

# Elements of Anarchist Theory and Strategy

Felipe Corrêa interviewed by Mya Walmsley

Felipe Corrêa

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*The steady revival of organized Anarchism in the anglosphere has led to a re-engagement with the fundamental strategic questions of Anarchism. In what way should a revolutionary organization be structured? How should a revolutionary organization struggle for reforms? What role does the revolutionary organization play in the revolutionary process? In grappling with these questions the most novel contemporary insights have undoubtedly come from the Anarchist movement in Latin America, where the tradition of organized, class struggle anarchism was growing and successfully struggling whilst in the anglosphere it was languishing in a long period of decline.*

*Despite their influence, many of the ideas and history that have motivated this movement are largely inaccessible to an English speaking audience. The explosive introduction of this tradition – called *especificismo* (specifism) – to the anglosphere was a broad introduction to the key tenants of the tendency in 2006 by Adam Weaver followed by the full translation of the 2008 conference platform of the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (*Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro – FARJ*), which summarized many of the theoretical conclusions of the movement in the region. Although *especificismo* has not been unanimously adopted across Latin America and debates between organisations concerning its exact meaning and implementation continue, this conference platform opened an English speaking audience to the novel theoretical development that had occurred in the region coherently for the first time.*

*Perhaps the most crucial book translated following this was the translation of Ángel Cappelletti's *Anarchism in Latin America* in 2018, which was not only itself a fantastic history of the movement in Latin America, but itself was a fundamental text for the rise of *especificismo*. Relevant for this interview however is that over the last few years the translation of several of Felipe Correa's key interventions by Enrique Guerrero-López has worked to clarify and build on the work presented in *Social Anarchism and Organisation*. As a militant and theorist in the Anarchist Organization Libertarian Socialism / Brazilian Anarchist Coordination (OASL/CAB) in São Paulo, these translations offer an insight into the strategic debate and consensus' emerging within Latin American Anarchism. By doing so, however, it has tantalizingly revealed the depth of strategic and theoretical debate that has been left unavailable to an English speaking audience.*

*In the spirit of clarifying and spreading the debates of Latin American Anarchism to the anglosphere, I contacted Felipe Correa in early 2022 and asked him questions that various comrades had raised during reading groups and informal discussions concerning the tendency – questions that*

could not be easily answered by the texts available to us. His extensive response to my questions, ranging from the notion of power, the role of organizations, and the relation between Anarchism and class politics, offers valuable and unique insight into this important tendency.

I am thankful for comrade Felipe Correa's patience in answering my questions and Enrique Guerrero-López's help in assisting with the translation of the text into English.

**Mya Walmsley**

**Thank you for agreeing to this interview Felipe! I appreciate the time you are taking to engage with these questions – I hope they prove interesting and fruitful. For those unfamiliar, would you be willing to provide a very brief summary of yourself, what kind of militant work you do, and the *especifismo* tendency?**

Hello Mya! I thank you for your interest. It is a pleasure for me to respond to this interview. I am Felipe Corrêa and for more than two decades I have been involved with anarchist militancy and also with other activities related to anarchism, such as research and editing.

In the field of militancy, I am member of the Anarchist Organization Libertarian Socialism / Brazilian Anarchist Coordination (OASL/CAB), in São Paulo.<sup>1</sup> I have been building the *especifismo* in Brazil for almost 20 years. At the state and national level, I am currently involved in trade union militancy – I am part of one of the teacher's union (SINPRO), I am a university professor, mainly linked to the area of Social Sciences and research activities – as well as resource management and political training.

CAB is part of an anarchist current called *especifista* – *especifista* anarchism or simply *especifismo* –, which is a Latin American expression of the historical anarchist organizational dualism, which has existed since Bakunin and the Alliance to the present. In Latin America this term has been used to refer to the theoretical and practical conceptions of the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) which, founded in 1956, played a central role in the struggles against the military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. By means of the organizational structures that FAU built and/or strengthened, it became the second largest force of the Uruguayan left in these struggles. At the trade union and mass level, it was smaller only than the Uruguayan Communist Party; at the armed level it was smaller only than the Tupamaros. However, it was the only force operating in both camps.<sup>2</sup>

With the end of Latin American dictatorships, *especifista* anarchism was re-articulated. First in Uruguay, in the mid-1980s, and then in other countries. Brazil was important in this process and had its first *especifista* experiences in the mid-1990s. It was developed in different Brazilian regions and, in 2002, articulated in the Forum of Organized Anarchism (FAO). With the expansion of presence and increase in organizational ties, the conditions were created for the foundation of the Brazilian Anarchist Coordination (CAB) in 2012, whose objective is to constitute a national political organization, with nuclei throughout the country.

In terms of political line, *especifismo* is an anarchist current inspired by the positions of Bakunin and Malatesta; it is close to the perspectives of the Dielo Truda group and other historical classics of anarchism.

It is a current that sustains a set of positions in the face of the great strategic debates of anarchism. First, in relation to the organizational debate, the *especifistas* sustain the need for an

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<sup>1</sup> OASL Website: [anarquismosp.wordpress.com](http://anarquismosp.wordpress.com). CAB Website: [cabanarquista.org](http://cabanarquista.org). CAB Declaration of Principles (in English): [www.anarkismo.net](http://www.anarkismo.net).

<sup>2</sup> On the history of FAU (in English), see: [www.anarkismo.net](http://www.anarkismo.net). On the strategy of *especifista* anarchism, see the long interview I did with Juan Carlos Mechoso, FAU's historical militant (in English): [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org).

organizational dualism, from which anarchists articulate themselves in a political organization, as anarchists, and in social organizations (trade unions and social movements), as workers. Second, in the face of the debate on the role of reforms, the *especificistas* consider that, depending on the way they are sought and conquered, they can contribute to a revolutionary process. Third, in relation to the debate on violence, the *especificistas* consider that it should always be carried out in the context and concomitantly with the construction of mass movements. On the social level, of mass movements, *especificismo* promotes a program that has numerous affinities with revolutionary syndicalism.

