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For a Theory of Strategy

Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira

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This is a coherence that we cannot toss aside. What we do today contributes to where we will arrive tomorrow.

Power, Dominance, and Social Classes

Power relations permeate all social relations, and involve social agents in the most diverse disputes and attempts to influence situations. In societies divided into social classes there is a specific power relationship that can manifest itself in different social spheres (economic, political and ideological): dominance, domination.

Domination occurs when a class, group, or individual carries out the plan of another person, group, or class against their own interests, thereby damaging themselves, and reinforcing the dominator's privileges.

The social classes mark the history of humanity since the appearance of the great civilizations up to the present, possessing a prominent and specific role in capitalism. Relations between social classes are relations of domination.

Anarchism, as a socialist current, struggles for the end of domination and, consequently, for the end of social classes, having the aim of building an egalitarian (socialist) and free (libertarian) system.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary for anarchists in general, and our political organizations in particular, to build a strategy and program that will guide the general path of this transformation.

General Strategic-Programmatic Framework

The table below systematizes what we understand by strategy and program of a political organization.

Note: Elements in the table are: General Strategy, Limited Time Strategy 1 & 2, Tactic 1–6, Analysis of Conjuncture, Analysis of Structure, and Ultimate/Goal Objective



strategy. They are very practical and concrete and “speak” to the day-to-day of the organization and its political practice.

It is constituted by the plan of action to be realized as goals of the organization for the short term. It operates in this historical present, from its specific problems and conflicts. It is where we point out organizational solutions and the general tactic, that is, the agreements, the concepts, the criteria of work and objectives that will express the militancy as a single political commitment during the action. Its execution and its good or bad results depend, therefore, on a global and/or solidarity view of the comrades, beyond its own place of insertion or specific task. This is the nature of a political organization. If it is not able to concentrate force on across different lines it weakens its associative pact and ends up languishing with impotent actions.

In order to go from our strategy until we reach our ultimate goal we would have to deal with intermediates of short, medium and long term that form part of the path we are building. The organization of social militancy in tendencies, for example, is something tactical that can fit or not fit within the same strategy, but once adopted it can last for years, even merely being a tactic. These actions linked to these goals, called tactics, should be in tune with the general objectives, and thus with the overall strategy. They must be executed based on the same principles, but with sufficient sensitivity to perceive their greater malleability in the sense of changing the various tactics in line with the strategic construction that will dialogue with the conjuncture in which it is inserted.

Goals and means

The tactics must be subordinated to the limited time strategy, which must be subordinated to the general strategy, which must be subordinated to the ultimate objectives.

It is not the case that “the ends that justify the means”, but rather that the ends must determine the means (strategies, tactics, etc.).

It may be that with the minimum program we have a zone of consensus with the classist sectors of the left camp, which in itself is no problem. What cannot be lacking as elements of distinction and definition are the general lines that will delineate our profile in political practice and its corresponding tasks within the plans and terms that we demarcate in the current stage. Within the broad framework of a minimum program that groups the fight against the dominant model, our strategy starts from where we are and what we are doing, to make priorities and plans for growth, form alliances and create more decisive social forces.

This is something that is part of the overall strategy, but limited to a certain field. Its possibility of change is greater than the general strategy and less than the tactics. It is general lines in a certain field of activity that feed the program of work for a certain period. For example, we have a general strategy for achieving libertarian socialism and a more narrow strategy within the field of health, which dialogues with the general strategy. Acting within the struggles of the field of health we will use various tactics.

This being our permanent strategy, we mark out a particular slice in time. That is, time frames. For the very short term (which is in exact terms of time = 2 years), and for the short term (= 4 years), where we will apply our strategy. In this shorter and more visible period of time (that is, where and when we can apply our planning), we will define central objectives, determinants of variations and changes over the long term, and appropriate decision-making autonomy by the federalist mechanism. To this shorter form of strategy we give the name that reflects the concept of the limited time strategy (applied in these restricted times).

Tactics

Tactics are flexible and endowed with autonomy and constitute an action or a set of actions of a momentary nature that have the objective to promote the limited strategy and, thus, the general

Strategic-Programmatic Elements

Below we discuss and conceptualize strategy and program, in general, followed by placing the other elements in the framework.

Strategy and Program

The strategy involves a reading of reality, the goals you want to achieve and a path to it. It is nothing more than the science of conflict, in the final analysis, the study of war (at all levels, forms, and intensities), including social conflict or class struggle.

The idea of strategy arises from the relations of conflict between classes, groups, or people and the fact that political disputes involve antagonistic interests.

