

Anarchism, Power, Class and Social Change

Felipe Corrêa

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Anarchism: Theory and Ideology, Principles and Strategies

Addressing anarchism in a study like this implies taking up three positions developed more broadly in another work (Corrêa, 2012). First, it is argued that anarchism constitutes an ideology, being defined as a “set of thought and action based on ethical precepts that guide collective political behaviors, based on specific strategies. Similar to the political doctrine, it has relations with the theory, but it is not summarized to it” (Corrêa, 2012, p.80). Ideology is distinguished from theory, in the sense that the second is related to the knowledge of society and the first to the interventions that are made on it; therefore, anarchism is characterized more by its ideological-dogmatic elements than by theoretical-methodological issues.

That distinction is substantive, since it assumes that the unity and historical coherence of anarchism is related to its political-ideological principles and not to the methods of analysis and social theories that have been used by anarchists for the interpretation of reality; as it is sustained, in the theoretical field, the anarchists have used different tools, deeply connected with the time and space in which they were and are produced.

Second, anarchism is defined as follows:

Anarchism is a socialist and revolutionary *ideology* that is based on determined principles, whose bases are defined from a critique of *domination* and a defense of *self-management*; in structural terms, anarchism defends a social transformation based on *strategies*, which must allow the substitution of a system of domination by a system of self-management.

Corrêa, 2012, p.87

Discussing the definition in more detail, it is argued that there is a relatively fixed set of ten political-ideological principles that are maintained, continuously and permanently, among the anarchists, and that constitute the fundamental bases of that definition of anarchism. These principles are:

- 1. Ethics and values.** The defense of an *ethical* conception, capable of subsidizing criticisms and rational proposals, based on the following *values*: individual and collective freedom; equality in economic, political and social terms; solidarity and mutual support; permanent encouragement to happiness, motivation and will.
- 2. Criticism of domination.** Criticism of *class dominations* – constituted by exploitation, physical coercion and political-bureaucratic and cultural-ideological dominations – and of *other types of domination* (gender, race, imperialism, etc.)
- 3. Social transformation of the system and the power model.** The recognition that the fundamental systemic structures in different dominations constitute a *system of domination* and the identification, by means of a rational criticism, based on the specified ethical values, that this system has to be transformed into a *system of self-management*. For that, the transformation of the current power model, of a *dominating power*, into a *self-managing power* becomes fundamental. In contemporary societies, this critique of domination implies a *clear opposition to capitalism, to the State and to the other institutions* created and sustained for the *maintenance of the domination*.

4. Classes and class struggle. The identification that, in the various systems of domination, with their respective class structures, *class dominations* allow conceiving the *fundamental division of society* into two broad global and universal categories, constituted by classes with *irreconcilable interests: the ruling classes* and the *dominated classes*. The social conflict between these classes characterizes the *class struggle*. [...] Other *dominations* must be *fought concomitantly with class dominations*, since the end of the latter does not necessarily mean the end of the former.

5. [Classism] and social force. The understanding that this *class-based social transformation* implies a *political practice*, constituted from the *intervention in the correlation of forces* that constitutes the *bases of current power relations*. In this sense, it seeks to *transform the capacity for realization* of the social agents that are members of the *socially dominated classes* into a *social force*, applying it in the class struggle and seeking to *increase it permanently*. [...]

6. Internationalism. The defense of a classism that is not restricted to national borders and, therefore, is based on *internationalism*, which implies, in the case of practices together with actors dominated by imperialist relations, the *rejection of nationalism* and, in the struggles for social transformation, the need for *broadening the mobilization of the dominated classes beyond borders national* [...]

7. Strategy. The rational conception, for that project of social transformation, of *adequate strategies*, that imply *readings of the reality* and the *establishment of paths* for the struggles. [...]

8. Strategic elements. Although the anarchists defend different strategies, some *strategic elements* are considered *principles*: the stimulus to the creation of *revolutionary subjects*, mobilized among the actors that constitute part of the concrete social classes of each epoch and locality, which give body to the *dominated classes*, from processes that include the *consciousness of class and the stimulus to the will of transformation*; the permanent stimulus to the *increase of social force of the dominated classes*, in a way that allows a *revolutionary process of social transformation*; the *coherence between objectives, strategies and tactics* and, therefore, the coherence between *ends and means* and the construction, in today's practices, of the society that is wanted for tomorrow; the use of *self-managed means* of struggle that *do not imply domination*, either among the anarchists themselves or in the relationship of the anarchists with other actors; the defense of *independence and class autonomy*, which implies opposition to the relations of domination established by political parties, the State or other institutions or agents, guaranteeing the *popular protagonism of the dominated classes*, which must be promoted by means of the *construction of the struggle for the base, from the bottom up*, including *direct action*.

