

Decentralised Federalism in Anarchist Political Thought

Call for Papers for a Special Issue of

Publius: The Journal of Federalism

Deadline for Abstracts: 15th of March 2024

To manage the competing demands of diverse populations and socioeconomic groups, neoliberal capitalism is becoming increasingly authoritarian and centralising. Global constitutional projects enable this by transnationalising, or off-shoring, democratic control and oversight of public goods and workplaces, while stripping back worker rights, and enabling hyper-extractivism. The consequences are climate change, cost-of-living crisis, and a democratic deficit between indigenous, sub-national, local, and community voices on the one hand, and states, regional organisations, and multi-national corporations on the other. These processes are felt differently by different groups, but most acutely by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

In the face of popular unrest, the recentralisation of nation states and/or regional political unity is often proposed as a solution to these intersecting problems. But in the context of numerous claims to devolution and independence across Europe and elsewhere, articulated as new forms of micro-statism, political imagination is sorely needed.

Federalism has been offered as a possible solution to the problem of unity in diversity for nearly two centuries. Although federalism is often framed in statist terms, there is another way of thinking about it, one developed within and alongside the transnational anarchist movement. Anarchists have been involved in public debates about the choice between federalism and unity from the Italian Risorgimento to the Maastricht Treaty, reflecting on the American, Swiss, and innumerable other federal constitutional projects, including in India, Australia, and Canada. Anarchist criticisms of the colonial and nationalist underpinnings of existing federations, and their proposed alternatives, now demand academic contemplation.

In particular, the federal constitutional structure of anarcho-syndicalist unions is a ubiquitous prefigurative constitutional project. From FORA in Argentina, to its Peruvian equivalent FORP, the federations of labour unions in Latin America, were models for the development of European syndicalist unions, such as the CNT in Spain and CGT in France decades later. From Sol-Fed to A-Fed, from Democratic Confederalism in Rojava, to the IWA, federalism remains a core part of the revolutionary anarchist labour movement to this day, but simply do not feature in academic studies of federalism.

This ground-breaking special issue will explore the historical, economic, philosophical, and political value of these ideas. We are interested in papers that explore anarcho-indigenous approaches to federalism, anarcho-syndicalism in the developing world, online federated activism, and collective identity formation through decentralised social media, socialist ideals of federalism in theory, history, and contemporary practice.

The special issue will be published in Autumn 2025 in *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*. If you are interested in proposing a paper, please send a 300 word abstract, including your name, institutional or professional affiliation, to Melis Kirtilli m.kirtilli@exeter.ac.uk and Alex Prichard a.prichard@exeter.ac.uk, by the 15th of March, 2024.