In the field of intellectual production, I have coordinated the Institute for Anarchist Theory and History (IATH), an international project that aims to deepen and disseminate research on anarchism. I have been producing research linked to the IATH, mainly in the field of anarchist political theory; and research linked to the university. I am also the editor of *Faísca Publicações Libertárias*, an anarchist publishing house with around 40 published books on militant propaganda and academic studies.<sup>3</sup>

**I'll start with a very abstract question. In *Anarchism, Power, Class and Social Change*<sup>4</sup>, you define anarchism as an *ideology*, distinguishing *ideology* from *theory* insofar as ideology makes political claims and produces practical strategic interventions while theory makes methodological claims that determine their understanding of reality. Why is this distinction so important, and what relationship does it imply between Anarchist theory, Anarchist ideology, and Anarchist practice?**

For us anarchists who uphold the organizational need for theoretical and ideological unity, it is important to have a precise answer about what anarchism is. And, in this discussion, Latin American *especificismo* refers, to a large extent, to a 1972 text of the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation entitled “Huerta Grande: The Importance of Theory”. It is a text that is based on the reflections of Malatesta about the distinction between the scientific and ideological-doctrinal fields.<sup>5</sup>

According to this notion that appears in “Huerta Grande” and in Malatesta, it is necessary to distinguish a field of science and another of ideology-doctrine. Science subsidizes the investigation of the past, the present and, at most, indicates what will probably happen in the future. The ideology-doctrine offers evaluative elements for the reality to be judged and, mainly, for the establishment of objectives and lines of action.

This distinction is very important for two reasons. On the one hand, it seeks to prevent the interpretation of reality (scientific field) from being distorted by doctrinal-ideological elements – or, as we sometimes say, from replacing what was and what is by what we would like it to have been or to be. A consistent strategy for anarchism must start from an accurate (theoretically and scientifically rigorous) reading of reality. On the other hand, it intends to prevent a future perspective that gives up transformation in the name of reformist or even conservative pragmatism. A consistent strategy for anarchism needs to contain elements that we might call utopian or finalist and seek to realize them by revolutionary means. I believe this position was well summarized

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<sup>3</sup> IATH Website: [ithanarquista.wordpress.com](http://ithanarquista.wordpress.com). Faísca Website: [editorafaisca.net](http://editorafaisca.net).

<sup>4</sup> At: [www.anarkismo.net](http://www.anarkismo.net).

<sup>5</sup> “Huerta Grande” (in English) can be read at: [blackrosefed.org](http://blackrosefed.org). On Malatesta positions in this regard, see the chapter “Anarchism and Science” of the compilation *Errico Malatesta: Life and Ideas*, organized by Vernon Richards: [libcom.org](http://libcom.org).

in the slogan propagated by the Japanese anarchist Osugi Sakae, when he recommended “to act like a believer, to think like a skeptic”.<sup>6</sup>

This position also highlights, within these elements, which are the most and least flexible. The scientific field has to be more flexible (open) than the doctrinal-ideological field. We need to take advantage of developments in the scientific field to improve our understanding of social reality. This does not and cannot imply the defense of an inconsistent theoretical pluralism or a meaningless free-for-all. It is just an opening that ensures that we are not tied to mistaken, imprecise or outdated methods, theories and studies, simply because they are anarchists.

Comparatively, the ideological-doctrinal field is much less flexible, especially when we talk about anarchist principles. We are not open and flexible (“anti-dogmatic”) about our principles. Those who treat principles in this way fall into a pragmatism incapable of social change or transformation. Regarding the strategy, we can say that the general strategy is more fixed, followed by the time-restricted strategy, which is a little less fixed and more flexible, and finally, by the tactics, more flexible.

This position cannot be confused with a certain positivism, which advocates – and believes that it is possible – some neutrality in the analysis of reality. It recognizes that such neutrality is impossible, but that, in carrying out science, anarchists must pay attention if they are not being betrayed by their ideological-doctrinal positions. Something that is very common in the field of the left in general, including Marxism and Anarchism.

The relationship this implies between theory, ideology and practice is as follows. We can say that, when operating with these assumptions from the FAU and Malatesta, anarchists defend: the need for a precise theoretical (scientific) perspective to analyze reality and know, precisely, “where we are”; the need for an ideological (anarchist) perspective to support our judgments of this reality, to establish the finalist objectives and possible and desirable lines of action for the period in question – that is, anarchism, from its critique of domination, defense of self-management and strategic vision, proposes, in broad lines, “where we intend to go” and “how”; which brings us to a third need, for a strategic political practice that can take us from where we are to where we want to go – a practice that is based on a general strategy, a time-constrained strategy and a set of tactics.

In short, anarchist theory subsidizes the reading of reality, anarchist ideology subsidizes the judgment of that reality, the establishment of strategic objectives and a strategic line of action, and anarchist practice concretely carries out actions in order to transform socially and revolutionary this reality.

**What strikes me as unique about your writing (and generally the Anarchist tradition in Latin America) as a militant from the anglosphere is that it focuses closely on the concept of ‘power’. In *Anarchism, Power, Class and Social Change* you remark that classical anarchists tended to imprecisely mix power, domination, and authority together as the same concept. This theoretical imprecision made it difficult to see what sort of power anarchists should oppose (domination) and what power they should build (popular). Why do you think the concept of power is so central to Anarchism, and what implications does a correct understanding of power have on our political practice and doctrines?**

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<sup>6</sup> The text in which Osugi Sakae makes this claim is partially available (in English) in the anthology *Anarchism: a documentary history of libertarian ideas*, vol. 1, organized by Robert Graham (Black Rose Books, 2005).

