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Gustavo Rodríguez

In Defense of Associative Specificity

October 19, 2021

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## In Defense of Associative Specificity

Gustavo Rodríguez

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*"The International was founded in order to replace the Socialist or semi-Socialist sects by a real organisation of the working class for struggle. The original Statutes and the Inaugural Address show this at the first glance. On the other hand the Internationalists could not have maintained themselves if the course of history had not already smashed up the sectarian system. The development of the system of Socialist sects and that of the real workers' movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other. So long as the sects are (historically) justified, the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historic movement. As soon as it has attained this maturity all sects are essentially reactionary. [...] And the history of the International was a continual struggle on the part of the General Council against the sects [...] At the end of 1868 the Russian, Bakunin, entered the International with the aim of forming inside it a second International called the "Alliance of Social-Democracy," with himself as leader. He –*

*a man devoid of theoretical knowledge – put forward the pretension that this separate body was to represent the scientific propaganda of the International, which was to be made the special function of this second International within the International. His programme was a superficially scraped together hash of Right and Left [...] atheism as a dogma to be dictated to the members, etc., and as the main dogma (Proudhonist), abstention from the political movement. This infant's spelling-book found favour (and still has a certain hold) in Italy and Spain, where the real conditions of the workers' movement are as yet little developed, and among a few vain, ambitious and empty doctrinaires in French Switzerland and Belgium. Resolutions I (2) and (3) and IX now give the New York committee legal weapons with which to put an end to all sectarian formations and amateur groups and if necessary to expel them.”*

**K. Marx, Letter to Friedrich Bolte, November 23, 1871.<sup>1</sup>**

Since the defeat of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, reiteration is a frequent occurrence in the Babelian context in which the life of the so-called “anarchist movement” painfully takes place.<sup>2</sup> As if

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<sup>1</sup> «Briefe und Auszüge aus Briefen von Joh. Phil. Becker, Jos». Translated from German. Dietzgen, Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx und A. an F. A. Sorge und Andere, Stuttgart, 1906; available in Russian in Marx, K. y Engels, F.; Obras Escogidas, 1ª ed., t. XXVI, Moscú, 1935. In Spanish, you may find it compiled in C. Marx y, F. Engels, Obras Escogidas, en tres tomos, Editorial Progreso, Moscú, 1974, t. II. A version of this letter in its entirety may be found in the digitized edition of KCL, Bakunin, Mijail; La Libertad: [circulosemiotico.files.wordpress.com](http://circulosemiotico.files.wordpress.com) (consulted on: 10/18/2021). [Translation note: The English version of this letter which was used to source that quotation in this translation may be found here: [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)

<sup>2</sup> An extremely heterogeneous entity, incapable of producing *de producir las modificaciones críticas, metodológicas y organizativas que permitan la reaparición protagónica de la Anarquía en nuestro tiempo y el desarrollo de su potencia negativa.*

theoretical-practical distinction that make us, from time immemorial, into a “sect”; that is, *in a different species* and in a *radical expression of rupture*; which has always allowed us to recognize and develop our uniqueness.

That heresy made us worthy then, as it had made us before, and does to us again now, of the epithet “sectarians.” That is, those who feed the “*doctrine that departs from orthodoxy*” or is “*sectioned*.”

This accusation was not only imputed to us from the totalizing ecclesiastical vision of red fascism that subdued the struggles in those years, but it was also used from the pragmatic distortions of anarcholeninism, in shameless harmony with the grammar of anti-imperialist front-ism. Unfortunately, many colleagues fled our “sect” waving other people’s flags and joined the fold of the “Church”. Some gave up their lives, impregnated by faith, consolidating dictatorships; others, are militant in electoral parties such as the *Party for the Victory of the People*.<sup>7</sup> Of course, beyond their hegemonic pretensions, these ideological and organizational “options” – outlined in each of these areas – were too closely related to vanguardist specialization, social democratic reformism and populist demagoguery (depending on the case), for the “sectarians” of yesterday, today and always to consider them attractive.

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<sup>7</sup> An embarrassing example is the formerly *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya* (FAU) and its degeneration —fleeing from «sectarianism»— into an electoral party (*Partido de la Victoria del Pueblo*). For more information see, [es.wikipedia.org](https://es.wikipedia.org) (consulted on: 10/18/2021).

it were “*Groundhog Day*”<sup>3</sup>, we are condemned to repeat the same experience indefinitely. Time and again, the ideological displacements and the conceptualizations of others gain presence in our camp. Thus – again – the notions of “sect”, “sectarianism” and “sectarian” emerge in the debate. *We don’t have the slightest chance of escaping from this vicious cycle*. Like Phil Connors (Bill Murray) in the famous comedy, every day the same song is hammered into us (at six in the morning!), forced to repeat ourselves in an infinite cycle from which not even suicide saves us.

Perhaps, for those who come from the so-called “left” – who have happily already evolved into “libertarian” positions – and today share the same barricade side by side, these imprecations have always been there, close at hand. Ready to be wielded at the slightest provocation. So they assume that such curse words are part of our lexicon or that they are part of a kind of universal vocabulary that we have to use out of obligation.

