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Especifismo

Gaucha Anarchist Federation

2000

Editor's note: The Gaucha Anarchist Federation (FAG) is a Brazilian anarchist group that identifies itself with the Platformist tradition in anarchist theory and practice (Volume One, Selection 115; and this Volume, Selection 69). The FAG advocates a political practice that has come to be known as "especifismo," the idea that anarchists should work within popular organizations not only in order to become part of popular struggles but to encourage the self-organization of the people into their own autonomous organizations. The following excerpts, translated by Paul Sharkey, are taken from the Federation's *Statement of Principles*.

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Anarchism, A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas
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Anarchism's legitimacy resides in its participation in the struggle and organization of the oppressed classes and its ability to contribute towards the deepening of these. Which is why anarchist organization should not at all be a sectarian club for the pure-of-thought or some centre for abstract philosophical reflection, but rather a tool serving the needs of a revolutionary process that places popular organizations at the

heart of its ventures. To this day-to-day effort we contribute grassroots work that prizes the independence of the class and its organized expressions—be they trade unions, associations, campaign committees, self-managing cooperatives, etc.—over any partisan line...

That anarchism should make an impact through organized political practice is one of the central priorities of the FAG [Gaucha Anarchist Federation]. As we see it, there is no “struggle for the people” and no “struggle through the people”: either we fight alongside the people, as militants pursuing a class option and having some profile among the people, or else no libertarian struggle is possible. This is because nothing can take the place of the organized people. Only the self-organized people can create people’s power, increasing the level and intensity of the struggle as the political awareness spreads that revolution is feasible and necessary. In the meantime, within the popular struggle the social revolution is incubated and propagated as an alternative, holding out the prospect of a worthwhile, free existence...

Our approach is not geared merely to furtherance of the development of the FAG and its particular political line, but makes anarchist political organization a means of overseeing the sustained spread of popular struggles, successfully providing a forum for discussion and action in which these struggles, and that “province,” can overcome their own shortcomings. Overcoming means, say, a social struggle based upon a specific demand becoming sensible of the need to involve itself in matters outside its purview and to coordinate with other experiments and struggles in progress, eventually discovering that their own particular conflict is yet another facet of their class status and awakening to the need to endow their specific struggle with a more global character.

We feel that the level at which workers’ movements and popular bodies organize and operate should not be dictated by politico-ideological outlook, nor manipulated by schemes

devised in quarters far removed from the sharp end of those struggles. The independence of the class and of its social organizations is a prerequisite for the sort of political practice that is crucial to breaking with the old elitist model of vanguards.

The wedding of the political with the social lies at the heart of what we understand by people's power, a process that amalgamates the two approaches into a single corpus, built upon a strategy that looks to invest the social with a structure so organized and alert that it lays the groundwork for the ground-up development of a capacity that looks beyond the limits on participation laid down by state-employer hegemony, shatters their dominion and lays down markers for the development of society's new life.

In Latin America, there are lots of revolutionary organizations and popular movements which will fight and do fight for liberation... an idea and a goal also covered by our own anarchist revolutionary plans. It is our understanding that the liberation of our class is only going to be possible through organized popular struggle and the building of a long term revolutionary process. In this continent-wide struggle, the best contribution we can make is to go out every day and plant the seeds of the fruits we hope to harvest. Which means that we do not believe that a new social system founded upon equality, justice and freedom can be conjured out of the natural evolutionary trends of the capitalist system and by means of a peaceful transition. Instead, the capitalist system has furnished plentiful proof of its ability to adapt to a number of historical phases so as to keep its underlying structures of domination intact. According to the anarchist view, if there is going to be a break with the capitalist system and a start is to be made on the building of people's power, the tools devised by the system itself must be discarded, having clearly been devised to keep that system in place rather than to hold out the prospect of it being destroyed.

Then again, it is obvious that mere determination alone is not enough to trigger a revolutionary process. Previous revo-

lutionary experiences must be put critically to use but without claiming to import recipes from previous ages and countries not our own. We need to take note of the peculiarities of the present point in time and space in which we are living. We need to see how these are reflected in our class, in its organizations and in its imagination. The times in which we are living today are very different from what they were thirty years ago. We need to devise strategies that take these peculiarities into account.

We see the breakthrough as being triggered by the people, which implies the widest possible participation by the people through its own organizations, with the confrontation with the ruling class being organized along direct action lines throughout...

The construction of a genuinely socialist and libertarian society is effected by means of the socialization of the economy—which is not the same as mere State take-over of the means of production—as well as by comprehensive socialization of decision-making powers.

Such socialization will have to be implemented by the grassroots organizations of the workers and the people and ought to include the means of production, distribution, credit and exchange, political power, education, the administration of justice, defence organizations, and knowledge and information sources. All of which presupposes the elimination of any ruling class and private ownership.

