



START TOGETHER, RETURN TOGETHER

POLITICAL EDUCATION
FOR ADULTS



Militant Kindergarten is a multi-month study of a text called “Social Anarchism and Organisation”, written by the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ). For us, this text functions as a meeting place that we can return to together. Like a cabin in the woods, it’s a specific station that we revisit every year, taking new people with us each time we make the journey. By starting and returning together, we’re specifically trying to reinforce the importance of militancy in our movements, but we also want to teach people about *especifismo*, an anarchist current that comes from Latin America.

At the Center for *Especifismo* Studies, we do not mean to convert people to our current of anarchism. We consider Militant Kindergarten a grouping of tendency, what we call “the tendency to learn”. And we’re very clear from the beginning that this is just a seminar. Everything we learn through study and dialogue still has to be applied in our real lives. Political education isn’t a magic bullet. We’re not educationalists. We don’t think that revolution will happen once everyone has “learned”. But at the same time, we do think that educational space needs to be defended.

The practice of returning to this particular “cabin in the woods” started in 2020, in the wake of the uprising over the summer. There was a serious problem of burnout that people weren’t adequately addressing. All that anyone seemed to suggest was

to keep doing the same thing over and over, with ever-increasing intensity. Through our studies, we concluded that a common cause for burnout was a lack of organization and strategy. Our movements had run out of momentum after dogmatically repeating tactics for no other reason than “that's what you do”. So, political education became an important step in figuring out what to do next and how not to repeat these same mistakes. We knew we needed new tools which also meant we needed a place to experiment and learn how to use them.

The Center for Especifismo Studies provides people from different places the chance to get together to study and learn. We defend non-urgent spaces where you can pause, listen, and discuss a topic. Our main priority as an organization is hosting the annual seminar that we call Militant Kindergarten where the main objective is the collective re-reading and study of “Social Anarchism and Organisation”. We use this text for militant formation because it's a comprehensive introduction, not only to the especificismo anarchist current, but also to social anarchism more broadly. It covers the basic principles, history, and organizational theory, as well as general strategy, tactics, and ideology. And unlike a lot of theoretical texts in the socialist canon, it does all this from a 21st-century perspective. It's a very comprehensive look at the kind of theoretical work that goes into forming a specific anarchist organization.

Another motivation for us, especially in the beginning, was the need to explain what especificismo is in English, because a lot of the resources, a lot of the ideas, and the main writings come from Latin America and were written in Spanish or Portuguese. Especifismo was first articulated by the Anarchist Federation of Uruguay (FAU) in the 1960's. They developed an organizational strategy that we understand using the metaphor of a train on two tracks. In this model, the locomotive represents the revolutionary rupture with the current system. And the two rails are (1) the social level, including all the different manifestations of the class struggle against domination, exploitation, and oppression in

society and (2) the political organization which ensures the collective application and preservation of anarchist principles and values. Ideologically, we don't differ much from other anarchist currents coming out of the socialist movement. Nevertheless, when it comes to how these two levels can best coordinate and both work towards the same ends, we see a need to keep them theoretically and strategically distinct.

At the Center for Especifismo Studies, we try to articulate these ideas, in our own words, so we can get a clearer picture of what this anarchist current looks like in our context. We don't want to simply translate tactics or uncritically absorb everything we read. We're developing especificismo studies because, for a lot of people, this anarchist current is still new. And when it comes to spreading the seeds of especificismo, there's a lot of work left to do.

As part of this ongoing effort, our organization produces and collects secondary resources related to especificismo and to "Social Anarchism and Organisation" in particular. This includes the recording of audio versions of the text and the regular production of articles, zines, and diagrams. In 2023, for example, there was a working group that produced a mini-zine to define some basic especificismo terms. Our members do podcast interviews, as well as write pamphlets and make audiobooks like "How do you say especificismo in English?" and "Contributions to especificismo".

When some people hear the word "especificismo", they're intrigued by its exotic sound. They think it must be something cool and new. But when other people hear it, they're quick to stereotype it and put especificismo into a clear-cut, ready-made category. Our position is that it's important to acknowledge what current you're plugged into, to recognize where your ideas and perspective are coming from. This is true whether we're talking about an organization or an individual. Acknowledging this has taken a lot of pressure off of us because we don't have to pretend that we're inventing everything, and we're not burdened with the

task of coming up with the most perfect ideas. It's been humbling to see how others have done this militancy before us; they're the ones that made especificismo available for us. This is why we consider political education an ethical and militant responsibility. We're preserving and progressing these ideas, and we're defending space for people to learn about them. We see this as the only way for radicalized and radicalizing people to be able to arrive at their own conclusions about especificismo and its relevance to their struggles. Without anyone doing this militancy, it's not possible for people to pick up these ideas and practices and use them the way that they see fit.

Social insertion is the committed and strategic practice of anarchists who are organized and present in mass movements. This consists of strategically supporting them and trying to help them achieve their own goals, not attempting to take them over and steer them toward a strictly anarchist political practice. But social insertion requires there to be social movements. That was one of the major problems that we ran into when we started reading about especificismo. In the US, we don't have popular social movements in the way that Latin America does. Movements here are usually spontaneous and disorganized, causing them to fizzle out, and a pervasive lack of strategy means they're easily coopted by better organized forces, usually corporations or political parties. But like we've said, one of our major projects as an organization is the theoretical and practical translation of especificismo to the North American context. And the fact that we can't just join an obviously popular social movement to achieve social insertion has forced us to start analyzing what's actually happening here today.

