Concentric Circles

The *Especifsta* Concept of Concentric Circles in Anarchist Organisation

FARJ

Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro - FARJ

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elements were present in the classless societies of yesterday, and continue, in those of today, not because they represent the result of economic contradictions, but to express, in the fullest form, the desire for freedom common to all individuals and communities throughout time. For this anarchism served, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as an important inspiration for the struggle against the bourgeoisie in the same way as it should determine the ethical standards of the future anarchic society.

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9. Mutual Aid

We propose to achieve active solidarity in struggle, fraternising with all comrades truly working for a more just and egalitarian world. Thus, we consider that mutual aid is a logical and direct consequence of the set of principles of anarchism, since we can only implement them through effective solidarity between the exploited and oppressed.

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Our conception is that anarchism, as social thought, does not allow the separating of theory and practice, ends from means and action from transformation; it does not allow for rigid frameworks wishing to establish, for the attitudes of militants, an abstract model that determines their principles and strategies. Anarchism, by being anti-dogmatic and establishing freedom as its primary concern, seeks in the evident contradictions of the capitalist system its field of action. Therefore, it is within the class struggle that the anarchists must be, while having a society of oppressed and oppressors, of bosses and workers, owners and dispossessed. However, as anarchists understand that the class struggle is a means and not an ends, they must be on the alert for certain interpretations of authoritarian meaning that conceive of history as the mere result of the struggle between classes. If there really is a factor that transforms history for libertarians, it can only be the result of the struggle continually engendered by revolutionaries against oppression and in search of solidarity. For anarchists, man isn't, in the new society, a simple result of historical materialism. Men are not forged by the hammer blows levelled by predetermined dialectics nor by some scheme that transcends them to concrete action.

Therefore, direct action is not only a means or methodology of combat, but the only way to materialise, in attitudes, the desire for individual and collective transformation. In this way the anarchists, who never sought a scientistic systematisation of their social thought, affirm that only through concrete actions can the radical process of transformation result.

Without masters or dogmas, libertarian militants proceed advocating social insertion in the most pressing issues of their lives. Such a relationship puts in the hands of the people and other organised groups the task of changing everything to please everyone. We think that anarchic

6. Direct Action

A method of action based on individual and collective protagonism. It is marked by horizontality and by a minimum of intermediation that, when necessary, does not result in the emergence of decision-making centres separated from those concerned.

Direct action is expressed in multiple variants and at all levels and expression, connecting the workers and oppressed to the centre of political action.

> *"Only direct action shakes thrones, threatens tyrannies, convolves worlds; it alone, principally, educates and strengthens the dispossessed people in their millennial struggle. Direct action is the revolution."*

- José Oiticica

7. Class struggle

We affirm our identity as workers. We fight for a classless society in which everyone can work and have the right to a dignified life. To achieve this objective, we consciously face a daily class struggle against the exploitative elites and the state. We believe that the end of class society will only be achieved with the emancipation of the oppressed in the process of the social revolution.

8. Political Practice and Social Insertion

We understand that, as workers, our intervention must be guided by our own social reality, based on the struggles that we face in our daily lives. However, considering that we anarchists believe that political action involves a greater commitment to social causes, we must always seek to relate our own militant practice to the diverse manifestations of popular struggles. Therefore, we believe that any expressions in this direction in the social, cultural, peasant, trade union, student, community, ecological etc. camps – as long as inserted in the context of the struggles for freedom – contemplate our political practice of social insertion.

The specific anarchist organisation uses, both for its internal and external functioning, the logic of what we call "concentric circles" - strongly inspired by the Bakuninist organisational model. The main reason that we adopt this logic of functioning is because, for us, the anarchist organisation needs to preserve different instances of action. These different instances should strengthen its work while at the same time allowing it to bring together prepared militants with a high level of commitment and approximating people sympathetic to the theory or practice of the organisation - who could be more or less prepared and more or less committed. In short, the concentric circles seek to resolve an important paradox: the anarchist organisation needs to be closed enough to have prepared, committed and politically aligned militants, and open enough to draw in new militants.

A large part of the problems that occur in anarchist organisation's are caused by them not functioning according to the logic of concentric circles and by not implementing these two instances of action. Should a person who says they are an anarchist and is interested in the work of the organisation be in the organisation, despite not knowing the political line in depth? Should a laymen interested in anarchist ideas be in the organisation? How do you relate to "libertarians" - in the broadest sense of the term - who do not consider themselves anarchists? Should they be in the organisation? And the older members who have already done important work but now want to be close, but not to engage in the permanent activities of the organisation? And those that can only rarely dedicate time for activism? There are many questions. Other problems occur because there are doubts about the implementation of social work. Must the organisation present itself as an anarchist organisation in the social movements? In its social work can it form alliances with other individuals, groups and organisations that are not anarchist? In such a case, what are the common points to advocate? How do you carry out social work in a field with people from different ideologies and maintain an anarchist identity? How do you

ensure that anarchism does not lose its identity when in contact with social movements? On this point there are also many questions.

The concentric circles are intended to provide a clear place for each of the militants and sympathisers of the organization. In addition, they seek to facilitate and strengthen the social work of the anarchist organisation, and finally, establish a channel for the capture of new militants.

In practice, the logic of concentric circles is established as follows. Inside the specific anarchist organisation there are only anarchists that, to a greater or lesser extent, are able to elaborate, reproduce and apply the political line of the organisation internally, in the fronts and in public activity. Also, to a greater or lesser extent, militants should be able to assist in the elaboration of the strategic-tactical line of the organisation, as well as having full capacity to reproduce and apply it. Militants assume internal functions in the organisation - be they executive, deliberative or extraordinary - as well as external functions with regards to social work. The functions assumed by the militants within the organisation adhere to self-management and federalism, or to horizontal decisions where all the militants have the same power of voice and of vote and where, in specific cases, there is delegation with imperative mandates. The functions to be performed by the delegates must be very well defined so that they "cannot act on behalf of the association unless the members thereof have explicitly authorised them [to do so]; they should execute only what the members have decided and not dictate the way forward to the association" [Luigi Fabbri. "The Anarchist Organisation". In: *Italian Anarchist Communism*. p. 124]. Moreover, the functions should be rotated in order to empower everyone and avoid crystallised positions or functions.

The specific anarchist organisation could have only one circle of militants, all of them being in the same instance, or it could have more than one circle - the criteria being collectively defined. For example, this may be the time that a person has been in the organisation or their ability to elaborate the political or tactical-strategic lines. Thus, the newer militants or those with a lesser ability to elaborate the lines may be in a more external (distant) circle, with the more experienced militants with a greater ability for elaborating the lines in another more internal (closer) one. There is not a hierarchy between the circles, but the idea is that the more "inside", or the closer the militant, the better are they able to formulate, understand, reproduce and apply the lines of the organisation. The more "inside" the militant, the greater is their level of commitment and activity. The more a militant offers the organisation, the more is demanded of them by it. It is the militants who decide on their level of commitment and they

2. Ethics and Values

The libertarian ethic is synonymous with anarchism, and is its backbone. It is a non-negotiable militant commitment, and presupposes consistency between life and ideology, that is, living anarchism. We understand that the ends are in the means, just as the tree is in the seed, and that we will only arrive at libertarian ends with political responsibility and through libertarian means. Ethics are exercised in mutual respect, and are responsible for defining the priority of values.

3. Federalism

Federalism is a non-hierarchical method of political organisation of society. It presupposes the decentralisation of the process of decision-making and enables the integration of self-managed nuclei at all levels.

It is based on mutual aid and on free association, with equal rights and duties for all. We consider it essential that the federal units exercise their right to deliberate, through delegations taken in the grassroots assemblies, guided by agreed principles, and having the organisational and militant commitment to abide by the resolutions of the council of delegates, thus respecting the decisions of the federative body.

4. Internationalism

Internationalism is exercised, in practice, through federalism. We understand that internationalism is enriched by respect for diversity of cultural practices and is practiced by the solidarity of struggles and through social self-management.

5. Self-management

An anti-capitalist and anti-statist method of socio-economic management at all levels. It is characterised as the management of the means of production and social organisation for the benefit of the collectivity; it is exercised from the grassroots entities, with equal rights and participation of all responsible.

Self-management, as a process of constructing the new, while still living with the current outdated system, potentiates the transformations that point to an egalitarian society.

cepts that sustain it, promoting the development of a political culture that is based on respect for the plurality of perspectives and affinity of objectives.

