

The September Document
from Militant Kindergarten
by the Center for Especificismo Studies

“In Militant Kindergarten radicalized and radicalizing people participate in an educational project together. For the success of this seminar year after year, our ideas have to be dynamic and capable of communicating to the actual participants. Everything that we do relies on our ethics and builds upon our principles. Especificismo militants seek to build real trust with other people who are struggling because overcoming ideological differences with practical, everyday respect and trust is the best defense against reactionary forces and co-optation.”

WHAT IS ESPECIFISMO?

In Militant Kindergarten, the Center for Especificismo Studies invites radicalized and radicalizing people to participate in an educational project together. For the success of this seminar year after year, our ideas have to be dynamic and capable of communicating to the actual participants. To this end, we have proposed three practical ways to understand especificismo during our group study.

First, especificismo is a model for revolutionary anarchist organization. Following from this model, anarchists struggle amongst themselves to form ideological, theoretical, and strategic unity. This kind of work is done on the political level and can be called “political work”. This political-level unity is a tool for successfully carrying out the social-level activities of anarchists, what can be called “social work”. By engaging with mass movements as a unified force, the political organization of anarchist militants unburdens the social level of endless sectarian disputes that are not related to the most immediate needs of the popular organization.

Second, with its conceptualization of two levels of organization, especificismo gives us a sociological theory for understanding how groups are formed and sustained, either in a unified way toward the political level or in a popular way toward the social level. An intermediary level is sometimes practical, allowing various political tendencies to join forces in a practical effort on the social level. But we have also learned through experience, that groupings of tendency and united fronts can become stagnant if they do not have a clear direction for their own movement.

And third, especificismo is a method of political analysis, allowing for the evaluation of political unity in multiple, seemingly unrelated contexts. It gives us the necessary tools to determine how cohesive a given force really is. With this orientation, we are able to evaluate our own projects as well as those of others.

THE POLITICAL LINE

When dealing with difficult ideas and unfamiliar terminology, it can be helpful to use an analogy or take a word out of its familiar context in order to theorize it. Taken out of its typical context and made into an analogy, the concept of the political line can be made more readily available to anarchist theory. First, by removing the modifier “political” we can ask: what is a line, and what does it do? If we were to draw an ordinary line on paper, we would find that it can:

1. Establish continuity between two or more points
2. Create a frame of reference
3. Indicate direction
4. Define a shape

Going further with our analogy, we can think about a line of text on a page; a line of string or wire; a railroad track; a group of people waiting to enter a concert; an escape route, a finish line, and so on. All of these examples enrich our understanding of what a “line” can do. If we return the modifier “political”, we can see that a political line:

1. Connects instances, or points, of political action to each other
2. Creates a framework for political analysis
3. Indicates strategic direction for a political formation
4. Defines and distinguishes specific political formations

The political line is an essential feature of anarchist organization. The struggle to define and unify around a political line, rather than around formality or terminology, is a distinguishing feature of a specific anarchist organization. In this way, the political organization is a series of well-defined and connected lines which support the work of the militants. Political lines unite anarchists around ideas and goals, and strategic-tactical lines coordinate their practice on the social level.

The political line is collectively constructed. It’s based on commitments that militants have to social spaces as well as to the political organization. So, it’s important to consider the principles, the initial points which were agreed on before organizing together. While having similar responses to certain questions can determine an initial amount of unity, over time, the specific group may not be satisfied with the existing degree of unity and may want to work to strengthen

it. A high degree of unity doesn't happen without struggle, but struggling on the political level isn't the same as struggling with class enemies or antagonists. It's a struggle to build unity, something which is developed, formed, and built together. It's not something that you can just find or be given. By contrast, people interacting with an authoritarian political line do not have a say in the directions or strategy that they're following. Authoritarian unity only moves in one direction. It's handed down, not constructed from below.