We have really gone into the discussion about the concept of power quite in depth. We have highlighted that it is important to anarchists not only in terms of criticism, but also in constructive and purposeful ways.

First of all, it is important to emphasize that, like all great concepts, power is a polysemic concept (it has many meanings) and can be defined in different ways. Historically, and in the different currents of thought, it is possible to say – as Tomás Ibáñez observed – that power has been defined in three different ways: 1.) As *capacity* (possibility of doing something), for example, when we say that we have the power to do this or that; 2.) As *structures and mechanisms of regulation and control* (a concrete thing), for example, when we say that someone or some group has taken power; 3.) As *asymmetry in the relations of force* (temporary relation of imposition), for example, when we say that a class – at a specific moment, and for a determined time – established a relationship of power (imposed itself) in relation to another.<sup>7</sup>

When we talk about classical anarchists, they also dialogue with these approaches, as I argued in “Anarchism, Power, Class and Social Change”. And, not infrequently, they treat the relations of domination through terms such as domination, power and authority. When we take the case of classical anarchists, most of the time they use these terms (domination, power, authority), they have in mind what we refer to, in our anarchist current, as *relations of domination*.

Some comments are needed on these statements. First, despite this majority approach, to some extent all classical anarchists offer elements for the establishment of an anarchist theory of power. It is true that it was not something that they prioritized during their lifetime, but there is no doubt that in their writings there are many elements about this theme. Second, when I make these statements about the “classical anarchists”, I am not considering Proudhon among them – who, for me and other researchers, is more a kind of father of anarchism than an anarchist himself, since we consider that anarchism arose only within the First International, in the second half of the 1860s.<sup>8</sup> Among the libertarian classics of socialism, Proudhon stands out with great contributions in this discussion about power. Third, both Proudhon and the classic anarchists, even though in most cases they treat domination, power and authority equivalently, also open up possibilities for other approaches.

Proudhon claims a “social power” as the collective force of workers. (*De la Justice dans la Révolution and dans l'Église*) Bakunin emphasizes that he does not reject all forms of authority (*God and the State*) and even claims the power of the “allies”, members of the Alliance, in relation to the workers (“Letter to A. Richard”). Malatesta speaks of an “effective power of all workers” (“La Dittatura del Proletariato e l'Anarchia”). Berneri defends the “use of political power by the proletariat” (“La Dittatura del Proletariato e il Socialismo di Stato”). Many other references could be mentioned. What I want to show with this is not that these figures have permanently claimed the term power to refer to their propositional and constructive strategies, but that, even in their works, there are moments when these references appear.

What I argue in “Anarchism, Power, Class and Social Change” is that, if we detach ourselves from the term and delve into the content of this discussion, we will see that, in general, all anarchists identify in workers a certain *capacity for realization*; these anarchists normally discuss and put into practice actions to transform this capacity into a *social force* capable of interven-

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<sup>7</sup> On this and other arguments by Ibáñez, see my review of his article “Por un Poder Político Libertario” (in English): [www.anarkismo.net](http://www.anarkismo.net).

<sup>8</sup> On this argument, see my article “Anarchist Theory and History in Global Perspective” (In English): [ithanarquista.wordpress.com](http://ithanarquista.wordpress.com).

ing in social reality and, finally, they intend to contribute to the workers *imposing themselves, prevailing* against the bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy, their class enemies in general, through a social revolution that leads to a socialism supported by self-managed and federalist *structures and mechanisms of regulation and control*.

As I will detail a little later in this interview, these elements – capacity for realization, social force, imposition/preponderance relations, and structures and mechanisms of regulation and control – are at the heart of the theory of power that the *especificistas* have defended and that I particularly have developed in theoretical terms.

I believe that, depending on how it is defined, the concept of power can play a very important role in anarchism. First, for the explanation of what anarchism itself is. For example, I use the concept of power as the basis of my explanation of anarchism in my book *Bandeira Negra: re-discutindo o anarquismo* [Black Flag: re-discussing anarchism], that is nothing more than a renewed “What is anarchism”, which intends to solve the problems of previous studies that addressed this topic.

When I define anarchism in this book, I emphasize, among other things, that “anarchism [...] aims to transform the capacity for realization of the dominated classes into a social force and, through social conflict characterized by class struggle, to replace the dominating power that emerges as a vector resulting from social relations by a self-managed power, consolidated in the three structured spheres of society”. So the anarchist project is considered by me a “power project”.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the concept of power can support the analyzes of reality developed by anarchists. Through it (and a consistent theory of power) it is possible to understand, in history or today (in conjunctural terms), which are the forces at play in a given context, which of them are imposing/prepondering in relation to others, which they are the power relations that are established in these contexts and what are the forms that such relations take (dominating, self-managing, with greater or lesser participation).

Third, and perhaps this is the main reason, for anarchists to be clear about their political project and where/how they intend to go. In my view, we constantly witness anarchists who do not understand what actions they can/should take in order to boost their project. They are not able to concretely assess the reality or prepare an adequately strategic program.

The most serious, however, occurs when anarchists do not understand that it is not enough for them to exist in the world, or to carry out their actions without achieving certain accumulations and conquests. It is also not enough, in cases where such accumulations and conquests are achieved, not knowing where/how they want to go. Let me explain. Either anarchists think of ways to maximize their social force and, more importantly, the social force of workers, so that this can point to a revolutionary, self-managing/federalist transformation, or they have no reason to exist. And more. Either anarchists understand that, on several occasions, they will have to impose themselves on others, prevail over others, or they will also not be able to carry out their project.

