

# *Reflexions on debatting and exchanging ideas*



# Some thoughts on debates and exchanges of ideas during an anarchist training camp

While organizing an anarchist training camp, we had to ask ourselves several questions about the debates and exchanges of ideas that can arise in such an event. We'd like to share with you some of the ideas and tensions that have been consuming our discussions. We hope that these will give you food for thought, and that they will fuel fertile exchanges throughout the weekend and beyond. So we leave you with a few half-finished lines, where we hope you can fill in the blanks with your own ideas.

Please note that these reflections are written in the specific context of discussions between leftist comrades who share common desires and ethical postures regarding the destruction of our systems of oppression and exploitation. The intolerable, which calls into question the integrity and autonomy of individuals and groups of people, must not be accepted in

a context of exchange of ideas. In these contexts, we prefer to refer to a corpus of ideas and tools from the anti-fascist tradition.

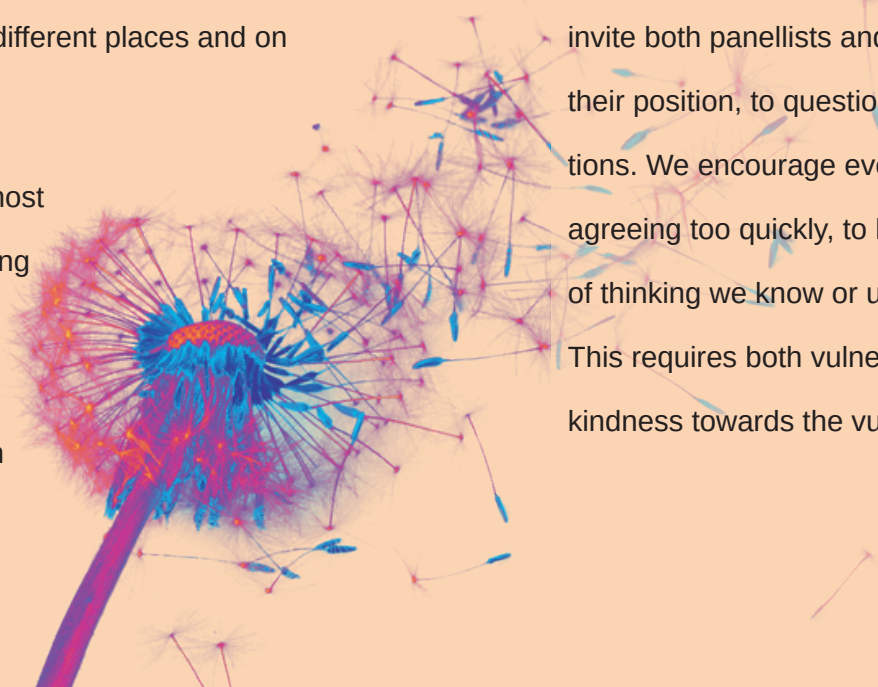
### **On the instability and stability of anarchist thought:**

One of the frequent criticisms of anarchism is that its ideas are imprecise and utopian. We want to resist this criticism by seeing the plurality of points of view in the movement as one of its strengths. We believe that the process of creating ideas in anarchism is not that of a search for an absolute truth or answer. Ideas are meant to be shared and confronted with multiple perspectives, in order to negotiate different realities and understandings of the world. We also need to realize that our experiences of struggle and oppression inform our ideas and processes at all times: we may be in different places and on different spectrums in our thinking.

We see collective discussion as the most important part of the process of creating our ideas. When we talk, when we quibble, when we question our points of view, when we change or transform

our ideas in contact with others, this allows us to push our thinking elsewhere and create new avenues of struggle. Perfect consensus may not always be possible, or even desirable: we believe that many ideas can be reconciled, while others need to be worked on and reworked to reach consensus. We believe that several means of struggle and forms of organization can and must exist at the same time to ensure our sustainability. The important thing is to discuss our failures, our victories and our ideas to update our points of view constantly.