9. Social revolution and violence. The search for a *social revolution* that transforms the current system and power model, since *violence*, as an expression of a higher level of confrontational tension, is *accepted, in most cases, because it is considered inevitable*. That revolution implies combative struggles and *fundamental changes in the three structured spheres* of society and is not within the framework of the current system of domination – it is beyond capitalism, the State, the dominating institutions.

10. Defense of self-management. The *defense of the self-management* that bases the political practice and anarchist strategy is the *basis for future society* that you want to build and involves the *socialization of property* in economic terms, *democratic self-government* in political terms and a *self-managed culture*. [...]

Corrêa, 2012, p. 143-147

Third, it is argued that anarchism has relevant internal debates, which form the basis for the establishment of its currents. The different theoretical positions do not constitute foundations for the definition of anarchist currents, given that they do not serve to define anarchism itself. In the anarchists' criticisms of domination, there are no relevant debates. In its defense of self-management, there are four fundamental debates: self-managed market *versus* democratic planning, collectivism *versus* communism, political articulation by the place of residence or work, limits and possibilities of culture; even so, it is affirmed that these debates are secondary in relation to the strategic debates.

Within the different strategies of the anarchists, four debates are presented, which are the most relevant, due to their continuity and historical permanence, as well as the greater lack of agreement among the anarchists: favorable positions and contrary to the organization, being that among organizational anarchists, there are different conceptions of organization at the mass level, including community and union articulation, and different conceptions of the specific anarchist organization; favorable positions and contrary to short-term gains (reforms), taking into account their contribution or not to the revolution; different positions in relation to the context of use and the role of violence, considering whether it should respond to already established mass movements or if it can function as a trigger to generate those movements; different positions in relation to the specific anarchist organization model, a cross-cutting debate to the others.

The definition of anarchist currents is established according to the first three strategic debates. *Mass anarchism*, historically, defends the organization at different levels, argues that, depending on how they were conquered, reforms can lead to revolution, and affirms that violence must strengthen already established movements; The two best-known strategies of this current are revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism. Historically, *insurrectional anarchism* opposes structured organization, opposes struggles for reforms and considers that violence must act as a trigger to generate revolutionary movements.

The fundamental argument of this article is that the same coherence of anarchism, which can be verified in its political-ideological principles, exists in the position of the anarchists about the issues of power, class and social transformation. Meanwhile, for that to be proven, it is fundamental to extrapolate the semantic problematic that implies the terms in question and analyze the historical content of the anarchist positions.

Members of the Los Angeles Tenants Union marching to oppose displacement.

Anarchism and Power

The discussion of power in anarchism has been damaged by semantic problems, which – according to Tomás Ibáñez, in his rigorous study on the subject, which takes into account more than 300 works – is not restricted to anarchist studies:

The fact that the investigators of power relations will continue, after so many years, dedicating an important part of their efforts to clarify and refine the content of the notion of power, the fact that there is no minimally generalized agreement on the meaning of that and the fact of the controversies will be given more on the differences of conceptualization than on the operations and results obtained from these conceptualizations, all this clearly indicates that the theorization on power is, at some point, with an epistemological obstacle that it prevents you from progressing.

Ibáñez, 1982, p.11

The lack of common meaning in relation to the term power and the epistemological obstacle to which Ibáñez refers is noted, also among the classical anarchists themselves, complicating the realization of a qualified discussion of power in anarchism. Bakunin emphasizes that “who speaks of political power speaks of domination” (1998, p.100); Kropotkin states that “to the extent that the socialists would constitute a power in bourgeois society and in the current state, their socialism will die” (1970a, p.189); Malatesta criticizes the authoritarian socialists saying that they “propose the conquest of power” to emancipate the people, that means, use the “same mechanism that today has enslaved him” and, as a libertarian proposal, suggests the “abolition of the government of all power” (2008, pp. 183, 200).

For classical anarchists, the term power is, in almost all cases, associated with the state and / or domination. On top of that, they often treat the terms of power, domination and authority as synonymous.¹ Meanwhile, should power be conceptualized only as domination or state? Power, domination and authority are synonymous? It is answered that no, in both cases.