We need to form a line that unifies our activity in a way that is federalist, but never fragmented. We can realize compact and internally cohesive action through a political practice that grows the organization, and this simply means a line that builds or rebuilds the social organizations necessary for the basis of popular power. To this unifying line we give the name and conceptual weight of the program.

The program formalizes a chosen strategy and therefore guides actions for a given time and place. To build a program, we have to use strategic evaluation and planning. It must present strategic reflections with notions about where we are, where we want to go in a particular moment, and how we will walk this path.

A program concretizes the line we apply in a period. It can be for shorter or longer periods of time. It contains a series of points, goals and objectives to be applied in the short term or non-short term (between organizational congresses, for example) and reflects the central objective of the strategy (general or restrained to a specific time). It presents the appropriate tools for popular activity (horizontal and combative): to unify the struggles, act from within our

different fronts, generate an identity in which diverse social subjects see and act from a notion of oppressed classes.

There is, therefore, a general political line to guide our initiatives in a specific time. It may also occur that the strategic objectives of a period do not fully correspond with the current capacity our militants (both in infrastructure and people/time to work at all necessary levels) nor with the force of our intervention in social struggles. Still, we have to transform into concrete political practice what we have chosen as general objectives for this stage. The program will be the instrument that will demonstrate the concrete actions we will take to realize our strategic hypothesis. For this reason we also talk about an agenda. They are distinct operations that must be in place to bring about a living force (this is because we intend to bring it into existence) in the face of harsh living conditions, fragmentation, despair caused by misery, loss of the idea of a collective future, the social fabric in tatters and the ideological advance of the old-right (oligarchies, financial and/or national capital) as well as the new-right (ruling class fractions, growing new political-administrative elites, the “official left” governments).

Of course, the ultimate objective and general organizational strategy may appear in the program. In this case it is a “maximum program”, with little variation. Nevertheless, it is important that the program presents more narrow short-and medium-term elements.

Structure/Structural Analysis

It is the evaluation of these elements that allows us to understand the system and structure in which we are inserted, taking into account awareness of the long term. This type of analysis is based on history and seeks to present the main structural features (which do not vary much with the conjuncture) of the capitalist system, of the state, of the current hegemonic culture (always with this awareness of the long term).

the more chance our project will have. That is, to have a functional federalism as a mode of political management; Self-management as a mode of socio-economic production; acting in solidarity with other class organizations and movements; having internal democracy and a high degree of popular participation and waging the fight in the most advanced way for each stage of the popular struggle. In this way we will build the anarchist hegemony within the popular movements under construction and/or advancement.

Short Term Strategy

The limited time strategy is inflexible within the stipulated time and constitutes the strategy for a given time less than the time of the general strategy. It is not the general strategy because its time is more limited and it is not the tactics because it has traits more lasting and less flexible and not merely operational. It encompasses a particular stage, less than the general strategic stage and greater than the stage of a restricted set of tactics.

It is linked to more rapid changes and cannot be reduced to the field of tactics. It corresponds to the analysis of a concrete social formation in its current stage of development, in order to consider its particular conditions and possibilities. This is to find a logical answer to an earlier statement that said: “There is only one strategy, what changes in shifts of time are tactics”. Not only tactics change, but also certain aspects, or zones, of the strategy. The strategy is conceived in articulation and constant interaction with tactics.

By this category we make definitions about the character of the stage (or phase), where we gather descriptive and analytical elements that “cut” historical periods and inform our operating models of the system in its historical dynamics. The minimal program in this regard accords with the problems facing the dominant model and the accumulation of antagonistic forces to construct a libertarian alternative.

conceptions within it, so that they can point to an ultimate objective, which is cemented in the construction of the new society.”

That is to say, this strategy implies a long-term revolutionary process, with the protagonism of the oppressed classes, and with a high level of confrontation (at all levels, military, political, social, economic, juridical and, mainly, ideological). In an anarchist program, this needs to be discussed in more detail to characterize the general outline of this strategy. In general, in a program, it is relevant to point out a time more or less expected for this great step, that is, for the realization of these objectives.

We can still say more. The strategy corresponds to a theory of the more general and slow changes of the system and a policy of rupture directed towards its fundamental structures of domination. Placed in this category are a characterization of the system of domination, capitalism and the structures of dominant power, the hard core instituted by social-historical formation. In this context we have defined a strategy of revolutionary popular power. We postulate as its constituent elements: the protagonism of popular organizations, a new political-social articulation, the revolutionary rupture as popular insurrection. The set of elements systematically and coherently combined point to the ultimate objectives: a revolution of socialist and libertarian character that comprises a front of oppressed classes as subject of change. That’s where the objective program is going, which holds a set of measures and propositions that represent the meaning of such social restructuring.