We started thinking about these concepts more literally. Like the idea of movement for example, what does it mean to be moving? Can we distinguish different kinds of movements? What should the role of an active minority be within a larger movement? We promote the idea that anarchist militants should move between different kinds of spaces, between different mass movements

and organizations. Anarchists should be generating, through this movement, a militant flow of people and of ideas, acting as a small motor within a bigger system, focusing effort and sustaining momentum. But like we've said, in the US, we still need to do the work of theorizing what kinds of liberating and combative movements are even possible. To do this, anarchists need to get plugged into more organizations. We need to have skin in the game so that our ideas will have more trusting outlets and anarchism can become an effective tool for keeping the momentum in these spaces from dying out.

Revolutionary politics must be dynamic; they have to stay "on the move". So, anarchism needs to be a relentless and uncompromising form of movement. We can't allow our ideas to become immobilized at a single station or in just one organization. We must constantly work to insert militant ideas, commitment, and ethics into popular spaces that we're not familiar with yet and that may not be easily convinced of combative tactics.

This practice of dual militancy has taught us more about social movements, more about the necessity for them to be popular, and more about Popular Power, while at the same time, we've developed a better understanding of political unity. During Militant Kindergarten, we ask what it means to have unity of strategy, and we address why theory still matters, even if we're organizing to do direct action. This points back to the idea of the train on two rails. We see the social and political levels as developing on independent cycles. It's the political practice of anarchists through social insertion that connects and coordinates them, like railroad ties stabilizing train tracks.

Social movements don't last forever. There are ebbs and flows in every struggle, and when we're talking about a massive popular organization, we should expect even more uncontrollable and unpredictable fluctuations. While it's clear that a lot of committed people will only ever engage militantly on the social level, unconcerned with political organization or strategy, after a

particular moment of conflict or battle has played out, we all agree that something needs to endure. This is why the political level should function on a different cycle, allowing it to preserve and push forward the energy coming from the social level. This is the idea of the small engine, and it goes back to the fact that Militant Kindergarten is an annual thing.

In the winter, there's not a lot to do, so it made sense to develop a seasonal pattern of returning to this educational space. For 15 weeks, the people who do still have capacity, the people who are attempting to stay active through winter, combine forces to keep that little bit of movement going.

As we've already said, the metaphor of a small engine, a little generator, is often used in especificismo to explain the role of the political organization. A small motor needs to be connected to something larger. In practice, we've already found that educational militancy is particularly effective at generating movement on both tracks. Opening this space to radicalized and radicalizing people facilitates more movement between the two. By studying the importance of political organization with people who've never been in that kind of org before, we all learn about new ways to approach revolutionary politics. On top of that, Militant Kindergarten presents a strategy of mass movements to people who may be radicalized ideologically but aren't currently present on the social level. Everything mixes together in this formative space, allowing us to build trust as a learning community.

Obviously, there's a need for operational security practices, but secrecy and clandestine tactics don't replace or get around the need for mass movements and social revolution. If we don't defend spaces that are more open and inviting to radicalizing people, the entry points to revolutionary politics will continue to be inaccessible, and anarchism will remain an irrelevant subculture. Many Latin American groups refer to the problem of anarchism becoming "ghettoized", separated from the popular organization of society. We agree that something's wrong

strategically if the only way that someone can learn about anarchism is if you “know someone who knows someone”.

We’ve also witnessed the loss of what Black Rose/Rosa Negra (BR/RN) refers to as organizational “muscle memory”. We live in an atomized society of isolated individuals. Organizing seems mysterious to us because it’s not a normal practice, and grouping together to collectively manage our priorities and objectives is not something that happens effortlessly.

As we’ve said, through our studies, we’ve learned to recognize and distinguish two different “tracks” of struggle. On the social level is the class struggle, and the antagonists are the dominant people in capitalist society: the ruling class (bosses, landlords, politicians, etc.). But there’s also a simultaneous struggle happening on the political level because the specific anarchist organization isn’t just a single homogeneous block. It does aim, however, to become as unified as possible around theory, ideology, and political practice. This means working together to develop and create unity, not simply finding it or stumbling onto it incidentally. Organizing on the political level has everything to do with forging unity with comrades. Unlike the social level, it’s not a place for confronting class antagonists and taking down an opponent. So, at the Center for Especifismo Studies, we try never to just read something together; we try to “produce” a reading collectively. We consider especificismo studies to be a method for ideological and theoretical production, and we think it’s important to leave behind some kind of trace of our actions. That’s an important part of Militant Kindergarten too. We take thorough notes of the sessions which are made available to all the participants. Some people follow along with the notes during the sessions, and some go back through them later to revisit what was said. We also have a writing team that reworks the notes into a write-up.

The best way to get involved is to send us an email. Then, we can start the enrollment process and get you the materials and links for accessing the seminar. Even if you don’t think you can make

the time, it's still worth reaching out to us. We organize other seminars and talks throughout the year.

Finally, if you don't think that you'd be able to make it to all the sessions, remember: this is exactly why we do this every year. We expect that working people without a lot of time will need more than one year to get through all this information. Militant Kindergarten is set up so that participants can cobble together sessions across several years. In fact, we encourage it! No one should feel like coming to one session is a permanent commitment, just like coming to the whole seminar doesn't make you a "card-carrying" especificismo anarchist.

Militant Kindergarten is an endurance trek to a cabin deep in the woods. But we don't want anyone burning themselves out or abandoning their social-level militancy for the sake of political education. Nevertheless, we do think that political organization and militant formation are effective ways of strategically monitoring and focusing our efforts, helping us protect ourselves and each other from the effects of burnout, and allowing our emancipatory movements to stay in motion.

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