Taking as axiomatic the eradication of all forms of repression, our aims include the eradication of oppression on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, etc. Oppression can be found at the politico-economic level as well as the cultural. And obviously they cannot be decreed out of existence, any more than the entire apparatus of domination can, but must be abolished through a thoroughgoing process of destruction and construction of other modes of organization and new values.

A society wherein every stratum is free to pursue its interests, with participation by all, would have no need of a separate political agency. But what is expected of a comprehensively libertarian society is also carried over into the present and into the period of transition... Anarchism needs to demonstrate that a libertarian society can dispense with the over-arching agency in the form of the politician.

As we see it, the social revolution only comes about when the people hold central stage. Otherwise, the domination of one class over another is going to persist. Such centrality calls for a strategy for the building of people's power. But that power must not be confused with government.

Faced with a strategy from the established authorities designed to perpetuate government, we must counter with a strategy from the oppressed classes destined to build up people's power. The achievement of people's power requires the preparation of class organizations called upon to wield it and the strengthening of such organizations with the assignment of appropriate tasks to them, so the building of people's power does not mean that the constituent parts of power are hijacked by a new ruling class supposedly representative of workers' interests. Historical experience would seem to rule out that authoritarian option. It is not a question of hanging the label "people's power" on familiar old models of political action and representation that exclude the people from every level of basic decision-making. However, it is not merely a matter of wresting the current, centralized political power from the ruling classes either: it is a matter of diffusing it and devolving it to popular agencies and turning it into something quite different... a new socio-political structure.

Taking power means taking power in the factories, fields, mines, offices, schools, hospitals, power stations, media and universities, and power belongs to the workers and the people when there are comprehensively democratic, participatory bodies controlled by them that take over the supervisory functions performed by the State. Which is why a people's power strategy should have the building of such bodies as its essential premise and central political task which, even now, is playing a primary role in determining whether the future revolution is going to be socialist and libertarian or will not take place at all. So the defeat of the capitalist, authoritarian order and the construction of genuine people's power is proceeding on a

daily basis, depending on how our political and social efforts are directed and implemented.

Creating or re-creating, strengthening and consolidating workers' and people' organizations and championing their centrality amounts to a step-by-step nurturing of the only feasible socialism: a socialism with freedom, where all of the advances familiar to us today are placed in the service of an improved, more humane operation of society that brings benefits to... the people as a whole...

As we understand it, the class struggle may have economic, political, ideological, cultural or other motives: it can be spear-headed by a wide range of oppressed persons—farm-workers and urban workers, the unemployed, students; it may assume the profile of a gender, ethnic, ecological struggle and so on. Which means that we do not think that there is any specific social group historically predestined to make the revolution, as certain strands of the left believe, especially in relation to the working class.

In order to assist our analysis of reality, we need to look upon a wide spectrum of the oppressed (prompted by different motives into combating the machinery of domination) as protagonists of class struggle.

If we are to make progress in the direction of people's power, we need to unite and marshal these struggles through ties of solidarity and organizational links...

Thus, for every specific struggle, the largest possible number of grassroots bodies should be brought together. For instance, we should try to ensure that the demands of the workers in public schools and of the students are converted in the medium term into a struggle for popular education. The class would be represented by those two sectors, as well as local communities, the mothers and fathers of pupils not just squabbling over grants, but also about the community-school council, curriculum content and teaching methods. And the same goes for all

concrete struggles such as housing, employment, health, hygiene, the land, black liberation, women and other sectors.

The umbrella groups of the people's organizations and movements should make a contribution here. But, as has been stated already, there is not going to be any protagonism as long as such coordination is vested in political parties and political organizations, and dependent upon whether their politics are class-based or not, or conciliatory or not. Unless we have the people waking up to its own experience... we will have some party line handed down for as long as the members of the oppressed class are not cast in the leading role...

Destruction of the State (taking the State to be the current legal-political form of class society and current social relationships) is not a single act but a persistent, ongoing process of destruction and at the same time of construction of a new social relationship, rather than a necessarily uniform and linear process...

[I]t is inconceivable that anarchists are going to make the revolution all on their own. Likewise, it is unthinkable that we will carry out the reconstruction on our own. For that would suggest a form of dictatorship that would not allow the expression of dissent or alternative suggestions. Even were we to find ourselves in the majority, we would be facing competition and coming to accommodations. This is the basic law of politics. A society with just one ideological doctrine and a single political organization is far from what we have in mind. The valid doctrine of freedom is closely connected with whatever a given society can achieve along these lines.

There is no guessing who and how the principal actors in times of revolution will turn out to be. But we must concede that we are unlikely to be the majority element. In which case, and this depends on our political development, we may still end up being a force to be reckoned with in some revolutionary process. Which implies our being clear about everything we need to challenge and agree on...