It can be said that the hegemonic position in anarchism, until the 1970s, and still exists today, is that anarchists are opposed to power, understand it as a synonym of domination and / or state. Positions such as that of Patrick Rossineri (2011, p.19-20) were, and still are, relatively common: “all anarchist theory is founded as a critique of power and the effects that it produces.” And even more: “The anarchists never proposed the popular power, nor the power for a class. [...] When there is symmetry and reciprocity in a social relationship, it is because the power relation ceases to exist.” Such positions, extracted from a largely superfluous and semantic analysis, were responsible, at some historical moments, for the rejection of anarchists of politics, of real intervention in the game of forces of society, ending by reallocating them to the role of critical observers of reality, without conditions of intervening in it.

Meanwhile, deepening the analysis and extrapolating the semantic aspects, it can be affirmed, as it has been becoming more emphatically and clearly in the last 40 years, that it does not seem acceptable, according to Ibáñez, “to consider that the relationship between libertarian thought

¹ This semantic problematic can also be seen in the translations, as in the case of Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*. The translation in Spanish states: “No se debe dar ni a ellos y a ninguno el *poder*, porque aquel que está investido de un *poder* se torna, inevitablemente, por la ley inmutable, un opresor, un explotador de la sociedad.” (Translator’s note: *Power* should not be given to them and to none, because the one who is invested with a power inevitably becomes, by the immutable law, an oppressor, an exploiter of society) (grifos meus) Bakunin, 2006, p. 159-160) Portuguese translation states: “Nao ha por que lhes dar, assim como nenhum outro, autoridade, pois quem dela e investido, torna-se, de modo infalviel, segundo uma lei social invariavel, um opressor e explorador da sociedad (Translator’s note: There is no need to give them, as well as any other *authority*, since it is invested, it is taken, in this infallible way, according to an invariable social law, an oppressor and exploiter of society). (grifei) (Bakunin, 2003, p. 166) Power and authority are used as a translation of the same original term.

and the concept of power can only be formulated in terms of denial, exclusion, rejection, opposition and even antinomy” (2007, p 42). Ibáñez considers, still, that the innumerable definitions of power can be grouped into three main approaches: 1) power as *capacity*, 2) power as *asymmetry in power relations*, and 3) of power as *structures and mechanisms of regulation and control* (2007, pp. 42-44). Taking into account these three approaches. Ibáñez affirms: “there is a libertarian conception of power, and it is false that it had to constitute a denial of power.”

Historical examples are abundant to show that anarchists never opposed the notion that people, groups and social classes have the capacity to do something; that society is composed of diverse forces at play and that, in order to seek a social transformation, anarchists must stimulate the growth of a determined force that surpasses the enemy forces, then predominant in the social field; that, at the same time that they oppose the structures and mechanisms of authoritarian regulation and control, the anarchists propose others, with a libertarian base, that constitute the foundations of the future society they propose.

Bakunin affirms that “the most insignificant human being represents a tiny fraction of social force” (2009, p.34). Kropotkin emphasizes: force –and a large amount of force– is necessary to prevent workers from appropriating what they consider to have been unjustly appropriated by a few (1970b, p.69). Malatesta recommends:

We must work to awaken in the oppressed the lively desire for a radical social transformation and persuade them that, by uniting, they have the necessary strength to overcome, we must propagate our ideal and prepare the moral and material forces necessary to defeat the enemy forces and organize the new society.

Malatesta, 2008, p.94

Overcoming the enemy forces implies, for Malatesta, making the revolution, socializing the economy and politics with the “creation of new institutions, new groupings, new social relations;” it is about initiating a social reconstruction that can “provide for the satisfaction of immediate needs and prepare for the future,” which should destroy “the privileges and the harmful institutions and make [...] functioning, for the benefit of all, the useful institutions that today they serve exclusively or mainly for the benefit of the ruling classes.” (Richards, 2007, pp. 147; 154)

There is no way to affirm the departure of the triple definition of Ibáñez that anarchists are opposed to power.

Power: Between Domination and Self-Management

When anarchists claimed to be against “power,” Ibáñez mentions, they used the “term” power “to refer, in fact, to a ‘certain type of power relations’, that is, more concretely, to the type of power that is found in the ‘relations of domination’, in the ‘structures of domination’, in the ‘domination device’ or in the ‘instruments of domination’, etc.” (2007, p.45). The anarchist critique of exploitation, coercion, alienation, always had as a background a critique of domination in a general way, including class domination to dominations of gender, race and between countries or peoples (imperialism).

In defending federalism, the anarchists supported. According to René Berthier (2011, p.32), social relations forged a broad participation in the decisive processes, by means of a system in

which there was “neither capture of all power by the elite (centralism), nor the atomization of the power (autonomism).” As Frank Mintz points out, the term “self-management” arose only in the 1960s to refer also to an organizational model supported by broad popular participation.² (1977, pp. 26-27) Although there had been later attempts to restrict the Federalism to the political sphere and to self-management to the economic, the fact is that the terms include notions quite close and have been commonly used by anarchists. The anarchist defense of the socialization of private property, of the socialization of political power, of a culture that reinforces that project, and of a bottom-up articulation, is based on a defense of generalized self-management, taken into account in all its social aspects, and that contain the notion of federalism.