A political line is more than a statement of affinity or points of unity. Affinity refers to a certain practical commonality people have, and unity gathers people around particular concepts. So, the political line must be supported by both unity and affinity, but these labels will run up against limits when they come into contact with practice. We have to expect that political organizing will not be straightforward. It will take struggle and time to reach a shared understanding. The political line is what guides the militants of an organization toward their goal. It's the mark against which an organization measures its progress. Without it, there can be no effective political practice. It connects unity to affinity; it connects the political level to the social level; it connects theory to practice; it connects means to ends. *Social Anarchism and Organisation* is an example of the political lines which have been woven together into an organizational platform. It's the result of the collective political struggle of FARJ's militants.

CADRES

When working towards unity we must be conscious of what terms we use to communicate our ideas. It's always possible that people use similar terms without meaning the same thing, or that they use different terms to mean essentially the same thing. We need to be able to see beyond the words. This is the role of theory. It's a tool that allows us to understand what is meant by a term so we can effectively develop solidarity, connections, and security. Especificismo militants are

responsible for doing this theoretical work and for figuring out how to use this tool ethically.

For example, a term which can be divisive, particularly among anarchists, is “cadre”. In English, it’s usually associated with various kinds of Marxism and the practice of political entryism. In revolutionary tendencies, it refers to the lowest unit of organizing, like a cell or a team. A cadre is often just a group of people who are tightly integrated and work together to carry out some kind of objective. So, we don’t think we should simply reject the term because of its association with Marxist tendencies. When it means something like a concentration of skills or a concentration of trust within a particular group of militants, we are in full agreement with the concept. Though FARJ refers only to the “specific anarchist organization”, at the Center for Especifismo Studies, we also use the term “political organization” as a synonym.

In the Black anarchist tradition, cadre refers to the militants of a political or social organization who share a high degree of trust, spend time developing a political line together, and adhere to its unified, long-term strategy. We can also consider that cadre has other meanings outside of the English context. In French, “cadre” can mean frame or framework. In Spanish, “cuadro” can mean square or canvas painting. From this perspective we can see that a cadre is very similar to a platform: both are “frames” or “foundations” for something to be built upon. In *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, that “something” is the specific anarchist organization. Some groups might say “cadre,” others “platform”, “party”, or another term of their choosing, but that doesn’t necessarily make them any less anarchist in their activities.

Additionally, looking back to the history of the International Workingmen’s Association (aka the IWA, the AIT, or the “First International”), we can see the difference between an anarchist-style cadre (the Alliance of Socialist Democracy), which sought to propagate their ideology within the IWA, and a Marxist-style cadre, which gained control of the Central Committee and expelled Bakunin and Guillaume

after their anti-authoritarian ideas had gained traction among the rank-and-file.

Experience shows that if anarchists don't organize on the political level and develop influence, others will. This is not even a problem unique to the left. For example, landlords and capitalists have "unions" too, in the form of landlord associations, local chambers of commerce, political action committees and more. If we aren't at least as organized as our class enemies then we're not learning how to struggle — we're ceding terrain. This is why we defend political practice inserting itself on the social level. This is where people can develop a sense of how to fight for their own interests and defend themselves against power centers and opportunism. Political retreat from struggle in complex terrains decreases the power, independence, and consciousness of the oppressed classes.

EVOLUTIONISM AND SCIENTISM

Especifismo prioritizes certain ideas drawn from Malatesta against what FARJ calls "evolutionism" and "scientism". This may be confusing to the average reader: FARJ is not against "science" or "evolution", which are both current topics in the North American "culture war" discourse between the religious right and secular liberals.

Scientism refers to the historical determinism ("scientific" socialism) of some Marxists who claim that History progresses naturally through particular stages towards communism. Malatesta argued that the future is not determined, and that libertarian socialism isn't guaranteed to be the next thing that happens after capitalism. It will require our free participation and commitment.

Evolutionism, on the other hand, is an anarchist theory which proposes that change will take place gradually by non-violent voluntary disassociation from the capitalist economy and the formation of alternative political and economic systems. Malatesta argued against evolutionism because it denies the necessity of violently overthrowing

capitalism and neglects the development of class consciousness through continuous confrontation and collective action. This is not to say that FARJ or Malatesta are against the creation of alternatives to capitalism while it still exists. They only believe that there is no way around or out of it without direct confrontation in the class struggle.

