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Anarchist Communists & The Mass Organization

Basic Strategy Document approved at the 1st
Congress of the FdCA, 1985

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

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This is also because the mass organization owes its existence to totally different reasons than those of the political organization.

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We have previously spoken of the interchange between the political organizations and the mass organizations. But, to judge from what has just been said, it could seem that the only problem which has really been faced is the one regarding the flow of political consciousness from the anarchist communists' political organizations to the mass organizations.

But this is not the case, for two reasons.

Firstly, the aim of the political organization is only to provide the mass organizations with the fruits of the historical consciousness of the revolutionary proletariat (which do not include any detailed line on the transition to revolution). They must be free to use the historical consciousness provided by the political organization and freely compare it with their own consciousness and their own needs in order to make the best possible choices. The mass organizations must, in fact, have their own autonomous ability to make political evaluations. Furthermore, they are also free where operational decisions are concerned, as they have — *a priori* — no institutional links whatever with the political organization.

The second reason regards the fact that the political organization must also be able and willing to learn from the mass organization. This is because the political militants are not the proletariat — they are part of it; their task is also to continually compare their comprehensive political vision with the current experiences of the class. Yet another fundamental task of the political organization is to publicize and help spread the experiences of the autonomous mass organizations.

The interchange lies in each learning from the other and supporting the other — through autonomous decisions — to the extent in which each organization finds a resemblance and complement in the consciousness and knowledge of the other.

It is an interchange which both organizations must develop in a coherent way and one which can be interrupted or can cease to exist for various reasons.

These lessons must be learnt also by our comrades, the members of the mass organizations who will learn them through their practice – not personally, but through the collective struggles of the organization – so that they become part of the official political heritage of the organization itself and, finally, build precious material for the continuous political education of its members, old and new.

- c. Our political organization has no authority whatsoever over the autonomous mass organizations, but this does not mean it has to stop correctly expressing its evaluations. This can only take place through our militants who are also natural members of the mass organizations and through the propaganda of the organization itself. Neither should we forget that these mass organizations are an ideal pool of prospective political militants, for the obvious reasons of the social position of the members and the composition of the mass organizations. Political militants within the mass organizations must, first and foremost, encourage the development of the points a) and b) above. Secondly, they must express their political ideas by linking them in a consistent way with the experience of the mass organization.

The political organization, on the other hand, must carry out this work from without, and concentrate on two goals in particular:

- gradually and consistently encourage the spread of our political consciousness among the natural members of the mass organizations, by convincing and demonstrating and not by force or trickery;
- encourage as many as possible of these members to join the political organization.

Introduction

Mass organizations differ from anarchist communist political organizations in that they have different bases and purposes. They do not have that clarity regarding the final goal that the political organization can have, though they potentially have the same goal as the political organization. History demonstrates that this goal (anarchist communism) is produced by a certain type of practice and consciousness within the mass organizations. These factors are based on the two principles of social self-management in struggle and in construction, and of the egalitarian and intransigent defence of those who work for society.

These are both logical principles, so much so that they may seem automatic; but history has shown that the dominant classes have always acted in such a way as to render this logic fragmentary and easy to suffocate. The utmost political clarity is therefore necessary and should be applied towards the real needs of the proletarians who are members of the mass organizations.

On the other hand, history has also shown that the revolution will not be realized unless it is put into action by the proletarian masses themselves who, as proletarians, discover their revolutionary potential through the practices of the mass organizations and who decide to set in motion revolutionary practices.

In consequence, the anarchist communist revolution will be successful inasmuch as the mass organizations apply that revolutionary logic which is not a necessary prerogative of theirs, but which is at the same time naturally inborn in them.

No To Economicism

The first obstacle to be removed are those types of ideas and practices which serve to reduce the mass organizations *a priori* to a role of simply making demands. This obstacle can take on the form of inter-classism or Leninism.