The FARJ is an organisation of active minority, made up of militants conscious of their historical responsibility ("a subject who has a libertarian ethic knows why they're struggling and is able to explain the ideological motives of struggle, [and] has commitment and self-discipline to carry out the tasks undertaken " – Ideal Peres). It proposes a radical transformation of society having as its starting point everyday popular life. It seeks always to support the development and strengthening of self-organisation, in the construction of independent and combative activities, in order that we all achieve a truly just society, free and equal, within the conception that each of its components is only an interim fighter inserted in the continued pursuit of human beings but for the realisation of the perfect dream, at least for creating the best possible utopias. To this end, the FARJ always seeks to support the training and development of other self-managed organisations, participating combatively in the day-to-day struggles of popular movements in action, first, in Brazil, in Latin America and especially in Rio de Janeiro.

To achieve these objectives, the FARJ has well-defined principles and content. The assumption of coherence with these principles is what determines ideological authenticity pertaining to anarchism.

In summary, these principles are:

1. Freedom

Freedom is the founding principle of anarchism. The struggle for freedom precedes anarchy. The desire to be free – from the contingencies of nature, principally, and, in the second instance, from human predators themselves, which by means of instruments of domination suffocate true egalitarian and fraternal dynamics – is the axis around which, in a permanent process historical, social, political and economic transformations turn. Individual freedom, however, can only find its greatest expression in collective freedom. States, capitalism and their results, class society, false educational principles, authoritarian family practices and ideologies of mass alienation, as well as mistaken theories of social emancipation, which lead to the formation of new tyrannies, currently constitute the greatest obstacles to the full libertarian development of humanity.

do or do not participate in the instances of deliberation based on this choice. Thus, the militants decide how much they want to commit and the more they commit, the more they will decide. The less they commit, the less they will decide.

This does not mean that the position of the more committed is of more value than that of the less committed. It means that they participate in different decision-making bodies. For example, those more committed participate with voice and vote in the Congresses, which define the political and strategic lines of the organisation; the less committed do not participate in the Congresses, or only participate as observers, and participate in the monthly assemblies where the tactics and practical applications of the lines are defined.

Thus, inside the specific anarchist organisation you may have one or more circles, which should always be defined by the level of commitment of the militants. In the case of more than one level this must be clear to everyone, and the criteria to change a level available to all militants. It is, therefore, the militant who chooses where they want to be.

The next circle, more external and distant from the core of the anarchist organisation is no longer part of the organisation, but has a fundamental importance: the level of supporters. This body, or instance, seeks to group together all people who have ideological affinities with the anarchist organisation. Supporters are responsible for assisting the organisation in its practical work, such as the publishing of pamphlets, periodicals or books; the dissemination of propaganda material; helping in the work of producing theory or of contextual analysis; in the organisation of practical activities for social work: community activities, help in training work, logistical activities, help in organising work, etc. This instance of support is where people who have affinities with the anarchist organisation and its work have contact with other militants, are able to deepen their knowledge of the political line of the organisation, better get to know its activities and deepen their vision of anarchism, etc.

Therefore, the category of support has an important role to help the anarchist organisation put into practice its activities, seeking to bring those interested closer to it. This approximation has as a future objective that some of these supporters will become militants of the organisation. The specific anarchist organisation draws in the greatest possible number of supporters and, through practical work, identifies those interested in joining the organisation and who have an appropriate profile for membership. The proposal for entry into the organisation may be made by the militants of the organisation to the supporter and vice-versa. Although each militant

chooses their level of commitment to the organisation and where they want to be, the objective of the anarchist organisation is always to have the greatest number of militants in the more internal circles, with a greater level of commitment.

Let us give a practical example: let's suppose that an organisation has deliberated to work internally with two levels of commitment - or two circles. When the militants are new they enter at the level of "militant" and, when they have been there six months and are prepared and committed militants, move on to the level of "full militant". Let us suppose that this organisation has resolved to have a level of supporters. The objective of the organisation will be to draw in the greatest possible number of supporters, based on the affinity of each one with the organisation, transferring them to the level of militant and, after six months - once prepared - to the level of full militant. We illustrate how this can work in practice.

