

Especifismo Before its Critics

Neither Parallel Assembly nor Co-optation, but Strategic Organization: Responding to the Criticisms Levelled Against Especifismo

SrgHkBk

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We present here a translation of an article which appeared on July 7, 2024 in the recently revived Spanish anarchist journal *Regeneración Libertaria*. The journal describes itself as “a portal for the revolutionary anarchist tendency, concretely of the *especifista* current, adapted to the Iberian Peninsula”.

Despite its original theoretical texts appearing in Spanish, the anarchist strategy of *especifismo* has only recently begun to make an impact on anarchism in Spain and Catalonia, places where the movement has historically found its expression through anarcho-syndicalist labor unions such as the CNT and CGT. This context becomes relevant to the article as the author, a CNT militant, aims to address the tension between *especifismo*’s commitment to organizational dualism and the revolutionary syndicalist view which sees no need for political organization outside of the union.

The recent introduction of *especifismo* to the Iberian Peninsula can be attributed largely to the work of organizations such as Embat and LiZA, whose militants have been producing articles, participating in social struggles, and holding seminars in Spain, Catalonia, and Portugal.

We are encouraged to see our European comrades taking up these ideas, debating them, and seeking to adapt them to their own context.

Article in the original Spanish: ‘*El especificismo ante sus críticos*’. Minor changes have been made in the course of translation for the purposes of clarity.

Translation by Cameron Pádraig.

Especifist anarchism advocates the need for a theoretical, strategic, and tactical organization—bound together with a program—under the banner of libertarian socialism. This is the ‘specifically anarchist’ organization, hence the term *especifismo*. It is a meeting point between affinities of social and organized anarchism, the aim of which is to influence social movements or ‘mass organizations’. In this way *especifismo* embraces ‘organizational dualism’, because the anarchist organization is not meaningful unless it is oriented towards the various popular struggles. The

specific organization aims to plant, within social movements, a revolutionary seed which can provide consistency through the ups and downs of social conflict and the political cycle.

Most of the criticisms of *especifismo* accuse it of promoting 'entryism', vanguardism, or of aiming to create a secretly coordinated minority who hope to manipulate social movements for their own purposes. These are suspicions that we understand to be legitimate but that, we believe, if they are made from a place of honesty and real concern, arise from a misunderstanding of the basic elements of the strategy.

Especifista anarchism advocates the idea of popular power. This notion maintains that social revolution will come about only through the organized masses themselves. It rests on the firm belief that the popular classes must be the protagonists and subjects of the social revolution. Proponents of popular power are committed to the principle that social struggles must be self-managed by the popular classes, struggles wherein popular structures are built based on the active participation of a broad majority and on democratic decision-making mechanisms. The concrete practice of *especifismo* is to make these mass organizations and social movements sites of genuine learning and popular participation.

Therefore, if we *especifistas* are truly committed to our principles, it would not make sense for us to seek executive control over social movements which possess the features that we are seeking to create. Moreover, the specific organization is not an end in itself. In other words, the strategy of *especifismo* is not concerned with growing a permanent vanguard party, but instead with the construction and orientation of mass movements toward a social revolutionary horizon. *Especifismo* shuns the vanguardist thesis and instead affirms that the libertarian communist militant must insert themselves within popular struggles, standing shoulder to shoulder with the people—not acting above them or 'from the shadows'.

We know that not everyone is an anarchist, in fact even within anarchism itself there is no broad consensus on political action. In this way the specific organization is a space of unity for those of us who recognize that a shared strategy, analysis of the conjuncture, and training to be indispensable. We recognize ourselves to be heirs to the socialist tradition, and as such we understand that together we will think better. We reject 'anarchist' individualism, which we believe to be a liberal deviation of recent decades.

Returning to the idea of popular power, much of the aim of *especifista* anarchism, through concrete praxis, is to build mass organizations and social movements that are participatory and democratic. Part of its task is to identify the presence of other political groups and organizations within these mass movements, to understand their strategy, and occasionally to confront them. Our aim in these mass movements is to equip participants within them with effective tools for self-organization and action. We aim to prevent these mass movements from being co-opted, deactivated or controlled by institutional and/or vanguardist tendencies. That is to say, *especifismo* seeks the opposite of co-optation or entryism. It instead seeks to organize and radicalize the popular masses under their own will and desire for liberation.

One of the fundamental principles of anarchism is a commitment to 'prefiguration'. This posits that the modes of organization and tactics carried out must accurately reflect the future society being sought. This commitment runs through our modes of organization, of action and our militant code of ethics. In each case we do not recognize a division between means and ends. We believe that the tactics we deploy are loaded with meaning and we do not want to build a new world which smuggles in the endemic evils of the current one. That is why *especifismo* has a clear ethical code. Transparency, clarity, and honesty in the communication of our inten-

tions are paramount. The strategies of entryism or co-optation are usually marked by unethical stratagems such as the control of certain working groups by a minority organized from outside, the taking of formal and informal power, and/or the use of ambiguous language that conceals intent. These elements are reflective of vanguardism, a revolutionary strategy which engenders a future class society directed by a bureaucratic-intellectual elite. Especifista anarchists see the antidote to such an arrangement to be the popular participation of the mass of people in a society via the frameworks of federalism and socialized control of production. We argue that this mode of social organization generates a broad institutionality that cannot easily be taken over by a privileged minority or intellectuals.

Turning now toward revolutionary syndicalism, there is a quite understandable debate in this context regarding the existence of the specific anarchist organization. This emerges from the understanding within revolutionary syndicalism of the syndicate (the revolutionary labor union) as the structure that synthesizes political organization and mass organization. In this vision, the syndicate is the organization that will replace the State as the administrator of society until the emergence of total communism. We formally support this political commitment and its strategy, however, it does not seem contradictory to us to maintain the existence of a specific anarchist organization where anarcho-syndicalist militants meet to establish a strategic coherence, to share experiences of struggle and to have theoretical debates beyond the trade union spaces.

Revolutionary syndicalism is the popular materialization of the working class constituted in trade unions. It is that which orients itself mainly towards seizing control of society's productive means. The problem is that, often, it is difficult to attract young militants to anarcho-syndicalism because they do not find within it a space relevant to them. A variety of factors cause this difficulty: theoretical underdevelopment, material circumstances, and/or the demands that union work implies. We contend that the anarchist organization can be a space to form and develop the anarcho-syndicalist militants of the future, to arm them with the capacity to conduct analytical, strategic, and tactical work effectively. As stated above, it can be a place that serves as a political school for many politically disoriented people.

In a context where we might confuse the trees for the forest, the anarchist political organization should be the mountain we can climb to survey the wider landscape. A place that generates the solid revolutionary base for different mass movements, that interconnects them and that energizes anarcho-syndicalism with pragmatic and trained militants. We understand that there are reasons for doubt and we celebrate these organizational debates. They show that the libertarian space is coming back to life after many years of theoretical stagnation, sectarianism, disorganization and purely aesthetic activism. The task ahead is still quite big, but no less exciting for that.

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