Inter-classism is the belief that mass organizations recognize the State as being unbiased and representing the entire people, the essence of the (purely economic) categories which distinguish one citizen from another. This means that the mass organizations exist for the economic defence of any category of citizens, and therefore can participate in the economic planning of society but without questioning the State or its decisions — the workers and the proletariat can only defend themselves, they cannot change the current economic situation or engage in political practices which alter the politics of the State.

Consequently, this type of union is excluded from all political decisions and thereby implies acceptance of the system. The clearest examples of this are the unions which are inspired by political forces close to the dominant classes in countries with classical capitalist systems.

Leninist-inspired political theories, on the other hand, cannot conceive of the existence of mass organizations which are not explicitly political — thereby seemingly the opposite of inter-classism. In fact, not only do these theories impose politics on the mass organizations, they impose the politics of the dominant class or its party. It derives that the masses can only engage in political activity within the political organization and that the mass organization must follow this political line. This characteristic is also known as “trade-unionism”.

Both inter-classism and Leninism converge on one point: the fate of the mass organization is decided and, if necessary, imposed from without.

- a. the action and elementary aims of the mass organizations;
 - b. the enrichment of the mass organizations' autonomous political characteristics;
 - c. the action of the political organizations through its militants who are natural members of the mass organizations and through explicit political propaganda.
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- a. In the elementary aims and in the elementary functioning of the mass organization, the first objective factors of political growth already exist in its members. It is a first very important point and one which characterizes the actions of its members, beginning with the simplest decisions. This is the case with the key points of assemblyism, direct democracy, federalism, the practice of free discussion and practical observation, with regard to the functioning. Instead, where the aims are concerned, it is a matter of defence and of the natural affirmation of the sole interests of the exploited class and of total emancipation of the exploited class from imposed exploitation and authority.
 - b. As the mass organizations gain political experience, occasions arise for political evaluations which then become part of the heritage of the mass organizations, with strong elements of autonomy. This political heritage must (in the light of practice) clarify the roles of the forces of counter-revolution (inter-classism, social-democracy and trade-unionism) and the necessity for the autonomous front of the masses to have these characteristics which are essential in order to advance through one's own strengths; experience must also gradually clarify the need for a libertarian socialist revolution if we are to eliminate exploitation definitively.

The subjective conditions required regard the proletariat's consciousness of the mass organizations. For our part, we must direct our attention to this problem in all the strategies and historical tactics which we develop, in the full awareness of the prime necessity of this point. Another fact derives from the observation of history: the importance of the mass organizations preparing for a substitution of Statist power so that they can move forward, having already prepared what to do and how to defend themselves. In other words, a capacity for an alternative management of society and physical self-defence. This means preparation in advance (or if not, at least rapid preparation) of all the functions required to play an ever more important role and defend it from enemies. Make it known to potential allies. This fact has simply been derived from history, above all from the most important moments of struggle of the 1970s, which we will have also seen to be in line with our theoretical conclusions.

The Development of Revolutionary Libertarian Consciousness

In consequence of what we have stated above and of our Theory, we are obliged to consider mass organizations also and above all as a place where the political consciousness of the proletariat can grow.

How does this political consciousness grow? We know that there is no automatic device for moving from the defence of labour to a consciousness of the libertarian social revolution. We know too that if one does not suffer exploitation, then it is not possible to begin that process which (starting with the defence of labour) can reach that of revolutionary struggle. We therefore need to keep in mind these two points. There are three consequent lines of action:

The result is economicism: the forcing of the historical interests of the proletariat which is only allowed to occupy itself with economic matters. But since it is patently absurd for someone to be concerned with the money they receive without also being concerned with the why's and wherefore's that money exists and how it is shared around, there exists behind economicism an explicit or implicit political imposition. In its turn, this fact makes a mockery of any autonomy in purely economic interests by limiting it politically. The circle is closed: by being forcefully separated from politics, economics simply means political subservience and results in economic subservience.