FEDERALISM

Another commonly misunderstood term we wish to clarify is federalism, and its relationship to centralism, de-centralism, and horizontalism. A federalist system is not just horizontal and vertical, and it's not simply decentralized or centralized; it has multiple points of view. The "center" of a federation needs to be aware of and in dialogue with these different perspectives because the information is coming from multiple directions and back out to multiple destinations. But this raises some questions: How does a center receiving information from the periphery not necessarily limit access points back to the periphery? How can we be sure that relevant information gets back out to the periphery accurately and efficiently? Why would the center be best equipped to do that movement?

The political organization is only one point at which this information can be passed through and "amplified", emitting a particular unified message or call to action back out. The specific anarchist organization isn't attempting to synthesize and decode information coming from social struggle like a science project; it's attempting to learn from it and reverberate it. Consider this metaphor: if the anarchists were in charge of a billboard, what would be put on it? Who would be in charge of putting it up there, and who would defend it so that it didn't get taken down? What would be its purpose? Would it be to communicate to other anarchists, to promote a certain side of a popular issue, or maybe to antagonize the other side of that same issue? We can also consider the example of the circulatory system: blood (a center) picks up materials (ideas, concepts, etc. from the periphery) from around the body and delivers them to other places across the body for processing,

use, or disposal. In this analogy, we see that the function of the center is movement. We also consider this to be the function of anarchist militancy.

The political organization isn't projecting an authority over the periphery of the political level; it's projecting information to the places that need it quickly, destinations that might not have the time or capacity to be moving those ideas. That being said, anarchist militants need places to move their ideas to, and the specific anarchist organization also needs supporters to maintain contact with as many perspectives and points of engagement as possible. Only through the rapid movement of information, ideas, and coordinated action can the "small motor" built at the political level effectively support movement on the social level.

We see a risk in simply defining decentralization as the opposite of centralization. Certain things will inevitably have to be organized somewhere. So, we can use a different word if we prefer, such as coordination or collectivization, but our understanding of the federalist model is that the flow of decision-making comes from the peripheries to the centers or from the base to the top, not top-down or center-out. Without an orientation toward libertarian socialism, centralization and decentralization can both be complementary processes in defense of capitalism and the State. Dominant forces can concentrate power in small centers which coordinate in a "decentralized" network. What about organizations or movements which possess multiple, distinct centers? It's possible that the various nodes could have different strengths and still support each other in solidarity, but it's also possible that they could be in competition.

If each point on a map represented a political "center" responsible for coordinating their activity and keeping the revolutionary "train" rolling along its track, some centers would act like stations; others would perform maintenance; others would operate the train and so on. One center wouldn't necessarily be the "best" equipped to manage that movement, but it would be the responsibility of each center to figure

out a model of movement or reverberation which they could perform consistently.

We need to be able to move from region to region, something that will require coordination from all kinds of different groups across different geographies (e.g., during the Mexican Revolution, the Magonistas organized more than 40 armed resistance groups throughout Mexico and the US). These groups will all have the autonomy to execute decisions, but they'll also be responsible for the larger revolutionary project. There has to be some form of federation that can go beyond the level of individual autonomy, to the level of the autonomy of the collective or the coordination. We should also expect that some people might use the word "centralization" here, so we need to be able to use theory to figure out what they mean by that.

Eventually, we want all of society to be self-managed. That will require forms of coordination that go beyond each of our relations to each other. There needs to be a goal, and we shouldn't be against the variety of different maps that chart and follow where social movements are going. We should assume that our own perspective is limited, and that not everyone will want to work on the project of mapping things out, following where things are going, and pushing things along. That doesn't mean they're not committed to the larger project. Federalism is about considering multiple perspectives, especially on the social level. The political organization is just one perspective; it's not even trying to be the definitive anarchist perspective. We must be prepared for the fact that by committing to our own perspective, which is only one among many, we may not be able to do everything exactly the way we want. But as anarchists, we know that solutions will emerge from dialogue, persuasion, compromise, and practice.