Flow of Militants
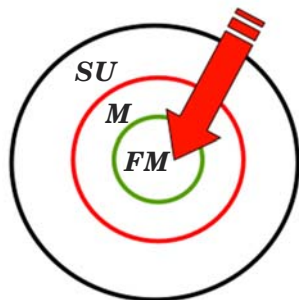
SU being the level of supporters, M of militants and FM of full militants, the objective is the flow indicated by the red arrow - to go from SU to M and from M to FM. Those who are interested can follow this flow, and those who are not can stay where they feel better. For example, if a person wants to give sporadic support, and no more than that, they may want to always stay at SU. The issue here is that all a person's will to work should be utilised by the organisation. This is not because a person has little time, or because they prefer to help at a time when it must be rejected, but because inside a specific anarchist organisation there must be room for all those who wish to contribute. "The criteria for selection that never fails are the accomplishments. The aptitude and efficiency of the militants are, fundamentally, measures for the enthusiasm and the application with which they perform their tasks". [Juan Mechoso. *Acción Directa Anarquista*. p.199.]

Appendix:

Charter of Principles
of the Anarchist Federation
of Rio de Janeiro

(Federação Anarquista do
Rio de Janeiro - FARJ)

"We desire the freedom and well-being of all men, all without exception. We want that every human being can develop and live in the happiest way possible. And we believe that this freedom and this well-being cannot be given by a man or by a party, but that everyone should find in themselves their conditions, and conquer them.

We consider that only the most complete application of the principle of solidarity can destroy war, oppression and exploitation, and solidarity can only be born of free agreement, of the spontaneous and desired harmonising of all concerned."

- Errico Malatesta

Anarchism is a political ideology of social transformation, which is expressed through an anti-authoritarian mode of reflection, interpretation and intervention on reality. It constitutes a revolutionary theory that struggles against all forms of exploitation and oppression. It has its historical origins in the working class struggles over almost two centuries. Committed to these principles, which are a continuation of the organisationalist current of anarchism, the Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) proposes to work – now and without intermediations – in order to interfere in the different realities that make up the universe of social movements.

To achieve its intended goals – to move immediately towards a world where all are free and equal – the FARJ will respect the firm ethical pre-

previous diagram, if a militant has great practical affinity with the anarchists, but is not an anarchist, they must be a member of the grouping of tendency and will be fundamental to the achievement of social work. If they have ideological affinities, they may be closer to or even join the organisation.

The objective of the anarchist organisation is not to turn all activists into anarchists, but to learn to work with each of these activists in the most appropriate way. While having mutual interests the militants may change their positions in the circles (from the social movement to the grouping of tendency or from the grouping of tendency to the anarchist organisation). Without these mutual interests, however, each one acts where they think it more pertinent.

The logic of concentric circles requires that each militant and the organisation itself have very well defined rights and duties for each level of commitment. This is because it is not just for someone to make decisions about something with which they will not comply. A supporter who frequents activities once a month and makes sporadic contributions, for example, cannot decide on rules or activities that must be met or carried out daily, as they would be deciding something much more for the other militants than for themselves.

It is a very common practice in libertarian groups that people who make sporadic contributions decide on issues which end up being committed to or carried out by the more permanent members. It is very easy for a militant who appears from time to time to want to set the political line of the organisation, for example, since it is not they who will have to follow this line most of the time.

These are disproportionate forms of decision-making in which one ends up deciding something which others enact. In the model of concentric circles we seek a system of rights and duties in which everyone makes decisions about that which they could and should be committed to afterwards. In this way it is normal for supporters to decide only on that in which they will be involved. In the same way it is normal for militants of the organisation to decide on that which they will carry out. Thus we make decisions and their commitments proportionally and this implies that the organisation has clear criteria for entry, well defining who does and does not take part in it, and at what level of commitment the militants are.