Our Outlook

The proletariat's mass organizations are, and will continue to be, important historical entities which cannot be ignored. They are different from political organizations and we must not deny this difference, nor relegate them to the role of second-class revolutionary organizations and seek to dominate them. Neither must we reduce our own role to second-class status and submit to the mass organizations. The relationship that we have with mass organizations must be one of a continuous dialectic, representing a real interchange and not limited to a one-way flow. The first essential, but not unique, condition for there to be a real interchange is that both entities be truly autonomous.

Where the mass organizations are concerned, this means that they must autonomously express the interests and consciousness of their (proletarian) members. In other words, they must be based on the self-management of those who naturally belong to them. In the process of the anarchist communist revolution, it is essential that the mass organizations can grow both operatively and politically in order that the masses may have the greatest possibility of expressing the strength and

consciousness which is necessary for the very life of the anarchist communist revolutionary process. The mass organizations will also need to be ever more capable of politically evaluating their actions and the prospects that these open up. If these conditions are met, we will be able to carry out our political duties of promoting political consciousness within the mass organizations and receiving in return its confirmation or otherwise. These conditions are necessary if the masses are to have a chance of making the most of the experiences of previous revolutionary experiences, of producing a more advanced revolution and of realizing it with all available forces. Thus far there emerges the fundamental problem of the double aspect of mass organizations: on the one hand their total autonomy, both in their experiences of the struggle and in the evaluations of these, while on the other hand, the objective need to evaluate everything in the light of the historical needs of the masses. Neither of these two aspects of the question can be ignored.

Mistakes to be Avoided

Many comrades and organizations have in the past committed and continue to commit errors where mass organizations are concerned, even though they may be sincerely libertarian and revolutionary in their outlook. We can divide these errors into two basic types: the first, “spontaneism”, the second “ideologism”. The former includes those ideas where the mass organizations have an automatic ability to completely sustain the revolutionary process. The basis of this idea is that the very capitalist contradictions of any given period can spark off a process of struggle which will be able to create for itself the very political bases upon which a social revolution can be built. It is like saying that to arrive at the revolution, it is sufficient to make the proletariat’s struggle for the defence of its labour rights as extreme as possible. An action against one employer

power — and not UP — was not yet strong enough to defend its gains.

In Portugal, the revolutionary route to socialism failed before it was born, and the reasons are simple: the forces which had contributed to the fall of fascism did not have enough clarity and/or will regarding proletarian self-management from below; the proletariat, on the other hand, had only developed this need to an extremely primitive and “naive” level. It was left to the counter-revolutionary parties — inter-classist and social-democrat — to snuff out the fires of proletarian autonomy of the mass organizations, so that they would tear themselves apart on the statist road to “democracy”.

We can see today in these clear examples that, from the times of the Paris Commune right up to the present day, the road to revolution passes through the mass proletarian organizations and that the proletariat naturally chooses this way as soon as it is practically possible. To draw conclusions, it is a historically valid fact that the mass organizations, on the road to social revolution, are destined to make a leap, to move on from asking for certain things — from bargaining, from fighting the central power, an enemy government which they themselves recognize implicitly as the dominant power — to substituting this government, to becoming the power (or non-power). In this way, mass organizations must face up to this passage in all consciousness so that they can acquire the necessary operational abilities. The fundamental objective necessities are:

- a. the stability of the mass organizations, which must not submit to partial goals, party directives or the logic of the State;
- b. the full application of direct democracy;
- c. federative relationships between the mass organizations, as functional and fully-operational as possible.

Other important moments also provide valuable lessons — the *Biennio Rosso* (1919–20) in Italy, the experiences in Chile in the '70s and in Portugal in 1974.