Many examples could be cited. But I will focus on one of them when, in the context of the Spanish Revolution, several influential members of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) – an anarcho-syndicalist organization that represented, at the time, approximately one and a half

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<sup>9</sup> The aforementioned article “Anarchist Theory and History in Global Perspective” provides a summary of this book.

million workers – understood that establishing a popular and self-managed power in regions where the social force of anarchists/anarcho-syndicalists was largely in the majority, it would amount to establishing an “anarchist dictatorship”.

Conceptually wrong reading and which, in my view, shows the lack of notion that the anarchist project is really a project of power. A project against domination and exploitation, based on self-management and federalism, it is true, but still a project of power. Afraid of imposing and dominating fronts against enemy and opposing forces, the CNT preferred to integrate the collaborationist project with the republican government...

This relationship, which I consider to be unresolved, between anarchists and the question of power, causes problems of this kind. Not only in revolutionary and insurrectionary situations, but also in everyday circumstances, such as in union, social, student, community etc. movements and struggles.

In summary, the adoption of this understanding of power that I support here has multiple implications. It allows for a more adequate understanding of anarchism, a strengthening of analyzes of reality and, mainly, of the anarchist political project. In particular, this understanding of power subsidizes anarchists to expand their intervention in reality and become increasingly influential.

**For many Western anarchists, the conceptual focus on power tends to be associated with the writings of Michel Foucault. For some this association is a positive one, but many in the mass anarchist tendency associate it with an abandonment of class struggle. What impact, if any, has Foucault had on the Latin American debates? Do people read him, and if so what do they take from him?**

It is true that “for many Western anarchists, the conceptual focus on power tends to be associated with the writings of Michel Foucault”. But this, in my view, says more about the “Western anarchists” than the debate about power in anarchism.

Foucault is undoubtedly one of the great thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and widely studied in universities. My impression – and this has been one of my great criticisms of the anarchist universe in general – is that many anarchists, perhaps for intellectual convenience, or even to follow academic fashions, end up appropriating authors from other traditions, from other political-ideological currents, rather than looking for contributions that exist within our own field. The worst thing is that this appropriation is done, in most cases, in an uncritical way, and not to complement the anarchist contributions, but to replace them.

What I consider to be, in various parts of the world, a fashion around Foucault among anarchists reflects, for me, certain “anarchism without anarchists”, which unfortunately we find in many places at the moment. There are now numerous “anarchist studies” unrelated to anarchism and historical anarchists.

What I mean is that, among anarchists – and syndicalists and libertarian/anti-authoritarian socialists more broadly – there are numerous contributions to this discussion of power and many others. But studying them means, most of the time, “breaking stones”: the texts are not very easy to find, many of them are not translated, there are practically no commentators, there are no manuals, nobody studies them at the university... That is, we have to recognize that it is not easy to study Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Proudhon, etc.

I consider it more than necessary to dedicate ourselves to the studies of our expanded tradition (anarchist, syndicalist, libertarian/anti-authoritarian socialist) and to produce, elaborate, offer our critical contributions to them. At the moment I am working on a book that reconstructs

Malatesta's theoretical contributions on power relations. There is no doubt that, even though these contributions are incredible, it is extremely difficult to recover them, reconstruct them, complement them.

I return to Foucault. Yes, our tradition of *especificista* anarchism had some influence from Foucault (in Uruguay and in some regions of Brazil, especially in the south), who was and is an author read by the militancy. It is noteworthy that not only him, among non-anarchists. I am well acquainted with Foucault's discussion of power; I have taught and written about this topic. It turns out that, as you very well point out, Foucault has his complications and ambiguities.

What I can say, as a person who is familiar with this discussion of power in Foucault, is that what we *especificistas* did, more than carrying out a rigorous academic reading of this author, was to propose a critical appropriation of some of his theoretical concepts and perspectives, and to adapt them to the general frame of reference of our anarchism – so that elements such as social classes and classism remained present. In my opinion, this *especificista* reading of Foucault was made by the left, very much by the left.

In any case, I understand that there is a certain risk in procedures of this type. For, despite the distinction we make between theory and ideology, and despite having a more flexible and open stance towards the former than towards the latter, it is undeniable that theoretical contributions have ideological elements and, sometimes, without realizing it, because we drink in certain theoretical material, we may end up incorporating certain ideologically complicated elements for anarchism.

I have seen this happen in the anarchist field at different times and regions, both with the incorporation of Marxist theory – which later ended up converting into “Marxizing” ideological elements – and with the incorporation of postmodern theory – which, at the same way, generated ideological perspectives that were very complicated and distant from anarchism.

When I say that Foucault has complications and ambiguities, I am referring to some points in particular. He was never an anarchist thinker, nor did he have major programmatic and strategic concerns. If his ideas can be interpreted in this way, more to the left, as done by the *especificistas*, they can also be taken from a very liberal perspective and even one of complete resignation – on this last case, pointing to readings such as: if there is power in all relationships, then there is not much to do, since we are all oppressed and oppressors at the same time. There are really important risks in this regard.

It should be noted that, studying in depth various classic anarchists, syndicalists and libertarian/anti-authoritarian socialists, I can say that everything that our current used from Foucault is present in “our” authors. There is nothing that we have appropriated from Foucault that is not, for example, in Malatesta and/or Proudhon.

I believe that we need to avoid at all costs this procedure (unfortunately very present in anarchism) of taking and uncritically incorporating everything that seems interesting, that is in fashion (academic or militant), that we study at the university or discuss in the movements. Historically anarchism has certain lines (and each anarchist current has more specific lines within anarchism). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that contributions should complement these lines and not discard them, put them in check or distort them.