Domination and self-management are directly related to the concept of power that will be defined here according to the second approach of Ibáñez, as asymmetry in the relations of force. Defining power in this way allows conceptualizing it, more specifically, as a relationship that is established in the struggles and disputes between different social forces, when one force(s) is imposed on the other(s); power and power relation work, in that way, as synonyms (Corrêa, 2011a). The link between domination, self-management and power are given through the notion of participation; considering that participation is established by power relations, it may be greater, approaching the notion of self-management, or less, approaching the notion of domination. Domination and self-management would be, thus, ideal-types of power relations, based on an axis of participation; the more dominating the power, the less participation; the more self-managed, the more participation.

The extremes constituted by domination and by self-management demarcate, theoretically, the logical possibilities of limits in the processes of participation. Regardless of the real possibility or not of reaching one of the ideal types, those extremes, what is relevant is to conceive them as a logical theoretical model for understanding the different power relations, the types of these relationships and the different forms of participation that derive from them [...] Conceiving power relations within these two extremes, based on the axis of participation, constitutes a method of analysis for relations at different levels.

Corrêa, 2011a

According to this model, the objective of the anarchists was always to sustain social relations that incorporated greater participation and replaced the dominating power – “dominator, hierarchy, alienation, monopoly of decisions by a minority, class structure and exploitation – by self-management power – ‘self-management, broad participation in decisions, non-alienated actors, non-hierarchical relations, no relations of domination, no class structure and exploitation’” (Corrêa, 2012, p.98).

Such a way of conceiving power responds that it is synonymous with domination and / or the State. Domination, as it is sustained, is a type of power, as well as self-management; power rela-

² Making a revision in dictionaries of the time, Mintz verified that during the decade of 1950 the term still did not appear in Hispanic languages; In slavic languages, the term “samopravlenie” was only translated as “independent popular government,” “self-determination” and “autonomy,” it was only translated as self-management from the 1960s. He states: “[. . .] from the political point of view, ‘direct management’ was used and then ‘self-management’ was adopted. To the magazine *Noir et Rouge* published a study in two parts on the Spanish collectivities whose number of June of 1965 was titled ‘Colectividades Españolas’ and, the following number, of February of 1965, ‘Autogestión.’ Also the descriptions of Yugoslavia and Algeria popularized the word” (Mintz, 1977, pp. 26-27).

tions can be established including greater or lesser participation; thus, power does not necessarily imply domination. The State is a central element of the system of domination and, in all its historical forms, have implied relations of domination, fundamentally those of a political-bureaucratic type and coercion; On the other hand, self-managed political power structures, defended by the anarchists for the substitution of the State, also imply power, but not domination.

Anarchism and Social Classes

Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt claim that anarchism is a revolutionary type “of libertarian socialism that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century;” they say, “it was from the movement and the associations of the working class that anarchism was born” (2009, pp. 71; 45; 51). Thus, anarchism can be conceived as an ideology that arises within the dominated classes during the process of class struggle carried out in the nineteenth century. “The anarchists [...] saw the class struggle as a necessary aspect of social transformation and saw in the victims of domination and class exploitation – the worker and the peasant – the actors of that change.” Anarchism, an essentially classist ideology, has emphatic critiques of class domination and concrete class projects, which seek to replace the system of domination and its class structure with a system of self-management in which social classes and the structure itself of dominators and dominated, they would cease to exist.

For anarchists, in general, social classes are established from the notion of domination, and are, therefore, beyond the ownership of the means of production and economic exploitation of labor. Although contemporary reflections such as those of Alfredo Errandonea (1989) deepen and recontextualize the debate, it can be affirmed that, from the very beginning, the anarchists verified the domination in the economic, political / legal / military, cultural / ideological spheres and, therefore, the systems that include capitalism and the State, and perceived their impact on the issue of social classes.

Reflecting on the social classes of his time, Bakunin emphasizes that the difference between them is quite clear; the noble aristocracy, the financial aristocracy, the upper bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the proletarians of the factories and cities, the great landowners, the tenants, the peasants, the landowners, the proletarians of the countryside would be the concrete social classes of your time. He sustains that,

All these different political existences are left, today, to reduce to the two main categories, diametrically opposed one to the other, and natural enemies of one another: the *political classes*, composed of all the privileged, both of the land and of capital, accessible to the bourgeois education, and the *working classes*, disinherited as much of the capital as of the earth, and deprived of any education and of any instruction.

