

Declaration of the Aims and Principles of the Fórum do Anarquismo Organizado (FAO)

Forum of Organized Anarchism

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The Forum of Organized Anarchism: a Process in the Making. Statement of the Aims and Principles of the Fórum do Anarquismo Organizado (FAO), approved at the 2010 National Meeting, held recently in Porto Alegre. The Fórum do Anarquismo Organizado (Forum of Organized Anarchism – FAO) has existed since 2002 and up to 2010 was a space for networking among individuals, groups and anarchist organizations who agree with two main themes: organization and “social insertion” (work within mass movements). These two bases provided us with theoretical and practical foundations over these past eight years; struggling to organize and organizing to struggle were the slogans used to gather together militants and guide our groups and organizations.

Struggle to Organize!

“We repeat: without organization, free or imposed, there can be no society, no conscious and desired organization, there can be no freedom nor guarantee that the interests of those in society are respected. And whoever is not organized, whoever does not seek the cooperation of others and does not offer his own, in conditions of reciprocity and solidarity, puts themselves necessarily in a state of inferiority and remains an unconscious cog in the social mechanism that others establish in their own way, and to their advantage.”

Errico Malatesta

The question of organization is very old in the anarchist milieu. Over one hundred years ago Malatesta was already addressing the issue. However much it may seem to us to be a simple matter, there is still much confusion about it and many people who sincerely think that anarchism is against any form of organization, that organization would mean bureaucracy, authoritarianism, etc. This is understandable, after all, as the concrete examples of organization that people know (like authoritarian, centralized, electoral parties) do not encourage anyone to think about it. But it is necessary to break with this, to realize that this is just “a” form of organization and not “the” form.

Anarchism has always had other forms of organization, horizontal, participatory and federal, just consider Bakunin, Malatesta, Makhno, the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, the syndicalist anarchists, etc.. It is time to organize ourselves in order to overcome the fear of bureaucratization. Discussing organization today is not just a matter of recovering the history of anarchism. It is a real need. Faced with an articulate, well-informed and operationally capable system, we cannot continue to be atomized.

“By remaining isolated, each acting or trying to act on his own without coming to agreement with others, without preparation, without bundling together the weak forces of the isolated, it means condemning ourselves to weakness, wasting our energy in small, ineffective acts, rapidly losing faith in our goal and starving ourselves completely”.

Malatesta,
1897

In addition, organization multiplies our forces. It gives us the ability to prevent and defend ourselves from repression (which continues to grow) and makes solidarity – often only written and spoken – real. We know there are many anarchists who are against the idea of organization, mostly individualist anarchists. They are not more or less anarchist than us for this reason, just a different sort of anarchist, anarchists with other ideas. Let them follow their path. We will follow ours, and we have every right to do so. Because we think that we need to be organized if we are to confront this capitalist system.

Organize to struggle! Social Insertion and Militancy

“(...) supporting popular organizations of all sorts is the logical consequence of our basic ideas and should thus be an integral part of our program.”

Errico Malatesta

Anarchism comprises a variety of currents, it is true. But it is also true that not all of them are willing to work together with our class, our people. Historically, we have had moments of very strong anarchist presence, in Ukraine with the Makhnovshchina, in the Spanish Revolution, the Mexican Revolution, in revolutionary syndicalism throughout Latin America, not to mention countless other experiences. In all these cases, which are a reference point – at least theoretically – for all anarchists, there were organized, class-struggle anarchists who worked as part of the social movements. It can be said that in every case where anarchism has had a significant influence, there was social insertion and militancy.

We live in a time when poverty is increasing, when the gulf between the classes is greater today than it was a hundred years ago. 85% of the world's population is poor or miserable. In Brazil alone there are 40 million people living below the poverty line. The manifestations of this poverty are brutal and are there for all to see.

But we have not lost the ability to be angry about this, to revolt against these constant attacks, “we will not keep to ourselves” or “each keep to his or her own”, because we suffer directly from it all. We believe that anarchism has something to say about this situation. We believe that anarchism has ideas and that it exists within this situation, not locked away safely from the real world.