For those of us who have been in the fight for some years, the feeling of *déjà vécu* caused by the remastering of this farcical operetta is inevitable. Indeed, it’s not the first time that we have to face these epithets and, definitely, it will not be the last. They are repeated as a mantra invoking the “crushing march of history” (Saint Charlie of Trier, dixit). The sad observation is that this liturgy even occurs in the ins and outs of the praxis —live and active today— of the *Informal Anarchic Tendency* (TIA). A tendency that has no place for uniforming practices, nor for repetition; that is to say, the attempts at fronts, nor the attempts at “tactical unity” and “collective responsibility.”

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<sup>3</sup> *Groundhog Day* (“*El día de la marmota*” in Argentina, Chile, México and Venezuela; “*Hechizo del tiempo*” in the rest of Latin America y, “*Atrapado en el tiempo*” in the Spanish State), it’s an American science fiction comedy, made in 1993 under the label Columbia Pictures. Directed by Harold Ramis, scripted by Ramis himself co-authored with Danny Rubin and starring Bill Murray (Phill) and Andie MacDowell (Rita).

The TIA reaffirms itself in the critique and the permanent conflict with each and every one of the forms and strategies of power; in constant experimentation and the tireless search for total liberation; within the framework of the war against all that exists through the continued practice of individual insurrection. All of which should be understood as a constant tension —not a realization—, incited by those who do not harbor hope in saving revolutions or regimes to come, and cast aside ALL mythology. Conscious that Anarchy cannot be reduced to the nineteenth-century “assault on heaven” or to the outdated “transformation” of certain structures; much less, to the establishment of a system of (self)government or to the mode of (self)management of production. *Read: the onanistic practices around libertarian Communism.*

However, these annotations should not be conceived as a pontificate that is exercised from the comfort of neutrality and / or ideological abstraction, but rather, they aspire to be a deeply self-critical reaffirmation of principles. I too (at some point in my life) fell into the trap of “tactical unity” and renounced our “sectarianism” for the sake of “the unity of revolutionary struggles”, whose realization turned out to be the *desideratum* of the reflections of that era. A quick reading of Guillén’s frontist ravings<sup>4</sup> is enough to assess the monumental size of the sixties, seventies and even eighties distortions of the recently baptized “revolutionary anarchism”, strongly influenced by Leninist Autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Vid., Guillén, Abraham; *Desafío al Pentágono. La guerrilla latinoamericana*, Editorial Andes, Montevideo, 1969; *Estrategia de la guerrilla urbana*, Ediciones Liberación, Montevideo, 1970 and; *Lecciones de la guerrilla latinoamericana*, in: Hodges Donald C. y Guillén, Abraham, *Revaloración de la guerrilla urbana*, Ediciones El Caballito, México, D.F., 1977.

<sup>5</sup> *Let’s not forget that Marxist-Leninist hegemony is more than seven decades old; during this prolonged period it has imposed its models and expressions in name of “revolutionary unity” producing a colossal denaturing in our camp. Such a denaturing, lead the Movimiento 2 de Junio to dilute into becoming the Fracción del Ejército Rojo (RAF) and the Revolutionäre Zellen (Células Revolucionarias) —fleeing*

But those experiments that are completely absurd to us today — four decades ago — were not the product of repetition. On the contrary, they sought to reorganize the field of understandings and meanings of an anarchic worldview that faced conceptual displacements and relocations in search of favorable conditions that would allow it to abandon the immobility to which the “movement” had been condemned. Thus, it faced a societal transformation with profound changes in the configuration of classes, actors and potential “revolutionary subjects”; in a context where work was beginning to lose its central condition.<sup>6</sup> The State itself was moving away from that vigorous role that supported the principle of authority, undergoing a process of redefining its historical role.

In the light of these events, the resurgence of the anarchic impudence animated a set of transgressive practices impregnated with hedonism — with its unconcealable fondness for uncompromising freedom, its pertinacious insurrectionary breath and its parricidal disposition — which immediately replaced, without much remorse, the acetic and sacrificial models of the traditional organizational containers (whether they were libertarian syndicates, synthesis federations or specificist parties), animated by informality and the pleasure of anarchic action. At the same time that it took note of the imperative effort of *contrasting, refuting* and even *seceding* from the revolutionary hegemony of the time (defined by Marxian-Leninoid orthodoxy), highlighting the elements of

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*from «sectarianism» within the framework of revolutionary front-ism— and operating with support of the Stassi and the KGB, until ending up as mercenaries at the orders of Saddam Hussein and Al-Fatah, assuming the most pedestrian antisemitism. Undoubtedly, for these anti-imperialist groupings there was no contradiction in collaborating and coordinating with the thugs of the German and Soviet secret police. From their front-ist perspective, against «sectarianism», all these repressive «tactical» allies. Like Joaquín Sabina would say: “Whenever the KGB fights against the CIA, in the end, the police wins”.*

<sup>6</sup> *And so it was, at least in those societies that possessed an extraordinary accumulation of available goods and had achieved «a surprising technological development» (to express it within the aspirations of that era.*