Bakunin, 1988, p.16

In his critique of the State, Kropotkin states that anarchists have demonstrated that “the mission of all governments, monarchists, constitutionalists and republicans, is to protect and maintain by force the privileged of the ruling classes, aristocracy, clergy and bourgeoisie” (2005, p.180). Positions similar to those defended by Malatesta, when it points out the results of human struggles that will end up dividing society into oppressed and oppressors.

On this depends the state of misery in which the **workers** were generally found, and all the resulting evils: ignorance, crime, prostitution, physical deficiency, moral abjection, premature death. From there the constitution of a **special class (the government)** that, provided with the material means of repression, has the mission to legalize and defend the owners against the demands of the proletariat. He then uses the strength he possesses to arrogate privileges and submit, if he can, to his own supremacy, the **class of the owners**. From that derives the formation of another **special class (the clergy)**, that by a series of fables related to the will of God, the future life, etc., seeks to lead the oppressed to docilely support the oppressor, the government, the interests of the owners and their own.

Malatesta, 2000, p. 9

Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, when defining the foundations of social classes, are based on the dominations that occur in the three social spheres. They emphasize different types of domination that have an impact on the definition of social classes: the exploitation of the work of urban, rural and peasant proletarians, the result of economic domination; physical coercion and political-bureaucratic domination, fruit of political / legal / military domination; education and religion, which include alienation, obedience, strengthening the dominant interests, fruit of cultural / ideological domination.

Schmidt and van der Walt emphasize that “the broad anarchist tradition sees the classes established by the control of a set of resources and not only economic property.” The definition of social classes in anarchism, they claim,

It does not say in relation only to the relations of production, but also the *relations of domination*, not only the ownership of the means of production, but also the ownership of the means of *coercion* – the ability to physically force decisions – and the means of *administration* – the instruments that govern society. Seen in this way, the unequal ownership of the means of production constitutes a necessary description, but not enough of a class system.

Schmidt; van der Walt, 2009, p. 109

That definition of social classes based on domination had, historically, a direct implication on the social stratification and the notion of revolutionary subject of the anarchists. While the dominated classes will include salaried, precarized, marginalized workers and the peasantry, the ruling classes will include, in addition to the owners of the means of production, “presidents, kings, generals, members of parliament, prefects, directors of the departments of government, leaders of state companies,” among others (Schmidt; van der Walt, 2009, p. 110).

In the process of class struggle, the anarchists promoted popular movements directly opposing the owners, rulers, high-ranking military, police, judges, clergy and other class enemies. They will seek to strengthen different oppressed subjects; As Schmidt and Van der Walt point out, in addition to the peasantry, other sectors of urban workers were also mobilized.

First, temporary or period workers, such as construction workers, dock workers, rural workers, sailors, gas industry workers, whose lives are characterized by instability, frequent job changes and the movement in search of work; and second, light and

heavy industry workers, such as workers in factories, miners and railroads. In addition to these main categories, there was also a smaller number of qualified workers and professionals, particularly journalists, teachers, nurses and doctors. [...].

Schmidt; van der Walt, 2009, p. 279

The revolutionary subjects historically included in the mobilizations promoted by the anarchists were not only in the middle of the urban-industrial proletariat, although this had been an important sector – perhaps the most relevant, in quantitative terms – in these mobilizations. The anarchists became involved in popular movements whose base was based as much on workers in the city as on the countryside, both on salaried workers and peasants, as well as on precarious, marginalized and poor people in general.

Members of Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet (DAF) rally in Istanbul, Turkey.

Anarchism and Social Transformation

The revolutionary strategy of anarchism is based on a model of social conflict for the overcoming of the system of domination and the establishment of the system of self-management. It is a matter of replacing capitalism, the State and domination in a general way, by socialized ownership and power and by new libertarian social relations.

The process for this social transformation historically advocated by the anarchists is based on five aspects: 1) the definition of social classes and the process of class struggle; 2) the belief in the capacity of the realization of the dominated classes; 3) the articulation and mobilization of these classes, the permanent stimulus to the formation and growth of their social force and the search for the overcoming of strategic enemies; 4) the selection of suitable means for that process; 5) the establishment of a self-managing power, with its respective regulatory and control structures.

Previously, it was pointed out how three classic anarchists – Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta – understand some of those issues. We demonstrated: their conception of the social classes from the concept of domination and their definition of the class struggle between dominators and dominated, oppressors and oppressed; their belief in the capacity for realization of the dominated classes and the oppressed in general; their search for a new society, socialist and libertarian, shaped by new institutions and social relations.

For the understanding of the process of articulation and mobilization of the dominated classes and of the stimulation to the growth of their social force, it becomes fundamental to discuss the concept of social force and to differentiate it from the capacity for realization.

The notion of social force – developed by Proudhon (s/d p. 211-229) in his serial dialectic, and which was, to some extent, appropriated by Bakunin (2009, p.35) – implies an understanding that, in conflicts social and in the class struggle the dominated classes must be articulated, because when individuals are associated, they “combine their efforts to achieve a common goal, they constitute a new force that surpasses, and long, the simple sum arithmetic of the individual efforts of each one.” Articulating and mobilizing the dominated classes would enable a significant gain of force, which, carried out collectively, would have a much greater result than the simple sum of the individual forces of each person involved in that process. In addition to that, the articulation and organization to intervene in conflicts and struggles allows to transform the capacity of realization of the dominated classes into a social force, as Bakunin points out:

It is true, there is a lot of spontaneous force in the town; this is incomparably greater than the strength of the government, including that of the classes; still, due to lack of organization, spontaneous force is not a real force. She is not in a position to sustain a long struggle against the much weaker, but better organized forces. On this incontestable superiority of the organized force over the elementary force of the people, all the power of the State rests. That is because the first condition of the victory of the people is the *union* or *organization of the popular forces*.

Bakunin, 2009, p. 67

When he speaks that a spontaneous force is not a real force. Bakunin distinguishes the capacity for realization of the oppressed, which is located in the potential field, and its social force, which allows the dominated classes to enter, in fact, in the political field, as a relevant actor in the game of forging forces the power relations of society. In the meantime, it is not only a question of creating a social force, but of allowing it to manage to confront the dominant classes and overcome their forces.

For Kropotkin, that moment in which popular forces overlap capitalist and statist forces is characterized as a social revolution. This, in addition to the cultural and ideological transformations, implies substantive changes in the economic and political field; “The two changes, political and economic, must walk side by side, hand in hand.” He affirms that “every step in the direction of economic freedom, every victory established over capitalism will be, at the same time, a step towards political freedom”. At the same time, “each step in the direction of removing from the State each of its powers and attributes will help the masses to establish their victory over capitalism.” (1970a, pp. 181-182)

Malatesta, in referring to the selection of means for this process, emphasizes the need for a strategic coherence between the goals that are sought to be achieved and the means that are used therefore:

These means are not arbitrary: they necessarily derive from the goals we propose and from the circumstances in which we fight. Deceiving ourselves in the media, we do not achieve the objective contemplated, but, on the contrary, we distance ourselves from our course towards frequently opposed realities, and that the methods we use are the natural and necessary consequence. Whoever opposes the road and is deceived at the beginning, will not go where he wants, but where he leads the road taken.

Malatesta, 2000, p. 11

The positions of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta imply fundamental notions about the anarchist perspective of social transformation. Bakunin reinforces Proudhon’s idea that collective association multiplies individual strengths and differentiates the ability to realize social force; it is, therefore, to articulate and mobilize the dominated classes and to stimulate the permanent growth of their social force. Kropotkin demonstrates how a revolutionary process of transformation must modify relations in the three social spheres, overcoming enemy forces. Malatesta affirms the need for the means to be coherent ends.

Malatesta’s arguments will provide conditions for moving forward; Based on the strategy theorists themselves, they demand a coherence between the realization of the tactics in relation to

the strategy, and between the realization of the strategy and the strategic objectives. If the ends of anarchist social transformation are characterized by a change in the power model of society – overcoming a dominating power and establishing a self-managing power–, the means employed must therefore reinforce self-management.

Means that do not coincide with that end must be discarded: those that reinforce capitalism, the State and the institutions that sustain them; those that remove from the masses the necessary protagonism in the process of social transformation; those that stimulate the spirit of survival and obedience. Building generalized self-management implies, therefore, the defense of economic and political socialization, and the revolutionary transformation of social institutions, the protagonism of the masses through class autonomy and the democratic construction of struggles for the base.

The anarchist positions on the nature of the State and its conception of social classes constitute a relevant example of the application of this notion of strategic coherence; they are at the bases of split between anarchism and most of the Marxist currents and have as their background their different strategies of social transformation.