Anarchists have always adopted various methods of action. Many have relations with each other, publish newsletters, hold libertarian meetings, publish websites and books, create alternative channels of information, etc. All this is important and necessary. But have we given due attention to a kind of militancy that is fundamental: social work with the popular movements, in neighborhoods, schools, universities, workplaces, and so on? Fortunately there are anarchists who already do this in several ways, but we honestly believe that it is too little. And this criticism is not directed at the other anarchists – we count ourselves among those who need to improve and further their integration into the social movements and social activism. We believe that all the other activities, the contacts, publications, meetings and books, can be greatly enriched if they are combined with social action by anarchists. There are many groups and anarchist organizations that have been working as an integral part of the social movements for several years now. We can see many experiences of social work carried out over recent years, from the homeless people's movement to the student movement, from work in the poverty-stricken neighbourhoods to

union work and in the struggles against neo-liberalism. Anarchists have been present in these areas and this allows us to discuss the question further.

For this reason, we believe it is essential to discuss how anarchists can act socially, what relationships to establish between anarchists and the social movements, what kind of activity would be more or less interesting, etc. Above all, we believe that anarchists will not make the revolution alone, and that if we are not an integral part of the struggles of our class, we will have no chance.

The 2010 National Meeting and the qualitative leap

At the 2010 National Meeting held in Porto Alegre, the participating groups and organizations felt that it was time to increase our organizational unity and continue with the goals which were previously established.

Therefore after intense discussions, we decided to make a qualitative leap and go beyond the two previously-proposed axes: organization and social insertion. As these are already incorporated into our groups and organizations and as the question of organization and social insertion are no longer so controversial in anarchist circles – and the actions to date of FAO groups and organizations and the FAO itself have contributed significantly to this – we decided to take another step towards building a nationwide organization, which has always been one of our goals.

The next step is for us to increase our organizational unity, and so we decided to adopt especificismo as the anarchist organizational form for groups and organizations in the FAO, establishing political and ideological principles that define, in our view, both anarchism and this organizational method. With this objective, the National Meeting reformulated the definition of the FAO (though it remains a forum), established its principles and strategies, and revised its commitments. Below are the resolutions of the meeting on these issues.

What is the FAO?

The Forum of Organized Anarchism is a place of debate and elaboration for anarchist organizations, groups and individuals who work or intend to work using the principles and strategy of especificist anarchism as their basis.

The main objective of the FAO is to create the conditions for the construction of an anarchist organization in Brazil. We know this task will not be achieved in the short term, but it is important to begin now.

Our organizational conception of anarchism

All groups and organizations in the FAO, as well as those interested in becoming members, should agree to implement and defend this conception of anarchism, which we consider to be the minimum necessary in order to begin to work together. The anarchism advocated by the FAO can be understood from its ideological and political principles and from the general strategy it follows.

Political and ideological principles

The realization, defence and/or implementation of the following points:

- a. Anarchism as an ideology and therefore as a system of ideas, motivations and aspirations that are necessarily connected with activities around social change and political practice.
- b. Anarchism in permanent contact with the class struggle of the popular movements of our time and working as a tool of struggle and not as a pure philosophy or in small isolated, sectarian groups.
- c. A concept of class which includes all sectors of the exploited, dominated and oppressed in our society.
- d. The need for anarchism to regain its leading role in social affairs and to seek the best areas to work in.
- e. The social revolution and libertarian socialism as the ultimate long-term goals.
- f. Organization as something that is essential and contrary to individualism and spontaneism.
- g. The specific anarchist organization as an essential factor for the various manifestations of the class struggle. That is to say, separation between the political level (the specific anarchist organization) and the social level (social movements, unions, etc.).
- h. The anarchist organization as the organization of the active minority, which differs from the authoritarian vanguard as it does not consider itself above the organizations at the social level. The political level complements the social and vice versa.
- i. The principal activity of the anarchist organization is social work/insertion, as part of the people's struggles.
- j. Ethics as a basic pillar of the anarchist organization, guiding all its action.
- k. The need for propaganda and for it to be carried out in fertile areas.
- l. The logic of concentric circles of operation, giving body to a form of organization in which ommitment is directly associated to decision-making power. This also allows an organization to provide efficient interaction with the popular movements.
- m. That the organization must have clear criteria for membership and clearly-defined positions for all those who wish to help (supporter/collaborator levels of membership).
- n. Self-management and federalism in decision making regarding work, using direct democracy.
- o. The continuous search for consensus but, failing that, the adoption of voting as a decision-making method.

- p. Working with theoretical, ideological and programmatic (strategic/action) unity. The organization collectively builds a theoretical and ideological line and, similarly, determines and strictly follows the defined paths, all rowing the boat in the same direction, toward the established goals.
- q. Commitment from militants and collective responsibility. An organization with responsible members, which does not accept a lack of commitment and responsibility. Likewise, the defence of a model in which militants are responsible for the organization and the organization is responsible for the militants.
- r. The militants who make up the organization must necessarily also be engaged in social work (social insertion) and in the internal activities of the organization (offices, etc.).