**Another term that seems to gain a lot of focus in the *especificismo* tendency is ‘social force’. Social force is the ‘realised’ force of a dominated class, when it is organised and channelled using the correct means towards goals that are in its interests. The concept of social force therefore places a premium on organisation – both practical and ideo-**



logical – of the dominated class, as increased organisation equals increased capacity for social transformation. Would you be able to expand a bit further on how this ‘social force’ becomes realised? And further, and this is perhaps a problem of translation, what difference is there between power and social force? From my reading of your translated works, there appear to be some distinct layers of social force that are implied but not explicitly described. Firstly, taking from Proudhon, there is a kind of potential force that workers obtain by working cooperatively. Further, there is a kind of force obtained by working cooperatively in a political ideological sense: working collectively towards a common goal and program. Finally, there is social force in the sense that you mostly discuss, at the class level, where the dominated classes by virtue of their class position can build popular power. I was wondering if you could speak to the relationship between these layers (regardless of whether you agree with my expansion of the term)? To reformulate this question more practically: what role does the anarchist organisation play in organising the power of the dominated classes?

There are many elements to this question that I think are important to detail and organize. Gradually I have written other materials on this topic of power, which cover everything you ask. I will try to systematize in a more didactic way to facilitate understanding. And everything I say below has reference to classical authors (Bakunin, Malatesta, Proudhon, mainly) and contemporary authors (Alfredo Errandonea, Tomás Ibáñez, Fábio López, Bruno L. Rocha), including the especificista anarchist organizations and my own production.<sup>10</sup>

First of all, it is important to remember, as I said before, that power has historically been defined in three ways: 1.) As a capacity; 2.) As structures and mechanisms of regulation and control; 3.) As asymmetry in the relations of force. These three elements are important and are present in the theory of power that I have been developing. Not necessarily as part of the concept of power itself, but related to it.

Let’s take as a starting point a definition of power that I consider adequate: *power is a concrete and dynamic social relationship between different asymmetric forces, in which there is a preponderance of one(some) force(s) in relation to another(s)*. There are some important aspects to this definition.

First, when I affirm power as a social relationship, I am saying that power means a relationship of power, and that it involves at least two parties (people, groups, classes, etc.). Second, when I speak of a concrete and dynamic relationship, I am excluding that notion of power as a capacity, which is placed in the field of possibilities, of something that may or may not materialize; I refer, more specifically, to a relationship that actually occurs. This relationship is never permanent – it is always located in a context (time-space) and is temporary; no one has the power eternally, but only for a certain time. Therefore, power relations are constantly changing and can be transformed at any time.

Third, when I speak of the relationship between different asymmetric forces, it is necessary to define precisely this accessory concept or sub-concept: social force. *Social force can be defined as the energy applied by agents in social conflicts to achieve certain goals*. Such force can be individual, group or class and means the materialization of the capacity for realization. Here we have the first aspect that organizes those three historical ways of conceptualizing power; I make a distinction between capacity for realization and social force.

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<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, there are few writings in English by these contemporary authors.

Capacity for realization is that possibility of doing something in the future, that possible come to be that may or may not materialize. We refer to the capacity for realization when, for example, we say that workers have the power to transform the world. According to the concepts that I have adopted, this sentence would be better formulated as follows: workers have the capacity (possibility) to transform the world. This is because, even with this capacity, they may or may not transform the world; it is not something concrete, which actually happens.

The capacity for realization becomes a social force when it leaves the field of possibility of realizing something in the future, which may or may not occur, and is actually put into practice, it begins to be part of the game of forces that constitutes a social reality. Let's go back to our example: Workers have the ability to transform the world. But they may all be going about their daily lives, going to work, taking care of the family, living a life that has no impact on the directions of development of capitalist society. In that case, they only continue with that potential capacity.

Now, when they begin to apply their energy to social conflicts towards certain goals, these workers constitute a social force. For example, when they start to organize themselves, when they make fights, demands, etc. See that here that capacity has been transformed into a social force. This force can be quite a minority – and, thus, be unable to change the course of reality; but it can be medium or even large and, in this way, lead to changes and transformations. When I speak of social force it is important to keep two issues in mind. The first is that we are all born with the physical force of our own bodies, which can be mobilized in certain conflicts. For example, a man's physical force can be used to impose himself on a woman in a given conflict. The second is that a social force can be individual or collective and, in the second case, we should always consider that the collective force is greater than the sum of the individual forces. For example, the collective force of 100 workers protesting in front of a city hall for an hour is much greater than if these workers stayed there, each one, individually, for an hour, one after the other. Even if the number of hours of protest per person is the same, without a doubt the social force of the collective (people together) is much greater than the social force of individuals (people apart).

Furthermore, we have to bear in mind that there are numerous ways to amplify social force. Let's look at some of them that are well known.

People can: 1.) *Increase their physical force and improve the techniques for using that force*, with exercises and martial arts. In a conflict between ultras, for example, physical force can be a determining factor. Or even in the case of military combats that require bodily capabilities and efforts. 2.) *Gather and mobilize people with a common purpose*. For a petition, an election or a street march, for example, the number of people gathered and mobilized is a fundamental element. 3.) *Owning money, property, machinery and natural resources*. That's what it's all about, for example, when we see that it's much easier for the rich to impose themselves on the poor than the other way around; that a country with a large amount of oil has greater weight in international geopolitical relations than a country without oil; that, in capitalist competition, the big ones tend to subjugate the little ones.

4.) *Conquering positions of command and decision*, as the people who occupy them have a much greater chance of imposing themselves on those who do not. When we say, for example, that there is no free negotiation of wages between boss and worker, it is precisely for this reason. Because they occupy a position of command and decision or even because they are the owners of the company, managers and proprietors will almost always have a much greater social force than

that of the worker in labor conflicts. This explains why, in a bureaucratized popular movement, positions of command and decision are strongly disputed by political entities and parties.