INDIVIDUALISM AND SYNTHESISM

For us, *especificismo* is a way of making revolutionary discourse a relevant and influential force in society. This cannot happen by only staying in spaces that are welcoming to anarchists. It means operating

on multiple fronts, in varying terrains. Especificismo is about organizing tightly and cohesively on one level, while remaining open and actively seeking out practical collaboration on another level. In this way, our collective efforts are always aimed at producing mass movements that are popular and actually capable of transforming society.

So, if we worked with a direct aid group supporting unsheltered people, we would share a practical affinity with everyone else who's responsible for that space. We wouldn't need to organize that effort around anarchism, but we wouldn't look to that space for ideological or theoretical support either. However, in other groups where we do have ideological unity, we might struggle to increase our unity by producing writings together which clarify our ideas. Especially for those of us who live in small towns, if we want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, we have to be ready to do different kinds of work with different kinds of groups. This variety of interactions keeps militants connected to social movements from many different angles but doesn't close off the possibility of ideological unity in another space. There may not even be two distinct groups to be a part of, but we still think it's possible to work to reach greater unity with an active minority of others participating in the same space. Again, we don't just mean two levels of organization; we mean two directions of movement.

We see no neutral, mediating, or "removed" perspective from which to produce political understanding. So in developing political analysis, the specific anarchist organization doesn't theorize from a perspective that is outside of or in any way removed from class struggle. For this reason, we consider revolutionary political analysis to be a form of action, but like education or propaganda, analysis is just one mechanism in the small motor that serves the larger movement.

We talk about the political level as the specific anarchist organization, but other tendencies have their own political organizations and distinct perspectives. It's also true that in different contexts the political organization should articulate itself differently, more or less clandestinely, more or less present in a given social movement or

sector of society. We don't need to make moral judgments about theories and strategies that are different from our own. We're not trying to define what anarchism or social revolution mean for others; we're attempting to organize ourselves to realize our own projects and priorities.

However, we do have a critique of individualist anarchist tendencies and a critique of serious activists, dissidents, and revolutionaries who refuse to work in organizations. Besides not having support and feedback to maintain capacity and avoid burnout, anyone engaging in a committed way on the social level without organization runs the risk of getting captured by tendencies they would normally consider opponents. This capture could be ideological, in the form of concepts and analysis, or it could be practical, in the form of exploitation or what FARJ refers to as being "sleeves" for the political projects of others. This points back to our discussions about the need for a clear ideology and strategy, to always know WHY you're engaged in the struggle as well as HOW you're engaged in it. Ideological continuity allows us to defend our values in public spaces where they are not always accepted and may even be rejected. In our experience, defending a consistently articulated and collectively supported ideology makes us less reactive and more persuasive politically.

Especifismo opposes anti-organizational and spontaneist anarchist tendencies, but it's more than a broad brush that covers all forms of anarchist organizationalism. Especifismo is in complete contrast to a different model of anarchist organization known as synthesisism. We disagree with the reasoning behind a big-tent, lowest-common-denominator organization of contradictory tendencies. Why should those who don't have ideological, theoretical, and strategic unity agree to be in an organization together just because they all call themselves anarchists? We see no point in organizing anarchists who are in favor of unions with those who are against them since the short-term goal wouldn't be for them to work together anyway. This dream of combining egoists and insurrectionists with collectivists and communists is inefficient and impractical. It's not a matter of questioning whether or not they're anarchists; it's about anarchists

coming out of the *especificismo* current wanting to organize specifically around our values, program, and political line. This goes back to the basic principle of self-management, the idea that the people doing the work should decide for themselves how the work is done. Imagine a social movement that needs people to facilitate organizing meetings or make phone calls. That's a lot of work. Social insertion on an everyday level might entail militants volunteering their collective social force to make those phone calls or host those meetings, so it would be essential for the success of this work that those militants consider their own needs, capacities, strategies, and boundaries.

