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Tendency Groups

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This text was written as a contribution to discussions that took place in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) between 2009 and 2010, aiming at forming tendency groups. Then, it was used in other debates and initiatives of the kind, as in the case of the Popular Resistance [Resistência Popular], which has a presence in several regions of the country.

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Contents

Strategy	5
Social force	6
The tendency group	8
A methodological and programmatic proposal	9
On the role of tendency groups	12

On the role of tendency groups

We know that our proposals are different from those of many other sectors of the left that work with popular movements. Therefore, tendency organization is of utmost importance to promote methodological and programmatic objectives, give strength to our proposals, and to permanently add militants of popular movements who are in agreement with us and are willing to do social work.

The tendency organization is like a group of popular sectors, with certain affinities, that acts within struggles to increase the possibilities of promoting what we believe, standing in the way of getting run roughshod over, expulsions, boycotts, isolation, etc., which are quite common. Tendency groups increase the ability to promote our ideas and influence and are decisive.

ber that the notion of tendency groups originates from the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU), which, during the 1960s, conformed the so-called Combative Tendency [Tendencia Combativa] at the National Convention of Workers (CNT), the union's central of the country. In that case, understanding that the main dispute at that moment occurred between a reformist sector, headed by the Communist Party of Uruguay (PCU), and a revolutionary sector, in which the FAU militants participated, they decided to conform the tendency, uniting mainly the revolutionary sector of the central, in order to strengthen this perspective in relation to the PCU. In other words, the principles of tendency group, when it needs to be created, must adapt to the concrete movements and struggles in which it is intended to intervene.

Fortunately, we are at a stage where we can and should experiment with different forms of organization, with patience and generosity, but with persistence in critical thinking. The forms of organization should help facilitate the implementation of the main objectives. Immediate action must be deeply tied to what you want in the future.

Gilmar Mauro

Strategy

Before moving on to the topic of tendency groups, it's important to start with our transformation strategy. It is based on three fundamental premises:

1. Capitalism is a society of classes and therefore class struggle is one of its central aspects.
2. Mobilizations of the most diverse sectors of the exploited, dominated and oppressed, that is, popular mass struggles, are essential, since need, will and organization expose the contradictions of the class system.
3. Transformation of this society must be based on the leadership of these movements, that is, the leadership of organized people, while according to other approaches transformation is the work of the vanguard party or the action of minorities separated from the base (as in the insurrectionary case of "propaganda by the deed" or *foquismo*, for example).

Therefore, we intend to carry out this transformation through popular movements. When these movements do not exist, our goal is to organize them; where there are movements, we encourage and promote from within them a

particular methodological and programmatic vision. Finally, we foster alliances between movements, the integration of their struggles and the growth of their social force. Only a significant build up of strength is capable of applying the violence necessary for a revolutionary transformation.

Permanently accumulating social force, organizing, mobilizing and fighting, here and now, learning and teaching, building the new society within this one — this constant construction should aim at final objectives: a revolutionary process and the construction of a new society based in equality and freedom. When we begin to implement this process, some say we are building *popular organization* and others *popular power*.

Social force

Based on this strategy, we can ask ourselves: what is the function of a tendency group? If we want a transformation made by popular movements, wouldn't that mean simply create and participate in these movements?

It follows that we cannot ignore the question of social force. In order for a transformation that points toward the end of exploitation and domination to occur we need very strong popular movements, within which the seed of the society of the future develops, as was the case with Brazilian revolutionary syndicalism of the early twentieth century. We know that most of the popular sectors are not organized, and therefore cannot achieve the objectives that must be achieved. On the other hand, the sectors currently organized in movements do not serve, in most cases, to promote collective interests and effect a transformation of society as expected. Movements are used for the benefit of bureaucrats, to provide resources and votes to a certain political party and even to promote it, and to orient people towards authoritarian power proposals, with lead-

played by all the exploited, dominated and oppressed sectors.

4. Advocating *autonomy* or *class independence*, decoupling the struggle from the State, political parties, bureaucratized unions and others who want to use movements for their own ends. Movements should not be the transmission belts of individuals, groups or organizations.
5. Advocating *direct democracy* or *grassroots democracy*, giving power to everyone, encouraging equal participation without hierarchies and collective decision-making in assemblies. *Self-management* of struggles must be promoted and organized according to federalism, which provides organization and coherence to struggles and at the same time respects their autonomy.
6. Finally, *permanent increase of social force* in the process of class struggle, so that popular movements carry out a dual struggle: to *guarantee the conquests* that improve the situation of the popular classes, and for a long-term revolutionary transformation; that is, the *construction of a permanent organization and popular power*.¹

¹ I believe it is important to highlight two aspects, taking into account the different interpretations that this text has received since it was published. First, that the construction or not of a tendency group, for anarchists who defend organizational dualism, is not a matter of principle. Distinctly, it is a matter of strategy and tactics. In other words, whether a tendency group should be created or not has to do with whether or not it will facilitate and enhance work in popular movements. Second, that the methodological and programmatic proposal presented here reflects resolutions embodied in concrete tendency groups in Brazil, namely, the Popular Resistance of São Paulo (1999–2007), the Popular Organization Aymberê [Organização Popular Aymberê] (2009–2012) and other Popular Resistances created latter in the state of São Paulo. In these cases, it was decided to give this libertarian aspect (in a broad sense, not specifically anarchist), expressed in the mentioned methodological and programmatic elements. However, not all tendencies that were or are driven by anarchists had or have these same principles. Let us remem-

the path to get there has to be the right one, because a bad path will lead us to a different destination. For this reason, we believe that we must ensure that the means lead to the desired end, that the means we choose (the tactics and strategies) are those that allow us to achieve the goals. The tactic is subject to strategy and both are subject to strategic goals. We do not believe in the maxim that the end justifies the means, since it is the means we choose that will determine the extent of our achievements. A programmatic vision must be built collectively, from an analysis of the present. Final objectives are the broad path for transformation, and this programmatic line should be defended within mass organizations by supporters of the tendency.