General Strategy

The general strategy of anarchism that we advocate is based in the popular movements, in their organization, their accumulation of power, and in the application of forms of advanced struggle in order to be able to reach the revolution and libertarian socialism. It is a process that occurs in conjunction with the specific anarchist organization that – operating as a fermentation agent or motor – works together with the popular movements in establishing the conditions for transformation. These two levels (the popular movements and the anarchist organization) can be further complemented by a third, the tendency, which gathers together similar sectors of the popular movements.

The objective of this strategy is therefore to create and participate in popular movements, advocating certain defined programmatic and methodological conceptions, so that they can indicate the way to the final goal, which is the building of the new society.

Commitments of the FAO

- 1. To stimulate and carry out debate on especificist anarchism in Brazil, pointing to the need to build a nationwide anarchist organization.
- 2. To support the formation of organized anarchist groups, encouraging unity within them.
- 3. To work so that these groups and organizations can come together, work together and eventually unite, initially on a state or regional level.
- 4. To the extent that the real possibilities allow, to work in the various levels of the anarchist revolutionary struggle: propaganda work, theoretical work and, most important of all, social work as part of fronts and in chosen areas.
- 5. To fight for the construction of a Brazilian anarchist organization with a single political project, having a certain social and political weight and with the widest possible national presence.

6. To establish relations of fraternity and solidarity with international anarchist organizations, particularly with those in Latin American, who find themselves in a similar situation to ours.

Building an Organized Anarchist Group (OAG)

Throughout Brazil, there are hundreds and maybe thousands of people who identify with and are sympathetic to anarchism. It is a potential force that is often not effective due to the dispersion anarchists find themselves in. We will not establish an anarchist organization in one magic step – first, it is necessary for there to be organized anarchist groups (OAGs) that are coordinated with each other. The OAG is the seed of the anarchist organization.

The FAO is willing to support those anarchist individuals who feel their blood boil in the face of injustice and who are tired of doing little or nothing, or of being alone. This is our suggestion for how to start an organized anarchist group (OAG):

Number of people. Identify the people you know who may feel an affinity with the project. Call a meeting to discuss the formation of a group, supported with reading material. The more people the better, but it is not necessary to wait to form a group. You can begin with three people, always striving for more people to join.

Identity of the OAG. If your project is thriving, the OAG can now adopt a name, flag and symbols, to enable it to be recognized by others.

Sharing basic tasks. The regular internal workings can be shared by the militants. This prevents some people becoming overloaded while others have few tasks, and makes participation more horizontal. We would suggest some roles for a group of at least five people (smaller or larger groups can adapt to their situation).

- a. comrade responsible for organization: in charge of reporting agreements and decisions of meetings, distributing them to others, creating a schedule, convening meetings, organizing the group's internal material;
- b. comrade responsible for propaganda: in charge of planning and proposing policies for communication and the group's propaganda material, for example a newsletter, website, pamphlets;
- c. comrade responsible for finances: acts as the group's treasurer, collects the militants' dues, thinks of ways to raise money and better structure the group;
- d. comrade responsible for relations: looks after correspondence, the PO Box, e-mail, contacts with other anarchist and leftist groups and/or popular movements;
- e. comrade responsible for political education: responsible for the group's internal debate and education, suggests themes for discussion, researches and organizes material, sets up courses and generally helps others in their political education, etc;

This division is not rigid. The comrade who is responsible for propaganda coordinates the newsletter, for example, but nothing prevents the others from giving their ideas, writing, helping out, etc. The same goes for the other functions.

Meetings. It is essential that the group meets regularly as it is the only way a group can debate and plan its activities collectively. Meetings can be weekly or fortnightly, preferably in a fixed location where the group can be at ease and not be disturbed.

Communications. Open a PO Box for correspondence, get an e-mail address and publish a newsletter, even if it is only a modest, single-sheet photocopied bulletin, it is a beginning and it allows the group to publicize its existence to others. Another important thing is a statement of the group's principles.

Decision making. Consensus should always be sought, with all participants having an equal voice in the debate. When consensus cannot be reached and the question requires a decision, the point should be voted on and the whole group should accept the decision. The minority position and its arguments should be recorded for later evaluation.

Basic tasks of each militant. An internal function (organization, finances, propaganda, relations and political education); external, social work in a front (see below); participation in meetings and contributing to the group.

From the Group to the Organization

This qualitative leap can come about in two ways:

1. With the growth of the OAG

In states and regions where there are no other anarchist groups or where the other anarchist groups are averse to this proposal for organization and social action, the only way to form an organization is for the OAG (whose aim is always to develop) to grow.

There are some elements which can help to determine the level of maturity: numerical growth (about 20 regular militants), regularity, the affinity and trust which exists among the militants, expansion of the social fronts, improved political education, etc.

With all this, the OAG can make a qualitative leap, subdividing into nuclei, creating a council that brings together representatives of these smaller groups, and expanding its sphere of action. It is essential that the transition from OAG to organization reflects a real step forward and not just the desires of the militants. A de facto group calling itself an organization or federation is a form of trickery, an act of wishful thinking that easily falls into the ridiculous. The transition from group to anarchist organization is a process, on the other hand, the groups define themselves autonomously. The transition involves a qualitative difference in the construction process, but not a hierarchical one.

2. Bringing the OAGs closer, working together and working towards unification

In states and regions where there are two or more anarchist groups, we propose that contact be established with other anarchist individuals and groups who are interested in the proposal of the FAO. Here we mean regions which are a short distance from each other, but which need not necessarily be in the same state, just nearby – for example, Goiás and Distrito Federal, groups located on the border between two states, etc.

These contacts and discussions may differ in their success rates. Some may categorically reject our project, others may show interest while doubts and criticism remain. With these latter,

discussion must continue and if possible a state or regional FAO be created to bring these groups together, to carry out joint practical tasks and to discuss the project and the tasks necessary for unification.

Getting involved in social activism

All OAG militants should be active within the social movements. The internal tasks mentioned above are important but not enough on their own and cannot be an excuse for militants “getting out” of social activism. We therefore want to avoid some militants dealing solely with internal matters or more “satisfying” matters, and others with social activism, something which can lead to “informal bureaucracies”.

It is important for the group to evaluate its forces and concentrate them in order for social work to bring results and avoid taking on more tasks of insertion than can be sustained. This makes it necessary to choose some area or areas as priorities for social insertion. When we say priority, we do not mean that one area or another is itself destined to achieve the social revolution, but rather that we concentrate our forces working in some area that we believe has more potential for change.

However, with growth and maturity we need to focus on bigger areas. The intention is that the OAG discusses the type of work to be done, what is more viable (in the neighborhood, in schools, university, factories, squats, etc.), according to the situation each group finds itself in. It is always advisable to begin insertion work in situations that militants are a natural part of, or where it is easier to fit in. Also, you should take into account the need for this work to be ongoing and in a fixed geographic location. It is important to be clear from the start, which front is more important and best fits the characteristics of those who make up the group.

Some examples of fronts and areas to work in

Fronts are areas of activity where our militant work is carried out. For example, the student movement, the trade union or workers’ movement, the homeless movement, community radio stations, poor neighborhoods associations, committees for various struggles, etc. On the community front, we can work with issues like housing, healthcare, food, water, electricity, basic sanitation, transport, social ecology, communications, culture, education, human rights, racism, gender, etc. Everything depends on the specific demands of each particular place and our political project.

In this paper, we have limited ourselves to discussing insertion and social activism in a general way, as it would be impossible to describe actual proposals for action in each area, even in general terms. A great deal of material has been produced by members of the FAO on these various fronts, there are experiences which can be shared and support for those who are starting to get involved. Materials and information on the experiences of each specific front can be obtained by contacting members of the FAO.

Want to know more? Want to participate?

If you have read this material and are interested, whether you are just an individual or belong to some group or organization, whether you are already a declared anarchist or someone who has only recently become interested in anarchism, please contact us.

You will certainly be important to the struggle and will have a lot to contribute!

For us, the anarchist project is above individual or personal issues. The FAO is already at work, but we have not finished, and we are never closed to those who might be interested. We know and are the first to admit that there are mistakes to be corrected and we must improve the project and incorporate new contributions and more people in the process.

If you have doubts, disagreements over part of what has been stated so far, we invite you to talk to us, to get to know us better. In short, the stance of the FAO is a constructive one, open to dialogue and against sectarianism. We believe that only in this way can we create the conditions for the construction of a true anarchist organization, which is not a mere symbol or a ghetto.

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