Erradonea affirms that “from its origins, anarchism was a revolutionary socio-political movement that, consequently with its anti-statist and anti-authoritarian postulation, disdained the path of conquest of centralized social power, for the benefit of the self-managed collectivization of decentralized power” (1989, p.45) . For the anarchists, the State is a fundamental institution of the contemporary domination system and an essentially dominant instrument; rulers, high-ranking military, police, judges are class enemies. The strategy of state takeover either through reforms –as advocated by the social-democratic currents– or through revolution –as the Bolsheviks defend in their different versions– implies, necessarily, the use of a means that does not agree with the ends like the abolition of capitalism, of the State, of the social classes, socialism / communism, etc. According to the anarchists, conquering the State necessarily implies replacing one dominant class with another, even though the new rulers have their origin in the dominated classes; it’s about substituting some dominators for others.

This procedure could provide a social change, but the model of power would continue to be characterized, essentially, by domination, by complete lack of participation. The defense of the transformation in the model of power carried out by the anarchists implies, obligatorily, the end of the State and its replacement by self-managing mechanisms of power that imply high levels of participation, together with the end of capitalism, of the institutions and of the relationships that underlie the present system of domination.

Power, Class and Social Transformation in Historical Perspective

Among the episodes that stand out most in the history of anarchism are: the Macedonian Revolt, of 1903; the Mexican Revolution, began in 1910; the Russian and Ukrainian Revolution, respectively of 1917 and 1919; the mobilization in Bulgaria between the years 1920 and 1940; the Spanish Revolution, between 1936 and 1939; the Manchurian Revolution, in Korea, between

1929 and 1932; the mobilization in Uruguay in the 1960s and 1970s.³ At this time, the theoretical arguments presented above are based on one or more of these historical episodes.

The anarchist budget in these and other mobilizations is established through the belief in a capacity for realization of the dominated classes, which could become a social force. In Mexico, the manifesto of the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) – which, during the revolution, became anarchist – “after a radical transformation in labor relations, in the distribution of land and in the organization of Mexican society.” This transformation should be carried out by the poor (Samis, 2003, p.17). In Ukraine, according to the conception of the Makhnovists: “the masses are capable,” if “enthusiastic about a true revolutionary impetus” and if they were “left the total freedom to act” (Volin, 1976, p.20). In Spain, the ideal of emancipation of workers “is not about philosophical abstractions, but social justice, solidarity work organized, active fraternity created by the egalitarian enjoyment of goods produced by the work of all” (Leval, 1972, p.35).

That social force should have class-based bases and, therefore, mobilize the different concrete social classes, which are parts of the larger set of dominated classes. “In Macedonia, the anarchists won massive support from the peasants” (Schmidt, van der Walt, 2009, p.284) In Ukraine, the revolutionary process was “produced purely and solely by the ‘lower’ layers of the popular masses” (Volin, 1976, p.7). The aim of the anarchists was “to help the masses and interpret the significance of the struggle that awaits them, [...] to define the works to be carried out and their objectives, to take the necessary combat measures and organize their forces.” (Arshinov, 1976, p 259) In Spain, during the revolution, “industries and rural properties [were] marked under the self-management of workers and peasants,” a process in which “anarchists and trade unionists played a central role.” (Schmidt, van der Walt, 2009, p.180) In Uruguay, the radicalization of workers counted, within the National Workers’ Convention (CNT), promoted by the anarchists, with “mobilizations of the organized labor movement in the CNT.” (Rugai, 2003, p. 220)

In the search for the permanent growth of the class social force, the anarchists, through the organizations that participated and promoted, aimed to defeat the enemy forces and establish their proposals. In Mexico “the PLM rejected nationalism having to fight so much against capitalism and imperialism, recommending resistance in Mexico as part of a global class struggle” (Schmidt, van der Walt, 2009, p.315). In Bulgaria the anarchists had to fight against capitalists and “both against fascism and against Stalinism;” they will establish “a mass movement with remarkable diversity and resistance.”

Schmidt, 2009, p. 6

The Bulgarian anarchist movement was built with a formidable force, the third largest in the left field, using the disenchantment of the workers with agrarian and communist reformism to build many urban unions and, later, influencing all levels of society, with a network of interrelated organizations associating workers, workers, students and guerrillas (Schmidt, 2009, p. 46).

³ For a brief history of anarchism and various bibliographical indications, see Correa, 2013. On the Macedonian Revolt and anarchism in Bulgaria, see: Schmidt, 2009; Balkansky, 1982. On the Mexican Revolution, see: Zarcone, 2006; Trejo, 2005. On the Russian Revolution, see: Tragtenberg, 2007; Skirda, 2000. On the Ukrainian Revolution, see: Schujman, 200; Aschinov, 1076. On the Spanish Revolution, see: Paz, s / d; Peirats, 2006; Leval, 1972. On the Revolution in Manchuria and Anarchism in Korea, see: Crisi et alli, 2013. On anarchism in Uruguay, see: Mechoso, 2011, 2005, 2006, 2009; Rugai, 2003.

