

STEAL AND CAPTURE: Framework for an especifismo critique of “big tent” political projects

by the Center for Especifismo Studies (CES)

While just critiquing problematic political tendencies won't make them disappear, as we've said before: when anarchists don't intervene and attempt to imprint our strategic vision on social movements, other ideological forces will. It's important to be able to argue against other strategic proposals in debates. This framework, in 3 parts, is a tool for this task.

I. Stealing capacity, quantity over quality, and tactics over strategy

We think it's impossible to combat opportunism, reformism, and electoralism without a specific organization of highly committed individuals working toward long-term, strategic objectives, an organization capable of defending a consistent set of revolutionary and ethical principles.

Without a political organization of militants with a high degree of unity, the longevity of revolutionary movements is entirely dependent on the spontaneous development of politics on the social level. We disagree with this approach because spontaneity isn't a defense against co-optation by professional politicians and bourgeois political parties. This has driven some militants to join “big tent” political organizations

as a way of holding onto the gains they've made. But in practice, these projects only steal capacity from the popular organization by leading committed militants to political dead-ends.

Revolutionary movements are both sustained and limited by popular support. This is why a successful revolutionary process needs a political organization that's permanently oriented towards revolutionary goals and capable of surviving the ebbs and flows of popular support. This steadfastness and clarity will never come from political organizing that prioritizes quantity over quality, taking cues from the political cycles of the electoral system, insisting on short-sighted "big tent" tactics, and never considering long-term, strategic objectives.

II. Revolutionary strategy: Popular Power and the popular organization

Building Popular Power is a strategic objective that goes beyond the scope of any single political project or successful tactic. It's part of a revolutionary process that aims to accumulate the various social forces of the oppressed classes into a popular organization capable of bringing about a rupture with the capitalist system. Through self-management and federalism, it's possible for the oppressed classes to bring together the autonomous social movements and mass organizations confronting capitalism from different "points":

"[The] patriarchal system and the capitalist system have strategic points in common since they feed back onto each other, just as colonialism and racism are articulated and function in the capitalist form of production and in patriarchal strategies. These points form protagonist nodes in the plot of domination and generate, at the same time, antagonistic points of resistance. Following from this, our revolutionary subject is the articulation of the social antagonism composed by all those main points of resistance." [See: Roja y Negra's "Declaración de principios y elementos de estrategia" (translated from Spanish)]

The organized manifestation of social-level forces form the popular organization. It's produced through the self-management and federalism of the oppressed classes. Rather than referring to one organization or group, the popular organization is the articulated totality of social movements and mass organizations working together. It's an enduring combination of organization, necessity, and will. As a strategy, building Popular Power is about growing the popular organization's capacity because it will have to be able to sustain and reproduce itself if it's going to become a relevant force, capable of transforming society. [See: "Poder Popular y anarquismo especifista" by Liza]

So, while we do think the strategic objective of building Popular Power has the potential to connect multiple revolutionary currents and tendencies, especially those in and around the socialist, progressive, and libertarian movements, not all "mass" strategies are the same. For us, united fronts, groupings of tendency, and intermediate organizations are stepping stones on a strategic path, not "intersections" between the social and political levels. They don't replace social work or political organization and are only relevant within a certain context, not forever. [See: "Anarchy and Its Allies: the United Front and the Groupings of Tendency" by Tommy Lawson]

III. Popular protagonism, not gatekeeping

Building Popular Power means organizing large numbers of people around concrete needs and demands. However, especifismo is a rejection of political organizations that serve as "big-tents" and only unify militants around a "lowest-common-denominator" because, on the political level, unity is always more important than growing in numbers. A high degree of ideological, theoretical, and strategic unity is essential for defending the popular organization, not only from reactionaries and authoritarians, but also from "big tent" political organizations that claim to be in the best position to grow "the movement".

Our mass strategy is one of popular protagonism, meaning it prioritizes the struggles happening on the social level, unlike “umbrella” projects that aim to funnel people into one (or more) of the following:

A. Building the Left

(the socialist, communist, and progressive movements)

We should work on building the largest socialist organization possible because we don't want to lose the gains of the “broad” movement.

B. Anarchist synthesis

(the libertarian movement and activist scene)

We should try to organize all the “anarchistic” people together (anarchist communists, anarcho-syndicalists, insurrectionists, individualists, radical liberals, etc.) because we already have an important characteristic in common.

C. Popular front politics

(reformist movements and electoral campaigns)

We should all set aside our differences and rally together behind this candidate/ campaign/ party because their opponent presents an “existential threat” to all of us.

Especifismo isn't about throwing out everything from other tendencies or from the broad anarchist or socialist traditions, but it's also not about organizing everyone together into a watered-down political force. Popular protagonism centers the direct action, self-management, and federalism of social movements and mass organizations. This means not being captured by vague socialist, synthesist, or electoral formations. We see these “big tent” projects as a kind of gatekeeping, even if their gates are open and inviting. Since Popular Power doesn't pass through any of these gates, revolutionary militants need to resist capture by these caucuses, coalitions, and campaigns.