An important criterion for entry is that all of the militants who enter the organisation must agree with its political line. For this the anarchist organisation must have theoretical material that expresses this line - in less depth for those who are not yet members of the organisation and in more depth for those who are. When someone is interested in the work of the anarchist organisation, showing interest in approximation, you should make this person a supporter and give them the necessary guidance. As a supporter, knowing the political line in a little more depth and having an affinity for the practical work of the organisation, the person may show interest in joining the organisation or the organisation can express its interest in the supporter becoming a militant. In both cases the supporter should receive permanent guidance from the anarchist organisation, giving to them theoretical material that will deepen their political line. One or more militants who know this line well will discuss doubts, debate and make clarifications with them. Having secured the agreement of the supporter with the political line of the organisation,

and with agreement from both parties, the militant is integrated into the organisation. It is important that in the initial period every new militant has the guidance of another older one, who will orient and prepare them for work. In any event, the anarchist organisation always has to concern itself with the training and guidance of the supporters and militants so that this may allow them to change their level of commitment, if they so desire.

This same logic of concentric circles works in social work. Through it, the anarchist organisation is articulated to perform social work in the most appropriate and effective way. As we have seen, the anarchist organisation is divided internally into fronts for the performance of practical work. For this there are organisations that prefer to establish direct relations with the social movements, and there are others that prefer to present themselves through an intermediary social organisation, which we could call a grouping of tendency.

Participation in the grouping of tendency implies acceptance of a set of definitions that can be shared by comrades of diverse ideological origins, but which share certain indispensable exclusions (to the reformists, for example) if seeking a minimum level of real operational coherence. (...) The groupings of tendency, co-ordinated with each other and rooted in the most combative of the people (...) are a higher level than the latter [the level of the masses]. [Ibid. pg. 190, 192.]

The grouping of tendency puts itself between the social movements and the specific anarchist organisation, bringing together militants of distinct ideologies that have affinity in relation to certain practical questions.

As we have emphasised, there are anarchist organisations that prefer to present themselves directly in the social movements, without the necessity of the groupings of tendency, and others preferring to present themselves by means of these. In both cases there are positive and negative points and each organisation must determine the best way to act. As the views that we advocate in the social movements are much more practical than theoretical, it may be interesting to work with a grouping of tendency, incorporating people who agree with some or all of the positions that we advocate in the social movements (strength, classism, autonomy, combativeness, direct action, direct democracy and revolutionary perspective) and that will help us to augment the social force in defence of these positions.

In the same way as in the diagram above, the idea is that the specific anarchist organisation seeks insertion in this intermediate level (grouping of tendency) and through it presents itself, conducting its work in social

movements in search of social insertion. Again we illustrate how this works in practice.
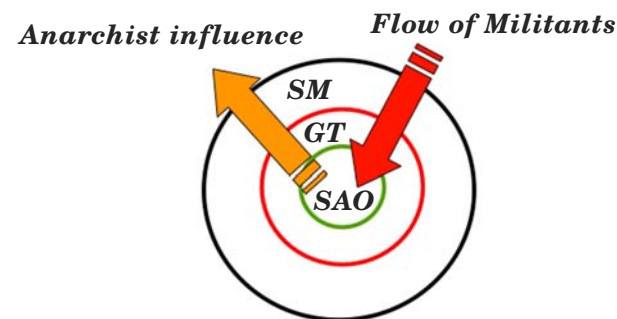
SAO being the specific anarchist organisation, GT the grouping of tendency and SM the social movement, there are two flows.

The first - that of the influence of the SAO - seeks to go to the GT and from there to the SM. Let us look at a few practical examples. The anarchist organisation that desires to act in a union may form a grouping of tendency with other activists from the union movement who defend some specific banners (revolutionary perspective, direct action, etc.) and by means of this tendency may influence the union movement, or the union in which it acts. Or the anarchist organisation may choose to work with the landless movement and, for this, brings people who defend similar positions (autonomy, direct democracy, etc.) in the social movement together in a grouping of tendency. By means of this grouping of tendency the specific anarchist organisation acts within the landless movement and, in this way, seeks to influence it.

This form of organisation aims to solve a very common problem that we find in activism. For example, when we know very dedicated activists; revolutionaries that advocate self-management, autonomy, grassroots democracy, direct democracy, etc. and with whom we do not act because they are not anarchists. These activists could work with the anarchists in the groupings of tendency and defend their positions in the social movements together.

The second arrow in the diagram shows the objective of the flow of militants. That is, in this scheme of work, the goal is to bring people in the social movements that have practical affinity with the anarchists into the groupings of tendency and, from there, bring those that have ideological affinity closer to the anarchist organisation. In the same way as in the