Strategy and Tactics for a Revolutionary Anarchism

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I once wrote that anarchism suffered from a lack of strategic vision. Later, a reader recommended a short text on strategy and tactics based on the context of Chile in the 70s from a Marxist-Leninist perspective. And because it seemed interesting to me (not because it was marxist or Chilean, but because of the concepts developed within it), I decided to adapt it for anarchism today.

A Small Clarification

Why a revolutionary anarchism if anarchism is already revolutionary? The answer to this question has its origins in the atomization that anarchism has suffered from up to this day, in which tendencies emerged that rejected everything that was or smelled of socio-political intervention, libertarian socialism as a final goal or other issues, making anarchism a radical parody of self-complacency and ideological consumption, a hobby and an individual or gang lifestyle. These liberal conceptions of anarchism are what lead to currents incapable of—or directly rejecting—producing conjunctural analysis, strategic vision, programs, roadmaps, proposals, social insertion, creating structures for social struggle and building an anarchist political tendency with a mass-oriented project through the strategy of popular power that points toward libertarian socialism, since it does not start from anarchism as a political path toward socialism, but from anarchism as a way of living. It is for this reason that the title carries the qualifier revolutionary, because we argue that anarchism is a politics of revolutionary transformation and not radical liberalism.

This adaptation aims to lay the foundation to develop the tools necessary for giving rise to a revolutionary anarchism without having to add a qualifier. To do this, we will discuss questions about class struggle, strategy, correlation of forces, the program and more.

Introduction

We begin with class society, which results from a structural social inequality in the capitalist system, where the ruling class is the owner of the means of production, the resources of the land and capital on the one hand (the ruling class, the bourgeoisie) and, on the other, dispossessed majorities that sell their labor power to the capitalists to obtain a wage (the working classes).

The existence of exploited and exploiters will bring about a conflict: the class struggle, in which each social class fights for its objective class interests. This struggle is fought unevenly, where the bourgeoisie is the one that has an advantage and intends to perpetuate itself in control, while the working classes remain disjointed and the vast majority carry on without having a sense of socialism or class emancipation.

Nevertheless, around the world there are still class-based organizations that fight to defend wages, jobs, collective bargaining, contracts, dignified conditions at work, job security, etc. These demands generally favor the working class. However, these demands, although fair and necessary in that through struggle the working class learns to defend its interests, do not reach the point of being revolutionary since they lack a revolutionary backbone that points toward the seizure and socialization of the means of production, the land and the instruments of work—in short, toward socialism. In other words, these struggles are not enough to achieve class emancipation, because that will only come with socialism as a goal.

The revolutionary left, and with it anarchism, assumes that the class struggle is a protracted war with many open fronts, not only in the workplace, and that, like every war, to achieve the final victory, it is necessary to equip ourselves with tools that allow us to materialize our libertarian socialist political project. Neither time nor reason nor any abstraction will inevitably lead us to socialism. It is the working class that will have to materialize it by surpassing the current system of capitalist exploitation, since the ruling class will logically not give up its privileged position and will utilize all the structures and means necessary to stay in power. If we want to implement libertarian socialism, we have to start by building counterpower that challenges the dominance of the ruling class and directly confronts the status quo to overthrow them.

Therefore, these theses lead us to other approaches about the structures we need (a revolutionary party, an organization of cadres, unions, neighborhood assemblies …?), about the immediate objectives to be determined (housing, work, public services, territories …), how to increase popular forces, their real power and the creation of counterpowers, how we will spread our messages and struggles to increase these forces and consolidate ourselves as a political alternative and movement. All this we will develop throughout the text.

Strategy and Tactics

Strategy is a series of methods of planning, organization and execution of various tactical operations to achieve a concrete objective. As we said in the introduction, class struggle is understood as a prolonged war and as such, to win a war it is necessary to develop and implement strategic plans that start from a conjunctural analysis, that is, tools of analysis that allow us to understand the material and social reality that surrounds us, taking into account the following factors (We will accompany the theoretical explanations with a case study written in italics):

- The scenario in which the battles will take place. It is the physical space where the class struggle and its temporary manifestations will take place (fronts: labor, territorial, public services, etc.)

- The real strength and weaknesses the enemy possesses.

- The real strength and weaknesses we possess.

  In a subway company, the management wants to restructure the workforce by putting forward a package of downgrades that touch salaries, working hours, shifts and breaks. The staff is dissatisfied with management's decision and a labor dispute begins. Suppose a priori the company can apply it without problems. On the workers side, most of the workforce is not unionized, and the representation of the only combative union that exists is low compared to the mainstream union, which tends more toward dialogue than confrontation.