5.) *Develop a capacity for influence and persuasion*, when there are people who, through arguments or charisma, in conversations, speeches, etc., convince and bring other people to their side. 6.) *Possess weapons and war technologies*, fundamental elements to, for example, determine the results of a war. 7.) *Having information and knowledge*, which allows not only to have a better impact on conflicts, but also to know in advance the steps of adversaries and enemies. Many other ways of increasing social force could be mentioned.

It should be noted that, in each case, there is a set of “rules” about possible and legitimate ways to invest in increasing social force. Let’s see. For physical conflicts between ultras, attending a gym and doing a martial art is much more acceptable (“normal”) than for labor disputes over salary negotiation in a company. For competitive conflicts between companies, owning property and money – investing to have more and more, and making it a mechanism to impose itself – is much more acceptable/normal than in social conflicts espoused by popular movements and revolutionary socialist organizations.

I mean that each form of conflict has a certain set of rules about what is most acceptable, normal, usual to invest in increasing social force. Which does not mean that other paths cannot be adopted. For example, weapons in general are not part of the normality of a union election, but in Brazil we know that, depending on the union, this is a reality. Another important aspect of this discussion is that the relations between social forces always take place in a certain scenario – a certain structure or order with regulations, controls, norms, institutions. This scenario is also formed by relations of forces, but that are more lasting, that last in time-space and that are institutionalized, making the scenario itself have its rules and, for that very reason, exert force in the game. Social forces that work in favor of structure/order are much easier (are maximized) than forces that oppose it (are minimized).

This explains why, in social terms, continuing something that is already happening is usually easier than changing it; order-affirming movements have generally more facilities than order-defying movements. Let us imagine, for example, two movements with the same amount of people and resources: one in defense of capitalism and the other anti-capitalist. What I am arguing is that, in a circumstance like this, even with the same resources/people, the capitalist movement will have an easier time, as it will be playing in a scenario, in a capitalist structure, taking advantage of the inertia that such relationships have.

As can be seen, this notion of social force is useful for thinking about different issues, especially conflicts between certain forces at the micro, meso and macro-social levels. This mentioned dynamics of asymmetrical forces correlation can be used to understand the relationships between people, gangs, companies, countries, parties, means of communication, classes, etc.

We can conceive of social reality as the result of a confrontation between different social forces, which, in most cases, are not limited to two (force A vs. force B). There are often multiple forces, which affect reality differently, which have proximity and distance with others, which are allied, cooperated with each other.

I come here to the more specific concept of power, previously mentioned. *Power that occurs exactly when one or a few forces prevail (overlap, impose themselves) on the other(s)*. And here the difference between social force and power becomes evident. Constituting a social force means intervene in / affect reality, playing a role in conflicts; to have power means to make one’s own social force a force that prevailed over others, that overlapped, that imposed itself.

We can say, in this sense, for example, that since their resurgence from the 1990s onwards, anarchists and syndicalists, in global terms, have constituted a social force. Because, in different countries, they have an impact on reality, whether in struggles and protests in general, or in union, community, student, agrarian movements, or even in the field of ideas in a more general way.

This in no way means that anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism have power. Currently, they constitute a minority social force within the left in general, and almost insignificant when we think about the social forces that dispute the global directions of society.<sup>11</sup>

When we support the need for an anarchism that seeks power, this necessarily implies conceiving and putting into practice ways to maximize the force of anarchism and, mainly, of the popular classes, so that they become powerful agents not only on the left, but in local, regional, national and even international scenarios.

Power is present in all fields and levels of society. It provides the basis for regulations, controls, content, standards, etc. It thus has a direct relationship with decision-making.

We have, so far, certain theoretical aspects capable of supporting analyzes of reality, whether past or present. These theoretical aspects allow us to elaborate historical reflections and analysis of the conjuncture, through answers to a precise set of questions. In a given scenario (moment/territory): What are the social forces at play? How do they affect the social field? Which one(s) prevail(s)? What are the results of this relationship? Mapping the forces at play, their impact on reality, the preponderances and results of this confrontation is essential to understand a particular scenario of society.

Both the power relations and the regulations and controls that occur in society may or may not imply domination. This means that, as I and other *especificistas* have maintained, power and domination are not synonymous; nor regulation/control and domination. In other words, a power relationship can be a relationship of domination, but it can also not be. A set of regulatory and control mechanisms may be dominating, but it may also not be.

What makes this statement possible is another accessory concept or sub-concept: *participation*. Broadly speaking, *participation is the action of taking part in or contributing to collective decisions*; it relates to the entire process discussed in the constitution of social forces, confrontations/disputes and the establishment of power relations. Power relations and mechanisms of regulation and control can be analyzed and conceived in view of the greater or lesser participation they involve.

So that power, regulation and control can be dominant (and thus have less participation) or self-managed (and thus have greater participation). *Power can thus be conceived as a relationship that oscillates between these two extremes: domination and self-management.*

*Domination is a hierarchical social relationship, in which one or some decide what concerns everyone; it explains inequalities, involves relations of exploitation, coercion, alienation, etc. Domination*

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<sup>11</sup> These are some of the conclusions of a research I conducted over two years on the global resurgence of anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism between 1990 and 2019. The results of this research can be found in the chapter “The Global Revival of Anarchism and Syndicalism (1990–2019)”, from the book *The Cambridge History of Socialism: a global history in two volumes*, edited by Marcel Van der Linden (Cambridge, 2022) and in the “Dossier Contemporary Anarchism: anarchism and syndicalism in the whole world (1990–2019)”: [ithanarquista.wordpress.com](http://ithanarquista.wordpress.com).

*explains social classes, although there are other forms of domination besides class domination. Self-management is the antithesis of domination; it is a non-hierarchical (egalitarian) social relationship, in which people participate in the planning and decisions that affect them, personally and collectively. Self-management underlies the project of a classless society and other forms of domination.*

Some notions derive from this. First, that domination is a form of power, as is self-management. We can say that, historically, the vast majority of power relations that were established at the macro-social level were relations of domination (dominant power, therefore). But it is also possible to affirm that, in parallel, countless other power relations, at the meso and macro-social levels, were self-management relations (self-managed power, therefore). This we notice both in movements and struggles, as well as in certain moments of insurrectionary and revolutionary experiences.

When the *especificistas* claim that it is necessary to “build popular power”, what is defended is nothing more than the construction of a popular social force capable of promoting a social revolution and, with that, establishing a relationship of power against the ruling classes and great agents of domination in general. Obviously, it is not about the construction of any power, but about a self-managed power, which implies the direct combat of the relations of domination, and that points to a society without classes and other forms of domination. Therefore, our conception of popular power is a conception of self-managed power.

The role of the anarchist organization goes exactly in this direction. Its objective is, in the first place, to contribute to transforming the capacity for realization of workers into a social force. Secondly, to collaborate for the permanent increase of this workers’ social force. Thirdly, to reinforce the left-wing, socialist, revolutionary and libertarian/anti-authoritarian positions against the right-wing, capitalist, reformist and authoritarian positions present among workers and their movements. Fourthly, to stimulate the construction of self-managed power relations, which point to a revolutionary process of social transformation, establishing egalitarian and libertarian regulatory and control institutions, and allowing the expansion of this project in regional, national and international terms.

**On a more practical note, the definition of power and domination within *especificismo* has been used to theoretically understand the strategy of building a ‘front of oppressed classes’. Some of our comrades have concerns that this strategy leads to an abandonment of the leading role of the working class and their unique relationship to production during the socialist revolution. We are also concerned that it could lend itself to a ‘voluntarist’ analysis of socialist transformation. That’s to say, it seems to prioritise the relationship of domination over relationship to the means of production in understanding what role a class will play in the social revolution, and therefore potentially a prioritisation of consciousness-raising over political confrontation over production. I was hoping you could respond to these concerns – are they accurate understandings of your position?**

I want to start by emphasizing that the concept of social classes with which we operate, in general, is very close to that sustained by different classical anarchists, such as Bakunin and Malatesta. The problem here, again, seems to me to be that mentioned importation of theoretical elements (in this case, from Marxism) to anarchism, something that prevents us from knowing and enjoying our own contributions.

These and other anarchists have important reflections for this discussion about social classes. First of all, for Bakunin, Malatesta and others, social class was never an exclusively economic con-

cept. Undoubtedly, classes comprise (not infrequently, primarily) elements of an economic order, such as ownership of the means of production and distribution, and the consequent economic privileges. It can be said that there is, in this sense, an economic power.

But classes also encompass other elements of a political order, such as ownership of the means of administration and coercion, and the consequent political privileges. It can be said that there is, in this sense, a political power. Finally, classes still encompass intellectual/moral elements, such as ownership of the means of communication and instruction, and the consequent intellectual privileges. It can be said that there is, in this sense, an intellectual power.

In the capitalist-statist system – and, therefore, in contemporary society – it is possible to affirm that there is a set of dominant classes and a set of oppressed classes. Economically, we can speak of proprietors (bourgeois and landowners), who subjugate proletarians (in the narrowest sense, of wage workers) and peasants. Politically, we can speak of a bureaucracy (governors, judges, police), which submits a large contingent of the governed. Intellectually, we can speak of religious, communicational and educational authorities, who submit those who have few or no impact on the production of ideas in a society in general.

Therefore, in our society, when we talk about social classes, we can identify these three broad social conflicts: owners vs. proletarians and peasants (economic); bureaucrats vs. governed (political); religious/communication/educational authorities X people with few or no influence on the production of macrosocial ideas (intellectual).

It is important to note that these conflicts are always articulated in systemic terms. So, this distinction between the three fields or spheres (economic, political and intellectual) and the three aforementioned conflicts related to them is only analytical. For, in reality, these three parts make up a structural whole, which functions as a system. The articulation of these three conflicts points to exactly what I mentioned earlier. There is not only bourgeoisie and proletariat; there are not just two classes in conflict.

There is, as stated, a set of dominant classes and a set of oppressed classes. Exercising domination in our society we have this set of classes composed of: proprietors + bureaucracy + religious/communicational/educational authorities (emphasizing that I am speaking here, obviously, of the great religions, communication and education companies, that is, those that in fact guide the production of ideas in contemporary society). Set that simultaneously owns the means of production and distribution, of administration and coercion, of communication and instruction; and who enjoys, at the same time, economic, political and intellectual privileges.

Suffering domination in our society, we have another set of classes composed of: proletarians + peasants (and traditional peoples) + marginalized, who are, together, and concomitantly, victims of economic exploitation, political-bureaucratic domination, physical coercion and intellectual alienation. There is also a less relevant intermediate sector between these two broad sets of classes.

Thus, when we talk about class struggle, it is necessary to understand that it can manifest itself (and does manifest itself) in two different ways. One in particular, for example, when salaried workers in a company face a particular boss. Another, more general, that involves both sets mentioned above: dominant classes vs. oppressed classes.

If you and other colleagues are interested, we can share a study that uses these theoretical assumptions to make a reading of social classes in contemporary Brazil. It is quite complete and very interesting.