So, we admit that, in the panels and workshops, certain ideas will clash and contradict each other. We believe that leaving room for and appreciating divergence is a good way to avoid going off on a totalitarian, authoritarian tangent. We therefore invite both panellists and participants to become aware of their position, to question it and to engage in collective reflections. We encourage everyone to react, to question, to avoid agreeing too quickly, to look for biases and avoid the traps of thinking we know or understand more than the other. This requires both vulnerability in order to speak up, and kindness towards the vulnerability of others. We hope that the



richness that comes with sharing will then be the soil in which our ideas can spread.

### **On the false dichotomy of reason and emotion:**

When two ideas clash, our emotions can sometimes get involved in the dialogue. For us, emotions are part of the construction of ideas, especially when we talk about exploitation and liberation. For many of us, they're part of our radicalization, and tools in the struggle to handle the anxiety and fear that comes with repression. We recognize ourselves in the moments when the other person's disagreement makes us react in our incomprehension of their position, when ours is so clear in relation to our experience. Or, in the reaction to being misunderstood, of feeling that contradictions challenge our paths and our processes. Our ideas and opinions don't always come easily, and it's a challenge to update or change them.

We invite ourselves not to deny emotions, both our own and those of others. We can allow ourselves to raise our voice, to withdraw from a conversation, to express our anger, while respecting the limits of community life. We propose to try and understand emotions as we do with the more "rational"

elements of thought; it's their mixture that create our militant postures. However, like appeals to authority or experience, we think we must avoid letting our emotions become an imperative to the other to concede to our point. Rather, we believe they should be seen as something to be evaluated in order to polish our ideas.

### **On clumsiness and errors:**

The medium of talking has the singular difficulty of being anchored in a specific moment. In other words, you can't correct your sentences after speaking them, or think about them as much as you would when writing them down. They are also particular because they are informed in situations that are sometimes fast-moving and anxiety-inducing, especially in a group context with new people like Rafales. We recognize that in such a context, it's possible for anyone to make mistakes or to express ideas badly. These moments are sometimes fraught with shame and discomfort, and reactions can be strong.

In cases where mistakes are part of systems of oppression, we invite people to be kind to themselves and seek to understand their mistakes. For us, making a mistake is an opportunity to

learn by using our curiosity to ask questions. It's also an opportunity to take the time to accept criticism and think about it later, to understand it better: you don't have to accept all critiques, but it's worth considering them when they are offered by others. We also invite the person that witnesses a mistake to correct the person, if they are willing to do so. If not, we recommend that they seek support outside the situation, for example, by the person doing care work. Since we're talking here about a wide range of situations, it's difficult to propose ready-made solutions, which we don't think exist. Mistakes sometimes offer us new paths to do the complicated work of repairing and learning to make community. In short, all this is easy to write and not always easy to apply, but we like to think that it starts with assuming good intentions and an openness to being challenged or confronted.

**On the necessity of community:**

For us, the basis of anarchism is the maintenance and creation of strong, supportive communities that fight together to destroy this oppressive world and create new ones. But this work is difficult, capricious and chaotic. It also demands of us to admit that we won't like certain personalities, that we'll always have

some form of conflict or another, that we're likely to have major disagreements, to have regrets as well as remorse: it's all part of the work of being together. We mustn't fall into the individualistic trap of thinking we're not interdependent: this requires us to allow and forgive ourselves our mistakes, and to offer others the tools to change us collectively and accept the help to change individually. We're not going to create a community in three days of camp, and we can't put such expectations on ourselves either. But we can begin this work and these reflections now and hope to continue crossing and recrossing paths which allows the contexts for our communities to emerge, and eventually our revolution.

**Here are a few resources to go further that have inspired us:**

*<https://neighborhoodanarchists.org/norms>*

*<https://neighborhoodanarchists.org/structure/#conflict>*

*<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/phil-identity-politics-and-anti-politics-a-critical-perspective>*

*<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/institute-for-precarious-consciousness-we-are-all-very-anxious>*

*<https://youtu.be/AGiP9FitmYs?si=lzpDOAJEKJga57Nt>*