We will call the balance of forces on both sides a correlation of forces, which can be in favor of the enemy when their forces are superior to ours, or they can be favorable to our class when the opposite happens. At the current juncture, the correlation of forces is clearly favorable to the capitalist class. Therefore, through strategy we intend to reverse this situation, trying to tip the balance of the correlation of forces in our favor.

As we can see, the initial situation is based on an inequality in the correlation of forces in which the balance leans in favor of the employer. However, the climate within the workforce is marked by outrage and therefore, an opportunity was opened for that outrage to be articulated in an organized response capable of tipping the scales. This is where the strategic question arises to change that correlation of forces.

Tactics are each of the movements that are carried out within a strategic framework to achieve positions of intermediate advantage that bring us closer to a partial or final strategic objective. The difference between a partial and a final objective is that in the first instance, they try to gain a key position and change part of the correlation of forces or secure a better position to change it; while in the second, the final defeat of the enemy is the intention.

In the context of a dynamic situation, strategic plans must always be adapted to the changes that occur, and therefore, it is essential to assess and evaluate, in cycles of change, the achievement or not of strategic objectives set out above and adapt the road maps and strategic lines appropriate to each circumstance. These processes for determining which strategies to implement will come from experiences in the course of struggles, where we will learn from mistakes and successes.

While the mainstream unions called for calm and for a seat at the negotiating table, the staff criticized the moderate position that only suggested that the package of policies were not so aggressive for these unions, which also creates an atmosphere of distrust towards them, both among the unorganized and the bases of those unions. The position of the combative union is to call an indefinite strike that ends up being approved in an assembly of workers where the majority of the workforce participated. Once the strike has begun, we can see the movements of each side.

The ultimate goal of the company is to defeat the strike and apply its policies. For this purpose, it will resort to various strikebreaking tactics: divide the workforce and generate a climate of disunity, use the yellow unions so that they convince the Strikers to call off the strike, decree abusive minimum services, promote scabbing or generate a negative opinion towards the strikers through the media.

The final objective (we can say immediate) for the workforce is that, since downgrade is unjustified, it must be withdrawn in its entirety. With the call for a strike, the workforce has already gained strength and thus will be able to move further towards its victory. But for this, they will have to use tactics that not only neutralize the bosses' attacks, but allow them to win and impose their demands. Tactics such as offering free service for the duration of the strike and converging with the demands of the subway users, would win over the sympathies of the population and at the same time could be a measure against the minimum abusive services, seek media coverage and support, cross the sectoral border converging with other social movements, create a list of demands and force negotiating positions according to the list...

We can see these types of strategies in the military:

1. The strategy of direct confrontation consists of using all available forces and throwing them against the enemy on all fronts. This strategy is correct when your real strength is much greater than that of the enemy.

2. The strategy of enclosure consists of attacking the flanks until the enemy is surrounded, isolating it and preventing it from communicating with the outside to receive reinforcements. This option, together with the following, is used when the correlation of forces is more or less balanced or unfavorable.

3. The strategy of division consists of attacking a weak point and advancing through it until the enemy is divided so that communications are cut between the enemy territories.
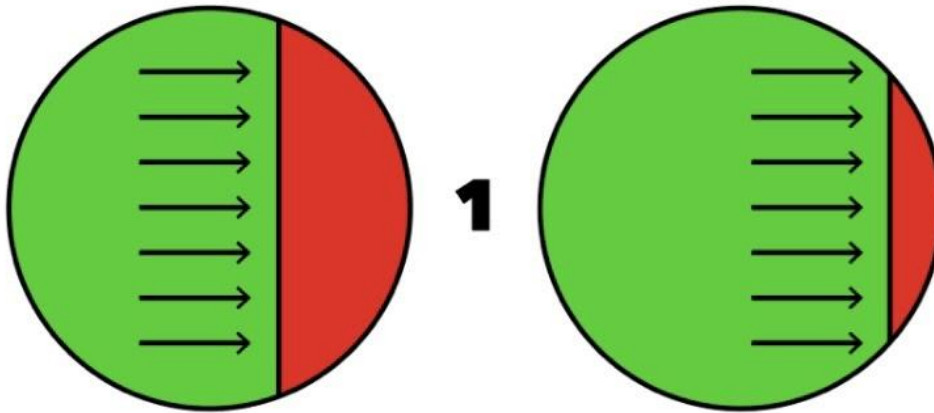
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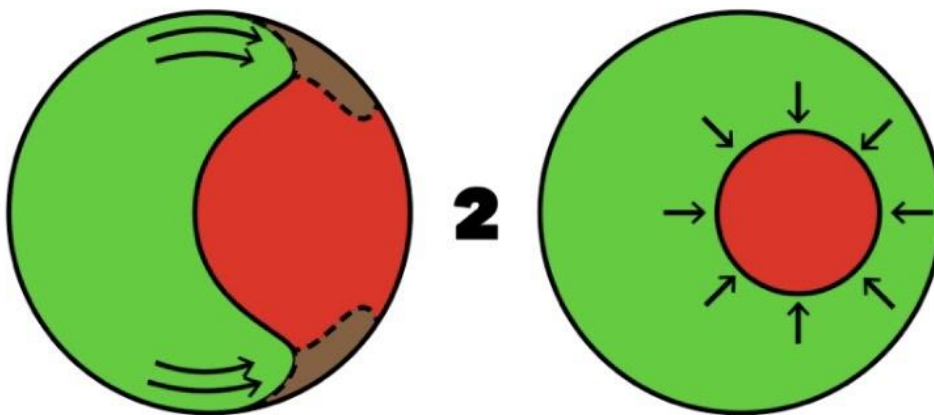
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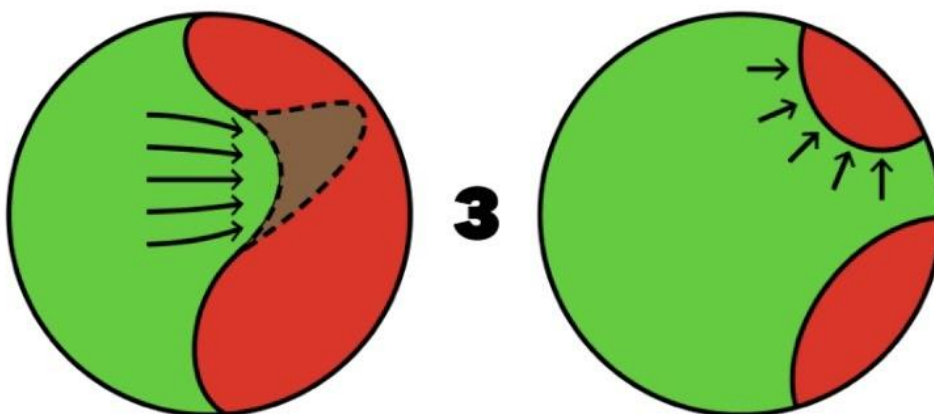
3. THE STRATEGY OF DIVIDING THE ENEMY

The purpose of strategy is to increase our forces in order to turn a situation of unfavorable correlation of forces into a favorable one that allows us to achieve the final victory: the defeat of capitalism and the triumph of libertarian socialism. A good strategy is one that, based on a conjunctural analysis, is capable of generating methods of action that allow the real advance of our forces to the detriment of those of the enemy. A strategy is wrong when it stems from an erroneous analysis or leaves out the correlation of forces and this could make for a waste of time and lead us to hard defeats. Thus, for example, the current insurrectionist trend is using the direct confrontation strategy without having a real force superior to that of the enemy, which is leading them to a lost war from the outset, wrapped up in cycles of repression.

Correlation of Forces

The correlation of forces is another important factor in the development of strategies. To do this, we must first understand the smallest parts — that is, force itself — which we will distinguish in two:

1. **Real force.** It is the real material capacity of a movement, a social class or a political force. In other words, they would be the forces that exist at any given time.

2. **Potential or possible force.** It is the one that can be achieved if the appropriate strategies are adopted, that is, a social sector that at a certain moment is still outside the movement or political force but that has the possibility of being part of the real force and increasing its effective base.

In the same way, we can talk about the real correlation of forces as the situation of our real forces in the immediate scenario, and the possible correlation of forces as that which is expected depending on the strategies implemented by the forces present on the stage.

Through strategy, the expectation is that potential or possible force becomes a real force, resulting in a change in the correlation of forces. Taking the previous practical example, we could say that the outrage of the workforce and its disagreement or indifference with respect to the downgrade would be the possible force used to materialize a real force. The real force at that time would be the combative union or the organized and mobilized sector of the workforce. However, in the correlation of forces at the time before the strike, it was unfavorable for the workers; this changes when the strike is called.

Discontent in itself is not able to stop the cuts; it's necessary to organize it and mobilize it around a series of demands, not only to reject the bosses' attacks but also to demand measures that benefit the workforce, to reach better negotiating positions or so negotiations are carried out within the field and the rhythms determined by the workforce, not management.

When the organized and mobilized sector of the workforce is able to read the situation and put on the table tools (strike committee) that allow for organizing a real response by winning over the sector that is not well positioned or not outraged, ensuring that everyone works together to carry out the strike and adhere to a set of demands from the strike committee, that possible force will have become a real force. It will be then when there will be possibilities to change the balance of the correlation of forces.

Offensive and Defensive

When the balance of the correlation of forces leans in favor of the ruling classes, proposing a direct offensive would be suicidal for any revolutionary tendency. In this situation, it would be better to resort to a defensive posture and one of resistance rather than surrender, since that would be giving into our final defeat. Thus, through resistance we buy time in order to articulate the necessary projects with which to change the correlation of forces and go on the offensive. A constant defensive position sooner or later will overcome the resistance after fatigue sets in from trying to stop enemy offensives, which ultimately ends with the final defeat, or at best, works through inertia.

Continuing with the scenario of the labor struggle in the subway, we could put it this way:

1. If through the combative union the workers moved directly into picketing and a list of demands, they would possibly end in defeat. In this case, it would be going on the offensive with an unfavorable correlation of forces. It would be easy for the bosses to discredit them and pit the workforce against them.

2. The other way is to opt for a defensive position that helps them buy time and accumulate the necessary forces to take the conflict to another level, where the correlation of forces is more balanced. Encouraging the workforce to oppose the package of policies is a first step to finally put a stop to them. However, if they were only on the defensive, in the end the cuts would be applied through the exhaustion of the workers if they are not organized or mobilized, in addition to the risk of co-optation by the collaborationist unions.

3. Seeing that rejection alone is not enough, based on the resistance they have created, they put on the table the need to launch the offensive through the organization and mobilization of the workforce. This is how the indefinite strike is carried out, a list of demands is established, aimed not only at stopping the cuts but also improving working conditions.

A great illustrative example of resistance can be seen in all the social movements that have emerged recently, organized around defensive demands, such as NO to cuts in public services, labor reforms, more restrictive laws, etc. Social movements, lacking a political orientation and a model from which to work from and oppose the neoliberal model, will tend to preserve and defend what already exists, so for example, public education is only proposed as a model when facing cuts in Education as is the case with Health.

As we can see today, the Citizen Tides[1] have virtually disappeared from the social scene. In general, we are facing the end of the mobilization cycle of 15M[2] after the movement hit a ceiling in 2013, subsequently declining, although some movements such as the PAH[3] and neighborhood assemblies have been forged.

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[1] Citizen Tides or "mareas ciudadanas" emerged as a mass movement in Spain in response to the economic crisis in 2013, which tackled a broad range of issues, from public health to the environment. Initially composed of different strands focused on particular issues, the Citizen Tides later merged under a shared platform.

[2] 15M refers to the 15-M Movement, or the Indignados Movement, an anti-austerity movement in Spain that took over public squares in response to the economic crisis beginning on May 15, 2011.

[3] PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) is a grassroots organization in Spain that uses direct direct to fight evictions and organizes around housing rights.

When these social movements hit a ceiling, that was the time to continue encouraging them by providing them with a political orientation that proposed new models to work on, such as community management of the education system, Health and other public services, forge ties between different sectors in struggle, etc., and consolidate a political project on which to pivot all social struggles. Only from this point can we launch the offensive, framing these struggles within the strategy of popular power.

The Strategy of Popular Power

The strategy of popular power begins from the premise of accumulation of forces in favor of our class and of generating counterpowers that confront the dominant power and lead to control of all areas of social life, such as public services, the educational system, work, territorial management, etc., through neighborhood assemblies, student organizations, associations of fathers and mothers, labor unions and workers councils, cooperatives, political organizations, etc. Popular power is understood here as the material capacity of a people to realize its revolutionary demands through its own self-organization, which allows it to be articulated as a class, and as an independent and autonomous political force outside the institutions of the State. This popular power would be constituted as a political actor formed by a network of popular institutions, movements and political organizations.

In the case of the strike, the union would be the body to drive mobilizations around a list of demands. To this end, it calls an assembly of workers as an organ so that the workforce participates in the decisions on how to carry out the labor dispute and determine the actions, tactics and strategies to be implemented in the course of the strike, in which they create a legitimate institution with social support to bring the demands of the staff to the negotiating table and mediate with the employers and labor authorities.

Within the framework of this strategy, the tactic of social insertion is used, which consists in participating in social movements and trying to get them to extract small victories in everyday struggles, giving them continuity and dynamism through the application of tactics, strategies, road maps and programs developed from political organizations, with the aim of creating a broad popular movement in which popular power institutions will be created, such as neighborhood assemblies, popular cultural and social centers, etc. if we're talking about the neighborhood sector; unions, workers' councils, etc. in the labor sector...on which the struggles would be articulated and acquire the legitimacy to implement the demands of the popular movements and the working class.

In order to carry out this strategy, it must be embodied in revolutionary political programs and have the necessary structures to bring these programs to the popular movements so that road maps are created and implemented.

The Program and the Cadre Organization

The program is a document that gathers the lines and tactical and strategic objectives to be reached and it varies depending on which of those objectives and what strategies should be pursued. In other words, why do we need political programs? To mark objectives and actions for implementation in the revolutionary process following a strategy, creating the necessary

structures to carry out tasks and have a clear direction, in the sense of having an orientation, a "North" to build a revolutionary political project and articulate the pivotal struggles of that project. We can distinguish two types:

- **Minimum programs.** That is the program which gathers the objectives to be reached in the immediate moment and medium term, preparing the way toward socialism by strengthening the real power of popular movements to have an impact on the most immediate problems for the working class such as housing, work, public services, territorial issues, etc. It could also be said that the minimal program would be a transitional program and that it is framed within the strategy of popular power as a path to reach socialism.

  It's worth adding that roadmaps and agendas make up part of the programmatic tasks. The former consist of lines of concrete action in a specific sphere in order to advance in the short term. The latter, are schedules of actions to take and are not only mobilizations, but also meetings, assemblies, the building of structures, establishing agreements, etc.

- **Maximum programs**. The purpose-driven program where we express the political project or new model for the society that we want: socialism. And the political path we opt for: anarchism. Here are gathered the measures to take once capitalism is defeated, such as the socialization of the means of production and, consequently, the reorganization of the productive model in general, urban reorganization, the organization, management and administration of resources and territory... and all questions that must be dealt with to get the new model for society underway. This program is related to the previous one inasmuch as it is the frame upon which the minimal programs are created and adapted to a given situation, and it is these programs that establish the final objective, preventing the minimal programs from ending up without any political direction. The relationship between them is essential in order to advance the revolutionary process, the minimal program being part of these.

It is important to distinguish between these types of programs since, while the maximum program does not vary much and is not applicable in the short or medium term (in the long term will depend on the trajectory of the revolutionary political forces); the minimum program will necessarily go through modifications since it will have to be updated to the changes in situation, whether for factors external to the movement (capitalist crises, changes in government and laws, changes in the cycles of social movements...), or for internal factors (organization of counterpowers in the neighborhoods, multisectorality in social movements, growth and radicalization of the labor movement, etc).

Nevertheless, there is a different view in terms of the programmatic question, which only considers the maximum program without the necessity of making a minimal program. In its stead, the roadmaps would be the elaboration of goals, tactics and strategies based on the maximal program, adapted to a given situation and linked to the reality in which such roadmaps are created.

In current anarchism, at least on the level of the Spanish State, some collectives and affinity groups have goals that are similar to maximum programs whose points of unity include the abolition of Capitalism and the State, generalized self-management, collectivization, the free federation of territories, etc. But lacking strategies, minimal programs and roadmaps that permit

them to advance within the immediate situation toward the ultimate goal, those affinity groups aren't capable of making any material changes, nor of serving as a political reference for popular movements, since the program is not adapted to the immediate social reality, but to a distant goal and incapable of materializing given the current correlation of forces. Therefore, it is essential to have a minimal program if we really want to effect change. On the other hand, it would also not be viable to take on the minimal program as the only one since the necessary revolutionary direction to get to Socialism would be lost.

The programs would be carried out among the popular movements in harmony with the cadre organization, that is to say, an organization formed by militants with training in different disciplines of the social sciences (politics, economics, history…), with experiences in social struggles and leadership capacity both within the organization and in the struggles in which they are involved, who are organized into an internally cohesive entity, voluntary discipline and some shared strategic and political lines. The role of this type of organization will be, in addition to programmatic tasks, creating conjunctural analysis, develop and implement strategic plans, have links and insertion with the popular movement, bring roadmaps based on minimal programs to the social struggles, etc.

The Communications Strategy

Our political option is framed within a mass oriented project, that is that we should count on the social majorities to build popular power. For that, in our current information society, we need to elaborate an adequate communications strategy to have as much dissemination and impact as possible.

A successful communications strategy would be able to distinguish the different sectors of the public we address, and also be able to adapt slogans to audiences in any given situation without falling into abstractions. Simply put, by speaking openly about Anarchism to the rest of the population, we'll only scare them away. For example, if we speak to the public or to the social movements with the same terms that we use within our milieu, many things could be misinterpreted or simply not understood. And if we make a speech ahead of or behind the current times, or simply not in touch with reality and therefore full of rhetoric, we would fall into abstractions.

> *Within the combative union, they have as a clear objective the socialization of the means of production and worker control of enterprise. However, they know that if they use these words to try to mobilize the rest of the workforce, it would end up as nothing but pretty rhetoric without laying out real issues, proposals and roadmaps that enable the mobilization and organization of the workforce to reach the most immediate objectives, which are to stop the cuts and improve existing conditions.*
>
> *To that end, instead of charging directly against the other unions, it critiques what their upper leadership does and tries to approach their rank and file in the same way as the rest of the non-union workforce. The method of dissemination in the workplace of creating open assemblies with an agenda that includes preparing and organizing a strike, in this case, would be a wise choice.*

An example of why we should utilize different discursive levels is seen in the purely scientific and accessible scientific language; while the former is expressly technical and only understood

by scientists, the second is a language adapted to be understandable by the majority of the population. Both discursive elements transmit the same theses, but vary only by the language used. In this sense and as an example, to refer to our political project internally we could speak of Social Anarchism, Communism and/or Libertarian Socialism; when speaking to social movements as popular power; and for the public, as political and economic democracy.

> *The strikers realized that media silence could be one of the keys to their defeat, since they run the risk of falling into isolation and the criminalization of the labor conflict putting public opinion against the workers. Thus, they have to play the media field by bringing the conflict out of the workplace: to the streets, to the neighborhoods, to join with other social movements and labor conflicts, to hold press conferences, to generate audiovisual content and use speech that is familiar, sincere and realistic, that dovetails with the demands of transit riders to generate mutual understanding and awaken popular and class solidarity.*

In addition to the level of discourse, it would also be necessary to place goals on the table such as an aesthetic renovation, having our own professional media to achieve more constant media coverage of our movements, organizations, political proposals, actions and any social issues linked to our project, create an easily recognizable public image for our movement, a movement with its own identity as well as a presence in mainstream media. All of that would make up a communications strategy, keeping in mind that the media needs to be backed by a real popular movement.

In Short

The strategic vision is a look at reality from the point of view of social transformation, one coming from the same reality and the dynamics within it, overcoming ideological bias, stagnation and defeatist attitudes. A lack of strategic vision keeps us from building a revolutionary movement. A strategy is necessary because we take on the class struggle as a protracted war where we position ourselves in favor of the working class, seeking the victory of our class over the current dominant class: the capitalist and proprietarian class. To carry out our strategic objectives, first we need to articulate ourselves politically, build a new model of Libertarian movement and consolidate a socialist political project, to begin elaborating common plans of action and a program to put together the new societal model that we want: Socialism, from which we can carry out minimal programs or roadmaps with the goal of advancing in the current conjuncture. In these roadmaps, we will address the social problems that the working class currently experiences, solving them through the strategy of popular power and the tactic of social insertion. While we consolidate this new tendency, it is essential to have a good communications strategy.

This adaptation, updated as time goes on, seeks to be a small contribution to the necessary changes that would consolidate a revolutionary Anarchism with the capacity to intervene socially and politically on the scene. There is much work ahead to be done and a long road to walk. This is only the beginning of a project that is being built little by little and whose fruit we hope to see in the coming years. First, then, we must start identifying the errors we come across so as to learn from them and fix them; changes in militant culture, building a new movement model, organizational structuring, coordination and insertion in the fronts, the creation of common plans

of action for the entire Libertarian movement, the consolidation of a political project and a revolutionary program, the recovery of communal values and a popular culture based on solidarity and social struggle, grounding ourselves in the reality we face to start socializing our tactics and strategies, inserting ourselves in social movements within the frame of the strategy of popular power, creating from it broad popular movements with their own institutions as counterpowers, and a long ongoing list of tasks that will emerge in the course of our activity.

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