The *Biennio Rosso* in Italy scared the bourgeoisie, as the proletariat organized itself directly from below and managed itself, immediately creating an alternative structure of production. The government had accepted that the proletariat be represented by a party (or several parties), but could not accept that it represented itself. The answer given to the mass organizations by the forces of counter-revolution was most clear and indicative: they were to be denied the instruments of their own autonomy and functionality. They would be denied any political function and all decision-making powers and information would, by hook or by crook, be transferred to the union leaderships and politicians. This action was by far more effective in clipping the wings of the proletariat.

Why was *Unidad Popular* (UP) supported in Chile, and why did it fail? Outside this social-democratic government coalition there existed an autonomous force which identified with UP only in certain aspects. The entire movement of the mass organizations of the peasants, the workers and the towns had strong disagreements with UP and with the unions on one main point: whether or not power should be delegated to the State. This new force of the mass organizations had forms and contents which could not be shared by anyone: not by the bourgeoisie which was being removed from power, not by the UP which was being held up by the people but which could not expect the people to govern themselves. UP maintained its power even when the bourgeoisie no longer supported it since it was this proletariat force which was supporting it. And when UP fell, it was as a result of the process of proletarian power which was in progress, despite UP's own strategy. The bourgeoisie reacted because the proletariat was already building a revolutionary power which had nothing to do with the central power. And the bourgeoisie won because this new

is not the same thing as an organic, comprehensive programme against the bosses. A proletarian who defends himself, attacks, or whose anger is redirected against his exploiter in a single action, is not necessarily conscious that this action needs to be part of an organic, comprehensive programme of action. An action is not necessarily based on a programme, nor does it necessarily produce a programme.

Neither is a programme of union struggle necessarily a revolutionary libertarian programme. In fact, it is most unlikely that a series of organized union actions corresponds to a conscious programme designed to initiate the libertarian socialist revolution. History has clearly demonstrated these points and anyone who thought that unions have naturally anarchist and revolutionary tendencies has been sorely deluded.

Historically speaking, even the continual preaching of direct action and self-management within the unions has failed in its revolutionary aims when, reduced to pure syndical method and having lost its alternative, libertarian content, it has come up against proposals for struggle which were supported by organic political programmes, or when it has come up against the pure and simple fact that the dominant classes were able to take over what were by then empty methodologies which were often reduced to pure extremism. This collapse has since dragged libertarian methods along with it, methods which have often seemed wonderful, but which did not have a practical historical link or general prospects.

On the other hand, there is the second type of error which is in effect the opposite of the first and which states that only anarchists can fight as revolutionary proletarians and that therefore the only correct form of union is one which is made up of people who are fully conscious of the libertarian social revolution.

This conception generates isolationist positions and sterile vanguardism. The isolation derives from the pure and simple fact that it has never been the case that the proletariat has

first become communist anarchist before it can move against capital and weaken it, attack it and (at times) propose a libertarian alternative. To wait for this situation, therefore, means condemning oneself to isolation. Clearly, in this way there is a great risk of becoming vanguardist: the logical reaction of those who have isolated themselves from the masses, expecting to model them in their image. It is not by chance that “spontaneism” and “ideologism”, though declaring an enormous interest in mass organizations, both end up crushing the life out of these very same mass organizations by forcing them into roles which are imposed on them from without. Spontaneism holds that all manifestations and events which are fundamental for the revolutionary process (ie. which are naturally connected to the problem of revolution) are revolutionary in themselves. Ideologism on the other hand expects these manifestations and events to proclaim themselves revolutionary even before the need for them is autonomously established, gradually and through practice. Spontaneism stops the problem of the consolidation of the revolutionary consciousness of the mass organizations from being confronted in a serious way. Ideologism stops the mass organizations from carrying out the work of uniting the proletariat as exploited, and of their gradual growth through struggle, something which is necessary for the transition to anarchist communism.

Towards a Better Understanding

The mass organizations’ basic historical need for a libertarian social revolution cannot be denied. Neither can the risks connected with mass struggle be denied. The condition that mass organizations be autonomous guarantees the possibility that it will be the masses themselves, and only they, who carry

joined by the need for political growth. If we go to the heart of the question, we will discover however that it is not enough to continue with the logic of struggle through a labour union in order to arrive smoothly at the revolutionary management of society by the mass organizations. As long as we are in a phase of firmly-established and dominant class society, we can directly witness in practice only one link: the one between the role of the exploited and the natural protagonist of the struggle against exploitation. It is a situation which lends itself to direct observation and verification in a phase which precedes a future revolutionary transition. Furthermore, the problems of labour struggle require a certain type of mass organization, above all based on the structure of the exploitation. Instead, when we move from the struggle against exploitation to the construction of new social structures, we believe a huge step must be taken. A step which we are searching for only because the proletariat in its history has done so. In other words, we know that it is necessary if the social revolution is to take place; we also need to know that this requires an enormous leap in political consciousness and in the operative capacity of the mass organizations. There is a great risk that the mass organizations weaken class society to its limits, stripping it of its power, but will then be unable to reconstruct with the required clarity and ability.

If this were to happen, the revolutionary movement would meet with heavy defeats. It is therefore essential to study how the mass organizations can reach the moment of revolution in a position to deal successfully with it. On the other hand, it must be noted that the proletariat, in its most famous attempts at revolution, was able to make this great leap. It required a change from mass organizations with the aim of demanding concessions from the dominant central power to mass organizations which themselves constituted forms of power (or non-power, if one prefers) which were different from those of the exploiters, to the extent of suppressing the power (at least potentially).

The Building of an Alternative Management of Society

Mass organizations must be able to build the new structures for the revolutionary management of society. Principally, this means three things:

- the need for a capillary extension of the mass organizations,
- the need for these organizations to be able to gradually acquire the prospects and possibility of taking over the control and management of all social structures
- in order for the proletariat to take on the responsibility for the management of society by direct democratic means.

Management based on the mass organizations is not the pipe dream of one mind, but a practical indication of great proletarian revolutionary episodes.

What was said above regarding labour defence and attack has the precise aim of making it possible for the mass organizations to transform themselves from union organizations devoted to the labour struggle into organizations which can be the focus of the revolutionary process. This connection demonstrates, once again, the fact that we are not driven by opportunistic motives when we state that the labour struggle must be based on direct action and direct decision-making processes. This method of struggle – which is necessary in its own right – also becomes an end and alternative content at the moment in which the proletariat begins to use the mass organizations to build the new society and make it possible for all workers to participate in decision making. This prospect, however, creates some big problems in the field of practical realization. A guarantee of the possibility for autonomous political growth is

out the anarchist communist revolution. However, it does make it possible for the revolution to suffer serious defeats.

This situation is not hopeless: its strength is its weakness. There has been rich debate on the matter within the anarchist movement – debate which has often violent but has above all been open. The solution, in fact, cannot be found only or above all by the movement of political militants. We must be perfectly aware of this. Every time the need for a mass libertarian organization has been ascertained, an organization which can give birth to a practical revolutionary process out of exploitation and of the exploited, the fact that syndicalism is not necessarily revolutionary was demonstrated time and time again. Many comrades have tried to demonstrate that unions are in themselves reformist or revolutionary.

A great many comrades believe that the correct solution lies in one or other of these two theoretical conclusions. We believe that it is basically wrong to accept this line of thinking – to make rigid categories out of risks, possibilities and possible tendencies. It is a recipe for losing one's way, for falling back on spontaneism or idealism. We try to be lucid, to be able to accept complex, non-categorical facts for what they are. We try, in other words, to base ourselves on certainties and it is on these certainties that we must build, insofar as it is up to us. We must be ready to accept new, more advanced notions.

The Certainties We Must Build On

Contrary to political organizations, mass organizations are not based on an acquired consciousness nor do they explicitly seek to promote consciousness. They are based on immediate and objective material bases which arouse undeniable physical needs. Consequently, the members of the mass organizations live through the situation they organize themselves for. Their economic role is the basis on which they can come together

and, given that exploitation gives rise to all manner of unsatisfied needs (alienation), they come together to satisfy these needs as best they can. This basis is the starting point, it is the basis of the class autonomy of mass organizations. But in order to thrive, this autonomy must be projected into action and into the real possibilities of these organizations. If we wish, we can divide these into two areas: the economic struggle and political growth.

The economic struggle concerns all actions designed to obtain better material conditions for the workers and to manage the economic apparatus after the destruction of central power. Political growth is required to make the workers conscious through the economic struggle, the class struggle, the possibilities and needs of the social revolution and later to allow them to consciously build the new society.

Clearly, the economic struggle and political growth are so closely connected that, following the first actions of economic defence which are born from the needs of the current situation united with even a minimum will to defend oneself, they can support and sustain each other reciprocally. Autonomy plays a fundamental role, since the workers must be able to develop a clear vision of how basic exploitation is to social domination and must be able to develop freely the need for equality and radical change which will appear as the only definitive solution to exploitation. There is no point in the exploited coming together if there is no possibility of fully developing the struggle against exploitation – a struggle to eliminate exploitative social relationships. The dominant classes may accept this coming together for the defence of labour rights, but they will not accept this struggle developing to the point that it eliminates the very need for this defence.

Autonomy is at the same time method and content. Method because it can generate autonomous class content – content because it is the constant product of the elaborations made by the workers themselves. It must be said that autonomy as a ba-

the exploited class alone and they are the only ones who can react to it. This is also demonstrated by the facts. For this reason, we do not act because there is the opportunity to do so, because it is better for the workers to defend themselves from exploitation, because this position also includes the possibility that it is the workers who struggle and who decide. Our analysis forces us to say that the exploited are the only ones who can fight against exploitation. We must also deduce that the exploited class is unique. Either you are exploited or you are not. Anyone who is not exploited can only express solidarity.

Material Attacks Against Exploitation

The material attack on exploitation falls first and foremost on the analysis made in the previous section. Certain important considerations then need to be made. For anarchist communists the only process through which the proletariat weakens and destroys the mechanisms of class society takes place in the places where the exploiting is done. The actions which can blunt the weapons of exploitation and the structure which supports it can only take place on the terrain of alienation caused by work and the creation of surplus value. The only organizations which can bring about this attack are the mass organizations. And there is also another factor which gives consistency to what has been said thus far: if the attack on exploitation is carried out by the exploited class itself, this provides a strong guarantee of a parallel growth in their consciousness given that once they have understood the need to attack, they will have a solid base on which to develop a new level of revolutionary consciousness.

In order to be able to decide from what and how we should defend ourselves, it is essential to:

- be subject to the very things we are defending ourselves from,
- be aware of and understand the ways in which these things create alienation,
- choose along the way the most important lines of defence,
- know directly what absolutely must be obtained and what can be renounced,
- really know our enemy, his weapons, his strength and his weaknesses, and
- know our own strength and be willing to use it.

These requisites are only held by members of the exploited class. They are the only ones who can develop them and use them correctly. Nobody can know what alienation is unless they experience it. Merely knowing about alienation from a distance means nothing. Alienation cannot exist if the person does not have to live with it and react to it (either positively or negatively, mentally or physically) and therefore contribute to its determination.

Those who only perceive the social alienation of the exploited class can only have an attitude of solidarity towards them (much as it may be useful and sincere), but can never substitute themselves for the proletariat in their alienation, nor decide how best to defend oneself from it.