Regarding methodology, we can say that when we create or participate in movements, we promote a way of functioning, certain characteristics, a militant style of work that, in fact, are means to achieve desired ends. But what, in general, is this methodology?

1. Advocating the *force* of movements, which should not be “ideologized”, that is, cannot be reserved exclusively for militants of a certain particular ideology. Anyone who is willing to struggle should be included, utilizing need as a criteria.
2. Advocating *direct action*, which means doing politics for ourselves, carrying out our actions against domination and exploitation and leading our own struggles, without depending on politicians, representatives or someone who speaks on our behalf.
3. Advocating *solidarity* between the exploited classes in struggle, without one sector or group prevailing. It is important to foster a class perspective that assumes the class struggle and the need for a revolutionary role

ers separated from the base, which means, among many others things, problems for the implementation of our project.

In this sense, there are two fundamental problems: the disorganization of the most popular sectors and, within the organized sectors, the promotion of forms of organization and programs that do not lead to a proposal for liberating transformation.

Therefore, we could say that we have to deal with two types of spaces that are in constant contestation. On the one hand, a broad social space of workers (permanent, temporary, unemployed), residents of peripheral neighborhoods and other popular sectors that are not organized and do not mobilize for a variety of reasons. And, on the other hand, a more restricted social space, with the most diverse organized movements, such as unions, neighborhood associations, the homeless, the landless, the unemployed, etc. To act in these spaces, which are contested—as is the rule in any space, because there is no “power vacuum” in any social relationship, since there is always some conflict of interest—we need a social force.

The idea of social force is that we all have a certain capacity for action, but if it is not exercised it means nothing. Thus, potentially, the force of the people is greater than the force of the ruling class, but since it is not fully implemented, the rulers cannot be defeated. We need to put into practice our ability to act, transforming our potential force into a real social force.

In this process, organization is an indispensable tool. Organization offers an “account” in which $1 + 1$ is more than 2. For example: if we have to carry a large box of 200 kilos, four people at a time can carry it, but if each try to load it separately, one after the other, they won’t succeed. Thus, when the four people are together their strength is greater than the sum of each of them separately. Another example: if we organize a protest we can go together or one by one. How will we become a greater force? Clearly if we are all together.

The bottom line, then, is that we must organize and participate in popular movements, always promoting certain methodological and programmatic criteria. The more organized we are, the greater our social force will be and therefore it will be easier to succeed in reaching our goals.

Having social force does not mean imposing anything on others in an authoritarian way, but to defend our positions, our opinions, our methodology, our program and, ultimately, be able to influence popular movements and not be used by other sectors or even isolated or eliminated.

The tendency group

That said, we now come to an explanation of what a tendency group is. The tendency group is an organization that could be called political and social, that is, an organization that brings together popular sectors that share an affinity around methodological and programmatic questions, but not necessarily an affinity with a certain ideology (Marxism, anarchism, autonomism, etc.). The tendency group, therefore, is neither a political organization (party) or a mass organization (popular movement), but is situated in an area that could be called intermediate between the political and the social.

The tendency group brings together activists who work in one or more movements or sectors of the population and aims to promote within the movements in which it operates a specific method and program, as well as the creation and organization of these social movements in the different unorganized sectors of the population.

In addition, the tendency group provides a space of interaction for militants who share similar points of view, and also serves to increase their social impact and influence in popular circles, and thus prevent other people or groups with contrary

ideas from asserting their points of view or use other militants to achieve their own goals.

The tendency group provides operational coherence to work with clear and well-defined objectives and is the “face” of militancy in the day-to-day of social movement work. Instead of aspiring to be the vanguard of the movement, it has the function of acting as a ferment and motor; it must encourage popular movements, ensuring that they have the capacity to promote their own struggles, for demands (in the short term) and for transformation (in the long term). Militants of the tendency group are part of the people and promote popular leadership, that is, the goal of building a strong people.

The tendency group operates, as we have said, from a specific methodological and programmatic proposal. But what does this “methodological and programmatic proposal” that we have mentioned several times consist of?

A methodological and programmatic proposal

In our militant work, when we are engaging in social movement activity, we say that we promote a specific methodology and a specific program. But what methodology and what program?

Obviously, this is all a collective construction, but we already have some concepts to begin with. First of all, we know that we do not want a society of exploitation and domination, as occurs in capitalist society and all that entails. So, we know that we want to build a new society that is free and equal, where we can live without exploitation or domination. To carry out this radical transformation of society we have to create a strategy, which will be reflected in a program.

We understand that strategy is the path we choose for this transformation. It is not enough to have a defined destination: