This interview with Juan Carlos Mechoso of the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) – conducted by Felipe Corrêa – discusses FAU's "strategy of *especificismo*". Relevant topics are addressed in the questions, such as: the concept of *especificismo*, this type of anarchism's relationship with the classics and with similar experiences that have emerged in history, *especifismo's* relation with the Latin American context, comparisons with other ideologies that promote operating at distinct levels (party - mass movement), scientific concepts, ideology and its relation to socialism, programmatic positions that anarchists should defend in popular movements, concepts and conceptions of class, neo-liberalism, the development model of Latin American, popular power, strategy, armed struggle and social revolution ★

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The Strategy of Especifismo

by Juan Carlos Mechoso,

Federación Anarquista Uruguaya
(Uruguayan Anarchist Federation–FAU)

Interviewed by Felipe Corrêa

Interview conducted between May and August 2009

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Front cover: Juan Carlos Mechoso (left) with interviewer, Felipe Corrêa.

6. Georges Fontenis. “Libertarian Communist Manifesto”. [https://zabalazabooks.net/2019/10/18/manifesto-of-libertarian-communism/]
7. It is the book “History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918-1921)”, written by Piotr Arshinov. [https://libcom.org/history/history-makhnovist-movement-1918-1921-peter-arshinov]
8. “Episteme” is the word used by the Greek philosophers for scientific knowledge.
9. This refers to insufficient alternatives that have emerged to deal with domination and exploitation such as the World Social Forum, referred to as “alternativists”, and liberal management solutions based on skilled people, referred to as “technicists”.
10. “Mestizo” is a term used in Latin America to refer to a person of mixed European and Indigenous American descent.
11. “Que se vayan todos!” (“All of them must go!”) was the popular slogan by which the December 2001 mass popular uprising in Argentina became known. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/December_2001_riots_in_Argentina]
12. “Conveyor belt” refers to a Leninist term in Portuguese for when a vanguard party gives the direction and the union just reproduces the political line determined by the party.
13. “Focalism” (or “foco”) refers to a theory of revolution by means of guerrilla war inspired by Ché Guevara. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foco]

Notes:

1. Juan Carlos Mechoso. *Acción Directa Anarquista: una história de FAU*. Volumes I, II, III and IV. Montevideo: Excerpts, 2011, 2005, 2006, 2009.

2. "*This refers to the Marxist schema of explanation of social functioning from the economic base of society, which in this vision, determines the thinking and institutions of the system. If the economy determined social life, and by the advance and development of the "productive forces" and its contradiction with "social relations of production" produced the revolution by itself, nothing could be done by the oppressed. The revolution would come alone, it would be the inevitable end of time, "the end of history". It should be noted that the Marxist vision approves of the development of capitalism, since it would generate "its own gravediggers", with which idea Marx and Engels applauded the invasion by Britain of India and of Mexico by the United States because it supposedly accelerated the revolution. A thought that contains a faith in progress and historical evolution.*

   Anarchism has historically criticised that deterministic vision, placing human will as an essential aspect of social transformations. Without that will to change, organised and put into action, there is no revolutionary process possible. There is no determinism and ideology is not "scientific", it responds to the sphere of thought, feelings, hopes and a set of behaviours and beliefs. Therefore, the FAU's especifismo has had as a permanent task the development of theoretical study to elaborate our own categories of analysis, trying to analyse reality correctly, avoiding falling into simplistic schemes that reduce everything to the economic. The capitalist system is composed of several structures (ideological-cultural, political, military, legal, as well as economic) that interrelate and none of them have a priori predominance."

   See document: "Wellington Galarza-Malvina Tabares" by FAU-FAG; today adopted as an organisational document by CALA (Latin American Anarchist Co-ordination).

3. See the documents by Volin and Sébastien Faure, both called "The Anarchist Synthesis".

4. Dielo Truda. "Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists" [https://zabalazabooks.net/2019/08/14/organisational-platform-of-the-general-union-of-anarchists-draft/]. The correct name of this document according to the new translations is: "The Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)".

5. FAKB "Platform of the Bulgarian Anarcho-Communist Federation". In: Michael Schmidt. "The Anarchist-communist Mass Line: Bulgarian Anarchism Armed". [https://zabalazabooks.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/bulgarian_anarchism_armed_michael_schmidt.pdf]

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Felipe Corrêa (FC): In this interview I would not only like to address the history of the *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya* (Uruguayan Anarchist Federation–FAU) – which has been covered in detail in the four volumes of *Acción Directa Anarquista: una historia de FAU* (Anarchist Direct Action: A History of FAU) [1] – but also the strategy of social transformation proposed by the FAU, which implies *especifismo*. Noting also that the FAU's *especifismo* is of widespread influence in Latin America, and even more so in Brazil – all the *especifista* organisations in the country, whether consolidated or in formation, are directly influenced by it — how would you define it? For the FAU, what is *especifismo*?

Juan Carlos Mechoso (JCM): I understand the thematic priority you mention, although it seems useful to me to say that the FAU's *especifismo* can also be "seen" and "read" in its functioning, in its taking a position in the face of certain problems, as well as in the strategy that it has applied throughout its political and militant history. Of course, I am not saying anything you did not already know by that, but it seemed useful to say anyway.

Even so, I want to state that I will try to answer your questions based on positions and documents that the FAU has developed at different historical moments. However, I will give preference to those that have more to do with the organisation's theoretical-political position today.

I say this because my work as a militant has, throughout these 54 years, always been within the framework of an organisation and I participated in it, in different instances, in the elaboration, adaptation and reaffirmation of positions that have been the horizon of our daily social and political practice. My formation took place in this context. I believe that what will interest you the most are the positions the FAU has defended in the different social spheres. Certainly, I will give personal opinions in relation to certain particular questions, and perhaps in relation to some details. I will also intervene personally when, due to the technical requirements of an interview, it is necessary to summarise the texts produced by the FAU itself. Either way, I will try to make sure that the answers align with the organisation's fundamental orientations.

When the FAU was founded in 1956, *especifismo* was the common theoretical denominator for the militants in this political task. This conception of anarchism was a strong general reference; understanding by this the necessity of building an anarchist political organisation. The most relevant theoretical reference at that time was Errico Malatesta. This did not mean – nor was the subject even

discussed – that all of his ideas and proposals would be considered as they were produced in their own historical moment. However, many of his theoretical positions, politics and propositions for working in the social and popular milieu were especially considered and provided inspiration.

It's important to state that from the beginning the FAU's *especifismo*, although using Malatesta as a reference, did not incorporate many of his conceptions and propositions – including his polemics with other currents of anarchism. Of these polemics special attention was given to his refutation of individualism, which was widely shared by us at that time. Mikhail Bakunin was another strong reference. Some of his ideas, prioritised at that time by the FAU, were also incorporated depending on the time and place we were living in.

You could ask me: Why did the FAU incorporate some things and not others? This has an historical explanation. In the construction of the FAU there were distinct generations of militants. There were comrades who had been active in anarchism since the 1910s, 20s, and 30s. Many of these militants participated in various internal polemics before and after the Russian Revolution, as well as in different organisational experiences. Comrades who even met, talked and discussed with militants who formed the first unions in Uruguay, around the 1880s.

There are cases like that of Antonio Marzovillo, who had been active since 1905 and who actively participated in the formation of support committees for Emiliano Zapata when he was fighting in Mexico. Several militants had also participated in the 1936 Spanish Revolution. There were also anarcho-syndicalists who organised together with comrades that were active or present in the reorganisation of the *Federación Obrera Regional Uruguaya* (Uruguayan Regional Workers' Federation–FORU) in 1911; comrades that, on that occasion, promoted *especifismo*.

At the time of the FAU's formation other texts dealing with *especifismo* were circulated together with Malatesta's material. One of them, from the Uruguayan militancy itself, was elaborated by José María Fosalba in the 1930s; another, about anarchism and organisation, by Georges Balkanski, who was linked to the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB).

Besides this there were also concrete *especifista* antecedents. In 1919, an Anarchist Relations Committee was established which, in addition to co-ordinating libertarian militancy at the union and popular level, had the intention of founding a specific organisation. In 1926, after a long process of activities and discussions, a plenary of the Anarchist Relations Committee gave life to the FAU; at that time Anarchist Federation of Uruguay. The FAU of today is heir to all this, although complexly.