In Manchuria, the anarchists defended the creation of a power of their own; “it is notorious that the Korean libertarians were talking about a power proper to the oppressed classes” (Crisi et al, 2013, p.8). In Uruguay, “the organization [FAU] created a conception of ‘popular power,’ not state, organized from bottom to top, but possessing global coordination agencies” (Rugai, 2003, pp. 205-206).

In that process of overcoming by establishing their own forces, and coherently and strategically adapting the goals they sought to achieve and the means used by them, the anarchists sought to promote means that stimulated self-management and opposed domination; they claimed the independence of class in relation to the parties, States, institutions and agents that threaten the popular protagonism, the democratic construction of the struggles for the base, by means of direct action. In Russia, anarchists defended the Soviets with the following arguments: “Power should be decentralized as follows: each individual is placed in agreement with others to form a commune, the federation of communes forms a province (region, city, district, district), and a pan-Russian federative republic emerges from the federation of the provinces” (Skirda, 2000, p.82). In Russia, “the true and complete autonomy of the movement was sought, which was consciously and energetically guaranteed against the intrusive forces” (Volin, 1976, p.21). In Uruguay, it was about building “direct action at all levels,” through “several areas of action,” in order to “build class leadership through their own organisms” (Rugai, 2003, p 165; 256).

There were several tools of the struggles used in that process. Union organizations, in the cities and in the fields, including mobilizations by work and residence, as was the case of the Spanish National Confederation of Workers (CNT); armed defense organizations, such as the cases of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine and the Revolutionary Popular Organization – 33 Orientales (OPR-33), of Uruguay; anarchist political organizations, such as the cases of the PLM in Mexico and the Federation of the Anarcho-Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB); popular soviets (councils), like those that were the bases of the revolution in Russia; cooperative, like the Vlassovden, driven by the Bulgarians.

In the revolutionary processes that have advanced the most, self-managed structures of regulation and control will be established. In Macedonia, the establishments of the Commune of Krouchevo and the Commune of Strandzha will lay the foundations of “a revolutionary movement of social liberation with clearly libertarian aspects” (Balkansky, 1982, p.5); they carried out self-management experiences for a month, constituting the first local attempt to build a new society on the principles of libertarian communism. In Russia,

The anarcho-syndicalists control a certain number of factory committees, bakers’ unions, metallurgists, stevedores, etc. They extol the direct and collective taking by the workers themselves of the entire production. That workers’ control is different from that advocated by the Bolsheviks because of their organization from the base and not from the State.

Skirda, 2000, p. 67

In Spain, the first organisms established by the revolution were the “Food Supply Committee.” “From these committees started the first measures of distribution of rationing,” which included priority for war wounded, children and the elderly. (Peirats, 2006, pp. 131-132) In Manchuria, with the establishment of the Commune of Shimin, self-management was established in a territory with more than two million peasants and “managed to liberate large rural areas and small

towns. They were installed, not without inconvenience, Administrative Councils that supplanted and extinguished at all levels the State.” Through a council structure, which had “Municipal or Village Councils; [...] District Councils and Area or Regional Councils,” “direct democracy decision boards” were promoted (Crisi et alli, 2013, p.4: 10).

Concluding Notes

The theoretical elements and the historical experiences discussed subsidize the theses developed throughout this article. Anarchists have a conception and a general project of power that bases their conception of class, established by means of a type of power (domination), and constitutes the basis of their notion of social transformation, which is characterized by: their belief in the capacity of realization of the subjects that constitute part of the different dominated classes, its implication in the transformation of that capacity into a social force, its attempt for this force to increase permanently, its defense of a revolutionary process that allows to overcome the enemy forces and replace the dominating power of society with a self-managing power.

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Felipe Corrêa
Anarchism, Power, Class and Social Change

This article by Brazilian anarchist Felipe Corrêa discusses the relationship of anarchism with power, class, and revolutionary social change. Starting from a definition of anarchism it proposes to conceptualize power in terms of asymmetric, or uneven, relationships between social forces. It also puts forward that anarchists have a conception of power based on the belief in the capacity of the dominated classes as a social force, the defense of a revolutionary process, and replacing the dominating power of capitalist society with a self-managed power. Translation by Servio G. Felipe Corrêa is a teacher and political militant in São Paulo, Brazil. He is a participant with the Institute of Theory and Anarchist History (ITHA) and Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira or Brazilian Anarchist Coordination. This article was originally published in Em Debate, no. 8, 2012. Translation from Spanish by Servio G., member of Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation.

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