Even when the struggle becomes political, there is no mechanism by which alienation can be felt by non-workers — the struggle is politicized only by reason of the quality of the struggle against alienation. Therefore, alienation is the concern of

sis is necessary for the revolutionary development of the mass organizations, for the abolition of exploitation and the construction of egalitarian social relationships. Many comrades and organizations have tried to define the autonomy of mass organizations in terms of pure method or pure content. In so doing, where the former is concerned, this cannot explain the reason why the methods of autonomy are necessary and fundamental for the revolution in the mass struggle, and those who forget this often reduce this concept to the level of pure extremism. In the second case, on the other hand, the problem of consistency between means and ends is ignored and we end up with the instrumentalization of mass struggle by authoritarian programmes, thereby stopping the autonomous actions of the workers from building the autonomous programme of the workers. And this is the principal aim, from an anarchist communist point of view. Autonomy is not a content which is linked to certain specific objectives, it is the historical significance of the workers' revolutionary action. The significance of the autonomy of mass organizations is that the masses can learn to build a revolutionary programme only if they have complete freedom to put the objectives of struggle into action, to choose and evaluate them for themselves and without imposition from outside forces. In a system of social domination, this freedom means that the only obstacles to the masses' action must appear and be affronted by the masses themselves as conflictual factors, as arms of the class enemy, as products of class society. It is extremely dangerous for the idea to take root that there is someone who knows more than the others, who can force the struggle to be abandoned or be guided in a certain way, giving reasons which the large majority of the masses cannot understand. This path introduces the supremacy of "objective" compatibility which needs to be respected, not because there is not the required will or clarity to destroy it, but for abstruse and contorted reasons. It must always be clear that the road to social emancipation is scattered with obstacles and not

sophisms, and that we either remove these obstacles or they will stop us.

Along this path of autonomy, autonomous programmes can be born. Consequently, mass organizations must have the capacity to form their own objectives and the necessary methods of struggle by basing themselves on needs and on the consciousness of their natural members. Furthermore, they need to be able to evaluate any action by basing themselves on the same criteria.

Historically speaking, when the principal ideas of anarchist communism were formed, it was because there were mass organizations with these possibilities of action. Action which, in turn, can make the proletariat conscious of being the only class which can carry within it the seeds of social revolution.

Autonomy is therefore a factor in the freedom of the masses and, as such, does not provide the necessary guarantee that it will remain so or that it will lead to the social revolution. Freedom knows no external impositions. The exercise of autonomy in mass organizations has no infallible external guardians. Therefore, in the same measure in which autonomy can open up the road to social revolution, it frees itself of any inescapable revolutionary fate. For anarchist communists there can be no alternative to this. Just as the reformists must not impose bourgeois compatibilities on the mass organizations, neither must revolutionaries wish to or be able to impose their revolutionary programmes. But we have an advantage over the counter-revolutionaries: the development and exercise of the autonomy of the mass organizations has always shown itself to be a formidable revolutionary factor. We do not fear it, we support it.

The Functions of Mass Organizations

We anarchist communists consider mass organizations on a much wider and more complex level than the forces of inter-classism and social democracy. We accept four fundamental historical functions for mass organizations, based on autonomy:

1. defence and sustenance within class society;
2. material attacks against exploitation;
3. the building of an alternative management of society;
4. the development of libertarian revolutionary consciousness.

Defence and Sustenance Within Class Society

The foremost need of the exploited is to defend themselves from the exploitation which progressively eats away their living spaces and tries to tie them tighter and in ever more refined ways to the economic needs of the dominating class. The correct development of the mass organization is based on this first function of labour defence. From a strictly economic point of view, it is a matter of blocking and refuting the material arms which the dominant class uses against the workers. The basis on which one or more exploited workers set out on the road to social struggle can only be the defence of the growing alienation caused by exploitation. On the other hand, as long as one class holds power, the mass organizations must be in a position to successfully defend labour in order to ensure that the working class is not bowed by a material attack at the moment in which the class struggle becomes more political. We can truly say then, that within class society labour defence is the basis on which the mass organizations are founded. It is at this stage that the need for autonomy is most clearly seen.