However, despite these varied experiences of militancy that occurred in the formation of the FAU the theoretical discussion was not tense and did not take very long. There was a tacit agreement since the call was made. The "old"

FC: Other important contributions by our current to anarchism are positions on militant commitment and dedication to the cause, within the framework of an anarchist political organisation. Could you talk a little about the importance of these aspects for a project of revolutionary transformation? Finally, which term do you prefer: libertarian socialism or anarchism? Would you like to say some final words?

JCM: There is an old saying here: "Anarchism is a way of life". This was said by the old comrades in the early 1900s, who had been active since 1905, 1910, 1920 and so on. When the FAU was organised this saying — which had so often departed from the lips of those sober, modest, self-sacrificing comrades — became an ideological-ethical element of the first order. Something so simple and yet so important. How important it was! No pride or elitism. We wanted to synthesise into one sentence something like complete surrender to the cause, to feel it and practice it every day, to be consequential, to resist complicity with the system by means of related conduct, to fight the superficiality of the ethereal and vain word.

These former militants meant that there are some things worth giving your life to, including the search for a just, free and solidaristic society. They meant that it was impossible to see so many infamies and atrocities and remain indifferent or concerned only with personal matters, seeing the rest as something secondary.

But let us not be mistaken in thinking that this implied isolation or contempt for different customs. No. These militants met among the people, organised fraternal festivals, soccer clubs, carnival bands, theatres, picnics and had completely normal human contact in their communities as well as in their family life, which was like that of any other neighbour. For them, it was necessary to permanently correct deeply rooted defects and devote as much time as possible to the struggle and propagation of the ideal; to the preparation of the revolution.

I believe that commitment to the cause must be profound, as well as commitment to political organisation with a social project of transformation; the anarchist organisation that intends to organise everything differently so that the collective does not negate but potentiates the individual.

Regarding the question about libertarian socialism or anarchism; I consider them synonymous. However, I must say that I prefer the term "anarchism". It is a sentimental issue that involves emotions and memories.

I return now to the present tense and conclude our conversation. For the final words of commitment to the cause I would let all the FAU comrades who have been tortured, murdered, "disappeared", shot — like many others in our beloved history — speak through their conduct. They craved this tomorrow of socialism and freedom from the depths of their "souls", and they did not hesitate in dedicating themselves completely to it. They are always telling us: Come on! Let's go! Because this cause deserves everything!

comrades considered many of those controversies that were met with passion, at another time, to be ironed out.

It's possible to say, coming much closer to the "real" question, that the organisation's political character was more evident in its way of confronting the task of the different work fronts: union, student, community and internal. Analyses of the Uruguayan historical and conjunctural situation were performed – relating it to the general political, union, student and community spheres and putting an emphasis on Latin America.

One of the first tasks carried out by the FAU was to organise the Latin American Anarchist Congress, which took place in 1957 and was participated in by militants from Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. The central concern of the young militants, a majority at the time, was that the political organisation that was being created should be an instrument for strengthening anarchism and bring it "up to date" in relation to our specific Latin American and Uruguayan reality. It seemed fundamental not to copy or automatically import schemas and formulas that had reason for being in other historical conjunctures. We would say more or less the following: "We are obliged to think about our reality and our time without mental laziness and produce responses accordingly".

It should be noted that this prioritising Latin America did not preclude a strong international concern; considering the internationalist framework of Uruguayan anarchism, which has practically existed since the 1860s. That's how, from the beginning, the FAU adopted what was called a "*thirdist*" position here, which consisted of completely rejecting both "Russian and Yankee imperialism".

In this manner the FAU's *especifismo* established itself, from the beginning, which translated into concrete realisations: a Statement of Principles; an Organisational Charter that set out the militants' rights and duties; attempts to understand the general and particular historical conjuncture and work projects for the different spheres, involving what was immediate and what concerned the medium and long term.

At the same time, we were aware that many of these positions should be refined and deepened at future congresses. It's worth mentioning something else that seems relevant: we did not consider the issues exhausted; there was modesty and an awareness of the complexity of most of the issues being addressed and, on the other hand, we often recalled the damage caused by dogmatisms, ready-made schemas and abstractions that were adopted out of context, based on the belief that they would be valid for all times and places. "Today, more than ever, anarchism must be open-minded" an "old" militant once said.

It must be stressed that these positions never implied relativism or pragmatism. There was always a conceptual structure – which was conceived as something in motion, encompassing the possibilities of change according to new contributions that emerged in the field of knowledge – that supported the various discourses.

The general aspects of these conceptual issues were discussed and we came to some common understandings.

There was a rejection of the infrastructure and superstructure architectural schema and special concern concerning concepts and issues such as: power and the state, ideology, the role of utopia, science and socialism, understanding of class struggle beyond the economic structure, reformism and revolution, pacifism and revolutionary violence, method and content, permanent elements of the capitalist structure, a rejection of evolutionism and progressivism.[2] Such were the most relevant concepts and questions at that time.

I must make it clear that *especifismo* was not equally understood by everyone and there were nuances. The greater or lesser degree of organisation and commitment to decisions were issues that generated divergences. What is known as "synthesis" – that is all anarchist currents acting together in the same organisation – was never a matter for discussion.[3]

At a certain moment, however, facts like some groups' practices and their way of operating highlighted strategies and priorities that were very different from those recommended by the union, community and popular sectors and part of the militants in the student milieu. This factor, in addition to the political aspects of the time and the conception of rupture that was beginning to be advocated, resulted in the exiting of a group of comrades in 1963. Of course, these comrades were anarchists but they had another conception of how to bring about social transformations.

I am saying this to affirm that the FAU had different periods. After 1963, the organisational aspects, the strategic coherence with a conception of rupture, the collective position on the need for greater preparation for the repression that was manifesting were deepened much more. But this is an issue that can be dealt with later.

It was also at that time that the systematisation of theoretical issues began to be considered more rigorously, organising the conceptual structure that would support the different discourses with due coherence. Because, for us, a political organisation needed a consistent conceptual tool, or toolbox, that would help formulate and guide the strategy of rupture that we wanted to carry forward, that would enable rigorous readings of the social reality and the development of the consequent political lines in order to put this project into practice.

These questions were not only in the discourse or the realm of desires. In short, they were seen as activities pertaining to any other front of work, treating them with the same regularity and planning.

"Ruben, what do you remember about the Escuelita*?*

— The first question was that process of psychological testing to which we were submitted. I remember that this took place for a few days, in a hospital amphitheater, and comprised a battery of tests, drawings, histories and maps. All the tests used at that time, and which were re-examined in the comrades' literature, were based on a critical perspective of psychoanalysis. And that was important.

Marxism has distinctly never given a damn about this perspective, equating it with pharmacological psychiatry. For me, this process was very important and opened up a whole new world of literature. It turned out later, with the school now functioning, that the test results were spectacular as they got 90 percent of the assessments right, as we'll see later.

The tests were only an introduction. Theoretical and practical questions were soon addressed. In practical terms the rudiments of explosives, weapons and tactics were given. I also remember that historical and philosophical questions were addressed, and I remember a graph, which had a square we could put on and take off, besides a whole discussion about science.

The Escuelita *also encouraged the militants to read on their own, by their own initiative. If we compare it with boarding schools in Argentina and elsewhere we will see that the* Escuelita *has nothing to do with them. For example, the Argentine* Partido Revolucionário de los Trabajadores *(Revolutionary Workers' Party—PRT) was very ideological and, when it came to arms, there was a lot of lyricism. The* Montoneros *invested a lot in military training and little in ideological formation. The* Escuelita *encompassed a range of things. In every education system there is always a relationship, a basis of transfer of knowledge.*

Another thing I remember is that the batteries of tests were used critically. Because if it were not so, if the orthodox criteria were applied, we would all be considered unfit psychopaths. The technicians had to reassess all the tests with this distinct criteria, and that was a lot of work. There was great concern for the proper functioning of the Escuelita*.*

I would even add that, on comparing what I remember of the Escuelita *with the Argentine Marxist experience, I could understand the* Escuelita *more clearly; both in its modesty and its grandeur, both in its psychoanalytic techniques as well as in its human concerns and philosophical doubts.*

Only a Marxist can assert that it is only class struggle that moves history. It was good to fill our heads with doubts and certainties, starting from which we judge life. This sums up the wonderful aspect of an education system."

on these topics. Several specialised comrades, mostly teachers, were in charge of the training process.

The activity was carried out regularly and continuously, producing fruitful results. Nando and Silva were two of its great animators.

It is necessary to return to the social context in which the task of training was carried out in order to notice the importance given to it. It was a time when repression was in full swing. Constant street patrolling, persecutions, raiding homes and surveillance of suspect places. Under such conditions it was necessary to bring comrades of the armed apparatus who did not belong to the same league together with the specialists and teachers. At the same time, it was important to take care of the comrades' general security and partitioning.

Besides this, the house was unknown to almost everyone. This required extra effort as it was necessary to take the comrades there while making sure they did not know where they were. Meetings were held with the militants wearing hoods that hid their faces. But everyone was convinced that the goal was worth the effort and the risk.

This initiative arose in the Fomento (Junta Federal), deliberative organ of the FAU. A lot of discussion was also not necessary as there was consensus on the subject. It was the kind of task that was anticipated because militant formation was always highly regarded. There was a whole history behind it. Only Silva, who would later become a strong animator, had some doubts, which were basically the following: Is this not a task to be performed a little later on? Would there be sufficient interest to make the effort worthwhile? Did the OPR comrades that would participate see this as a necessity?

Once the doubts were resolved we decided to proceed with the activity, which would be organised by Rogelio. Nando would do the first part, forming a cell that would work with him and a group that would produce tests that would then be applied to all OPR members. These tests would then be discussed at a joint meeting afterwards.

Comrade Nando was a psychologist of the highest technical level and a person of excellent human qualities who communicated very well. The other comrades who formed the cell next to him at that time were also professionals. This group worked tirelessly and continually on the design and application of the tests. Once this part was over, regular collective meetings were held in which a number of other issues were addressed.

The results of these experiments were considered very good. But it is better to let one of the participants speak about that — a fellow worker from the textile industry, I believe — a "disciple" who joined the activity enthusiastically.

FC: I see that the FAU's *especifismo* has a lot to do with its own history. It's also possible to note that you relate *especifismo* with a classic tendency of anarchism, which advocates the distinction between political organisation and popular movements and, in this way, I believe it's inevitable to agree with the wide influence of Malatesta's and Bakunin's organisational conceptions, which held this position. However, these are not the only influences, since we can also identify traces of anarcho-syndicalism and the expropriator anarchism of the Rio de la Plata region in the FAU. Could you describe for me what the influences of each of these "parts" are on the concept of *especifismo* you advocate? Could the FAU be considered heir to the Bakuninist conception of revolutionary political organisation represented by the Alliance of Socialist Democracy as well as to Malatesta's conception of the "anarchist party" today?

JCM: Yes. It's possible to say that all of this, in general, exists within the FAU and we will see how now. In Uruguay, the two most significant anarchist conceptions or currents were anarcho-syndicalism and *especifismo*. The so-called anti-organisationist current and affinity groups that advocated "propaganda by the deed" had little influence and had already disappeared by the 1940s. There remained a few comrades that had participated in expropriations or collaborated in armed operations and who, at the time of its foundation, joined the FAU. The only ones that did not join the organisation were a Spaniard who was in prison for 24 years and Boadas Ribas, a Catalan close to Buenaventura Durruti and who, once in the Rio de la Plata region, had relations with Miguel Arcángel Rosigna. However, he remained close to the FAU and collaborated on specific activities more than once.

What is called "individualism" did not have any significant expression in Uruguay at that time, since the anti-organisationists constituted something else that would warrant a separate explanation.

Various expressions of anarchism, which if taken in a purely abstract manner are distinct, were being integrated in a rich and fluid process. But this integration, which involved a wide circulation of ideas, experiences, opinions and affinities did not affect the organisation's hard organisational core.

I am referring to what you call the "anarchist party" in the question. The organisation was built by militant subjects who admired the anarchist expropriators and avengers, the workers' struggle for revolutionary and classist ends, *Los Solidários* and Durruti, the revolutionary attempt in Spain and Bakunin's at times clandestine insurrectional, classist and organisational position.

However, the process did not unfold as a patchwork but as a weave; woven together through a particular method. It's true that it united some more than others, since there was one implicit constant: the necessity of revolutionary violence for a victorious process of rupture with the capitalist system. This system was evaluated by most militants in the same way as Malatesta, Bakunin

and other comrades, who argued that domination is based on violence. Violence exercised in different spheres with the aim of ensuring the reproduction of the system, even with its historical unfolding. Such a violent configuration, with an enormous capacity for reproduction, could only be discontinued in this way.