This conception of social classes has implications that make evident the differences between our positions and those normally linked to the field of Marxism. Especially when we consider the bureaucracy a dominant class and, therefore, as class enemy of the workers as the bourgeois or landowners; the same goes for the great religious leaders, the owners of the great media and education conglomerates – they are all class enemies of workers and must be fought equally for socialism to be possible.

This socialism also encompasses these three fields or spheres: we seek an integral socialism, which is not restricted to the economy. We defend the socialization of the means of production and distribution (of economic power), but also of ownership of the means of administration and coercion (of political power), and of ownership of the means of communication and instruction (of intellectual power). This is what we understand as the end of capitalism, of the State, of social classes. That is, the complete socialization of social power.

About the proposal of a “front of oppressed classes”, I can say that, in our conception, it only means, as it generally meant for countless classical anarchists, the understanding that all those “from below” – wage workers, both from the city and countryside, both in industry and services, precarious, self-employed, marginalized workers, as well as peasants – must be taken into account when it comes to conceiving a broad project of revolutionary transformation like the one proposed by us.

In this aspect it is possible to identify other divergences, now with certain historical sectors of Marxism and even of anarchism. It was common, among such sectors, to conceive capitalism as an economic mode of production and to understand that its base is urban and industrial. There is no doubt that the economy is a central field/sphere in capitalist society, and that cities and industries play a very important role in capitalism. But capitalism is much more than a historical form of economy. It is, as I mentioned before, a system that, in addition to the economy, includes the State and the ideas that are fundamental to legitimizing capitalist social relations.

Therefore, there is no doubt that urban and industrial workers are fundamental to the struggle and to a social revolution. Now, when the “leading role of the working class and their unique relationship to production during the socialist revolution” is affirmed, this has different possibilities of interpretation. “Working class” can mean exclusively the urban and industrial proletariat – and there, of course, this position is not ours –, but it can also mean working class in a broad sense, a term we sometimes use, and which encompasses all the subjects mentioned above.

If it is true that the sectors most directly involved in production must be involved in any revolutionary project, when this issue is discussed in a global perspective, or even when thinking about our reality in Latin America, it is inconceivable an anarchist revolutionary project that does not encompass the rural proletariat, peasants, informal workers and even the marginalized.

I believe that at this point it is necessary to detail the terms we use a little more, because we may be talking about the same thing or have great differences.

This brings us to another point addressed in the question, about analytical voluntarism. Our position, as can be seen, is neither voluntarist nor structuralist. It understands that structures play a fundamental role in our society, building an important part of social reality. But also that the will, the human action, has a relevant role. Crude as it is, I like to think of social reality as 70%-80% structurally determined, and 30%-20% determined by voluntary human actions.

It seems to me that this position is in line with most contemporary social theories (from the Social Sciences or History) that seek to reconcile structure and action, giving the former

more weight than the latter, but at the same time fleeing from deterministic structuralism and voluntarism.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century made it evident that the arguments of a certain sector of Marxism were wrong, and that the position of an important group of historical anarchists was, indeed, the most correct. In this period we noticed, when observing the different economic and social realities in the world, that the structure of advanced capitalism was not enough to produce, by itself and automatically, revolutionary subjects and processes.

And even when we look at the countries that had and did not have revolutions, what we can see is that the development of the productive forces did not create revolutionary environments that were more radical or with greater potential than in the so-called “backward” countries, in which such revolutions took place. We note, at the same time, that there is no “stagism”, through which revolutions can only take place after an advanced development of capitalism.

Although it should be noted that these revolutions, most of which ended up building what would be known as “real socialism”, did not even socialize or initiate a consistent socialization of economic power, not to mention political or intellectual power. They didn’t even come close to the emancipation of workers, and they didn’t even move in that direction. Therefore, they cannot be taken as revolutionary models of success.

The position of a fraction of a class, a group or an individual in the structure of society is not enough to make it more or less revolutionary. For this, action, consciousness (class action, class consciousness) is essential, which, together with the structural determinants, will produce this new revolutionary subject that we need. For a transformation towards the self-managed socialism that we defend, it is not enough to be part of an unequal structure. It is necessary that this structure is perceived as unfair, that it is believed in the possibility of change. It is essential that actions move in a certain direction – we need a consistent project. Workers do not become revolutionary subjects without engagement in struggles and consciousness raising.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that I am not prioritizing “the relationship of domination over relationship to the means of production”. As I have pointed out, relations of domination, as I understand them, involve, encompass relations with the means of production (in the Marxian sense); exploitation, in this sense, is a form of domination, like the others I have mentioned (political- bureaucratic domination, physical coercion, and cultural alienation). But it is worth remembering that when I speak of class domination, I am not restricted to economic means, but also to political and intellectual ones.

I should also note that this position does not confuse class domination with other forms of domination, such as national domination (colonialism/imperialism), ethnic-racial domination (racism) and gender domination (patriarchy). Domination takes many forms; class domination is one of them – very important in capitalist society, no doubt – and it is related to all the other forms mentioned above. Such a relationship makes it possible to explain capitalist society in its multiple relations of domination.

Also, in the *especificista* strategy, there is no “prioritisation of consciousness-raising over political confrontation over production”. Our strategy has always focused on building and strengthening popular movements based on a specific program that, in historical terms, as I have already mentioned, is very close to revolutionary syndicalism. We are not educationists and we do not advocate priority in propaganda. Our focus is on regular and daily work, in the construction of union, community, agrarian, student, women, LGBT, black, indigenous struggles, etc. based in our program. The struggle in industrial and urban workspaces is included in our strategy, but it



goes beyond that. Not only due to the Brazilian economic and social scenario, but even from a global perspective.

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Felipe Corrêa  
Elements of Anarchist Theory and Strategy  
Felipe Corrêa interviewed by Mya Walmsley  
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