the popular protagonism of the oppressed classes against the ruling class. This process of social transformation, like baking bread, requires the necessary yeast which, in especificismo, is the political organization that connects peripheries, independently and away from the official centers of power.

So, we should not consider self-management and federalism, as separate economic and political principles, but as equally integral parts of the direct action that is possible when economics and politics no longer refer to centers of exploitation and domination.

Not all socialist tendencies are on board with this trajectory, nor do they all consider revolutionary rupture through social transformation to be a necessary path to socialism. While anarchists understand that this will occur differently depending on the local context and historical circumstances, the anarchist critique of the State is not limited to one or another form of the state, but to all its forms. Since it has the official role of mediating conflicts between classes, the state is always on the winning side. The juridical centers of power invite landlords and renters to defend themselves against the other side, both fighting for what are supposedly guaranteed rights but are inherently in conflict.

Capitalism and the State are the pervasive enemies of people all over the world. This is the foundation of a powerful means of solidarity that transcends national borders. The ruling class fights against this solidarity by making it more difficult for peripheries to relate to one another. Internationalism

is a practice of seeing multiple iterations of struggle and not getting subsumed entirely by the national politics of our own countries. This is a way of fighting against the ruling class narrative that “people from out of town” showed up to the protest. Workers should feel confident in crossing the State’s lines in solidarity with other people fighting against systematic oppression.

Capital already flows freely. It establishes new centers of power, divesting from and abandoning old centers, leaving them to adapt to their peripheral status without any support. But it is also true that people in cities can just as easily find themselves involuntarily positioned in new centers because of gentrification, leaving them to solve problems of rising rents and longer commutes. These are all examples of workers being pushed to peripheries, regardless of where they live.

Additionally, the ruling class at the center turns newly formed peripheries against generationally established peripheries by weaponizing their inclusion in the system. This is a fake competition created by capitalists to pit workers against each other, and it is perpetuated by the State because it strengthens nationalistic and patriotic sentiment. In this way, borders are essential for keeping people dominated, making them more desperate and, therefore, more likely to accept their exploitation.

Our lack of organization means giving up our freedom of movement; it means coercively being put into someone else’s organization. If we don’t organize ourselves, capitalism will do it for us. It already puts consumers at odds with producers, but in a libertarian socialist society, these two distinct interests would not be so diametrically opposed since, of course, all workers are also consumers. The interaction between the logistics of getting supplies, the management of time, and the division of tasks would create constant opportunities for coordination, unity, and eventually federation of various workers’ and consumers’ councils.