Our permanent strategy is to build popular power through the creation (or recreation) of classist [class struggle oriented] and autonomous popular organizations and to advance step by step in their protagonism as an organized people. But simply a declaration of intention would not suffice to fulfill the task of participating and contesting the hegemony of this popular power. It is not only a question of propagating the principles but also of influencing and ensuring the functioning of these organizations. The more libertarian and socialist these organizations and movements are internally,

Marx’s analysis of capitalism in *Capital*, for example, is structural, as is the anarchist theory of the state (and this theory of the state is independent of the party in government). The structure is deeper and has elements of greater permanence than the conjuncture; in an analysis of this type, we approach the system of domination and its class structure, regardless of whether company X or Y has greater economic power or whether party A or B has power over the executive or legislative branches of government for example.

Conjuncture/Conjunctural Analysis

It is the evaluation of these elements that make it possible to understand the moment in which the system and the structure of the society are found, that is, what is the characterization of the period in which a society is and its most important features are encountered? This type of analysis is much more immediate than structural analysis and takes into account changes such as economic policies, political parties in power, economic capitalist blocs, international and national scenarios, wars, conflicts, major events, popular movements, culture in a more immediate sense, etc.

As anarchists, we believe that, even with structural/conjunctural limitations, human action is capable of modifying/transforming society. Therefore, we must take into account in these analyzes of human actions that have contributed to the social conformations in question. Since we are not completely guided by the structure/conjuncture, we have to think how to position ourselves and how to act in relation to them. The conjuncture is the current moment, but it is necessary to select a piece of reality to be able to change it. They are, at least, three simultaneous dimensions. One is time, that is, the period to which we refer.

We can say that the period of time we stipulate is the following (very short term = 2 years, short term = 4 years, medium = 8 years, and long = 12 or more), or that we are analyzing the conjuncture

of the month, a quarter and so on. We can also say that we analyze the planning of another agent (ie, another political party or an institution of the enemy), and there use the time division that this other agent themselves stipulated. Another necessary dimension is the geographic dimension of terrain. Thus, we can analyze the conjuncture of a region of the metropolis, as we can try to analyze Rio Grande do Sul (a Brazilian province), as we even venture into a global analysis of the reality of the War against Iraq. Analysis simply cannot be done outside of time and space, and therefore these two dimensions are fundamental.

Ultimate Objective

The ultimate objective is inflexible and establishes the society that one desires for the future. In the case of CAB, as pointed out in our principles, the ultimate objectives are social revolution and libertarian socialism. In the case of an anarchist program, we consider it necessary to point out the general features of this system, that is, what we propose for self-management and federalism in the three spheres. The ultimate objective is consolidated with the conquest of society by the forces of the people and with the victory of popular power, through a long-term revolutionary process. This victory means political power by the federalist and revolutionary form and socio-economic self-management across the scale of the liberated territory.

It is very important to know that the finalist goals should not be confused with the overall strategy. The definition of the objectives we want to achieve is marked by the ideological choices we make, so that changes in general objectives imply ideological change, but not necessarily the same thing with the strategy. Revising the strategy, therefore, does not imply changing the principles. Libertarian socialism is a goal and the construction of popular power is more in the field of strategy.

It is these objectives that will condition the creation of our strategies and tactics, since it is the objectives that condition the strategies and these condition the tactics; This is what anarchists have called coherence between means and ends. This ultimate goal is established from the utopia.

Utopia is an inflexible and permanent element; It is a place to be built, the inspiration that, applied in concrete terms, traces the ultimate objective. The place to be built is socialist and libertarian society, where the form of social organization to live in collectivity will not emerge through injustice means, systems of privilege, nor will it reconstitute a state. We may never reach it, but this place is what directs the organization's strategic goals and time.

General/Permanent Strategy

The general/permanent strategy is inflexible and characterized by general planning that coordinates the objective goals (where we want to arrive) and the means employed, such that these objectives are promoted in relation to the other forces involved in conflict, starting from the a specific moment (characterized by the structural and conjunctural analyses). In the case of CAB, we point out as a general strategy:

“The general strategy of anarchism that we defend is based on popular movements, their organization, accumulation of force, and in the application of advanced forms of struggle, aiming at revolution and libertarian socialism. This process takes place jointly with the specific anarchist organization which, acting as a catalyst/engine, acts together with the popular movements and provides the conditions of transformation. These two levels (of the popular movements and the anarchist organization) can still be complemented by a third level, that of the tendency, that adds to areas related to popular movements. The strategy of tendency [also known as the intermediate level] aims to create and participate in popular movements defending certain methodological and programmatic