SOCIAL INSERTION

While there is obviously an attempt to maintain a flow of radicalizing people to the political organization, in *especificismo*, the emphasis is always on the degree of unity and coordination of these militants, not their quantity; it's the popular organization that must grow its numbers because the goal of social transformation is not attainable through winning political positions, growing a party, or splitting pluralistic spaces ideologically. The political organization interacts with mass movements and popular organizations by doing "social work" with the aim of achieving "social insertion". When an effective number of rank-and-file participants want to use direct action to defend their own collective interests against reaction, cooptation, and bureaucratic leadership, the political organization has social insertion. The point is to fight together and win people over to revolutionary ideas by struggling side by side with them. Anarchism, as a political force, always positions itself against authoritarianism and domination, so we are fundamentally against the partisan takeover of popular organizations. We want our ideology to be present in social movements, but it would be unethical and ineffective to convert a social movement to anarchism. We believe that insisting on any form of homogeneity that does not come out of struggle would stifle the creativity and stop the dynamic movement of both the social and political levels. We see no use in sulking and endlessly critiquing mass

movements for ignoring us when it's our actions, today, which will determine whether anarchism will be a relevant part of the class struggle or whether it will position itself on the sidelines. We understand this in terms of praxis which is why it's essential to regularly ask if what we're doing is having the intended results.

The exploited, dominated, and oppressed classes include especificismo militants in two ways. We're members of these peripheral classes in society and concerned with immediate needs and improvements of conditions, and at the same time, we're committed to the total eradication of class society. This kind of militancy is an ethical challenge that distinguishes especificismo militants from other political actors, also engaging on two levels but using different political practices and standards.

As we have said, there are revolutionary tendencies that organize politically and engage socially with a practice referred to as "entryism". It involves joining groups to funnel people to a small, sectarian Marxist project. Militant formation like this depends on a hierarchy of knowledge and organizational priorities, of the more senior members over the new recruits and of the political organization over the popular organization. Especificismo is about increasing the flow of ideas and practices between the social and political levels, not the flow of militants from one level to the other. Our militant flow is international and respectful of the context of struggle. We warn against vanguardism that prioritizes the formation of militants outside of struggle as if they were preparing to take an enlightened point of view back to the people on the front lines. Since we want to add force to social movements, it wouldn't be helpful or effective to see ourselves as acting from a place outside of the social reality.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

In the class struggle, we envision a federalist model for both the political organization of anarchists and the popular organization of mass movements. And after the rupture with the capitalist system, we

envision a federalist model for the popular organization of all of society. As we have said before, following from Malatesta, we see libertarian socialism as one possible result of class struggle, but it depends entirely on freedom, not on the natural evolution of society or on the scientific research of a political vanguard. This relates to our understanding of the differences between federalism and democratic centralism. The movement of information in only one direction, from society to sociologist, from workers to intellectuals, from specimen to scientist, overlooks the plurality of struggles and the plurality of perspectives. Democratic centralism limits the protagonism of those on the front lines of struggle by prioritizing the protagonism of those attempting to study and understand the struggle. Federalism, on the other hand, facilitates the movement of information AND accountability, from a variety of different angles. A federalist system recognizes multiple points from which to develop an informed perspective. The political organization needs to be aware of and in dialogue with these different perspectives, but it can never substitute its own point of view for that of the popular organization, not even theoretically.

When interacting on the social level, everything that we do relies on our ethics and builds upon our principles. When the political organization interacts with a social movement, it takes on the work of contributing to that movement, in dialogue with the other people who are present and active in the popular organization. Especificismo militants seek to build real trust with other people who are struggling, developing techniques to influence the popular organization and doing the necessary work to keep the movement from dying out. Their task is to earnestly contribute to the objectives of the social movement because overcoming ideological differences with practical, everyday respect and trust is the best defense against reactionary forces and co-optation.