Let's go back to the organisational question. During activities that included discussion, elaboration and social action, we in fact constructed an ideological-organisational framework. In this framework we did not see it as a problem for public and clandestine work to be carried out at the same time; we also maintained that armed and public popular-union activities should have their own organisations, according to their specificity, and for them not to be treated separately but within the same organisation. The FAU, as a political organisation, should contain within itself all the activity necessary for its strategy and its project of rupture.

The militants that continued in the FAU after 1963 identified with these notions and felt that this collection of activities constituted a unit that, organised in the same collective, would have operational potential in social and political terms and could carry out a coherent process of rupture and begin to establish new social relations.

If, owing to a misunderstanding of "the principles", we cannot build an anarchist organisation that understands the collection of activities necessary for a process of transforming social structures we would be giving anarchism a death certificate.

It was at that time that the FAU as a political organisation integrated these components, which ended up merging and being reconstructed into one unit, giving it the character it has today. This construction was not the product of a political decision or of intellectuals burning midnight oil, but was forged in action and was the result of failures and rectifications; as well as of the passion for building an anarchism that was part of the social-political scene, and not one only of meetings.

Even so, this is not a finished process since such questions are endless. The adaptation, correction and integration of new concepts seem to be permanent needs.

The FAU had, has and intends to have the intention of promoting a revolutionary, organised anarchism that is in accordance with present times; such was its intention that, with modesty and consequence, it tried to carry forward. Of course this involved hits and misses, something that is almost inseparable from doing and being present in a complex social interaction that requires continual responses.

There was a central concern not to turn anarchism into a critique alone, which would eventually create a world of gloom and hopelessness very close to resignation. To avoid any misunderstanding I can say that we are in favour of critical thinking but, together with it, we believe it necessary for there to be consequent proposals and actions.

and rejection of authoritarianism undermine the effectiveness, development and performance of specifically armed work? I can say no.

We can draw many conclusions, even taking into account the short period of this experience.

It cannot be said in any way that things functioned perfectly. I have no interest in idealising the issue. But, considering the errors and problems we were facing and which we sought to overcome, we saw that we gained effectiveness and strengthened the exercise of tasks. We saw that self-discipline and the convinced comrade worked miracles. Even with great limitations and a lack of resources things worked. There was surrender, willingness, the capacity of each one to resolve things; there was an acceptable level of continuity and growth.

Fomento (Junta Federal), Aguilar (organism responsible for the armed section), Leagues (columns composed of three cells of five members each) and Cells (basic organism of five members) merged and created a distinct culture of armed militancy. It had no reference to what was emerging at that historical moment, which was spreading across the continent and was much imitated; despite great and respectable heroisms it had nothing to do with our purposes.

"We have to go about creating our things, with our own conceptions, keeping them in relation to the history of this place and to our ideas. Imitation is not a good counsellor." This was a widely shared criterion.

It was creating something that could not be accomplished by decrees, resolutions of meeting nor good manuals. A capacity for reflection and effective participation by the militants was developing, so as to create a love and an understanding of the cause that was being defended.

Obviously this experience, besides being brief, had problems. However, it left us convinced of one thing: it is possible to develop a libertarian "military" activity and it is a myth that, for this to happen, everything can be better articulated by means of authoritarianism and hierarchies. "The organisation must have values that prefigure what we want tomorrow." This was always affirmed and oriented all our tasks.

Regarding the concern for the militants' formation, the development of their reflective capacity, there is a concrete experience that allows us to deepen the understanding of this situation: The "*Escuelita*" (Little School).

The activity became known by this diminutive, perhaps conceived in order to remove its solemnity and in seeking coherence with the notion of modesty, so emphasised in cell evaluations. What was the *Escuelita*? It was an experience carried out with youth from OPR who were taking on greater responsibilities. It included an activity of transferring knowledge on different topics: philosophy, psychology, history, pedagogy. We sought to generate discussions and reflections

the collective was improving and it became difficult for an incumbent to maintain themselves arbitrarily.

It was not as if a boss would one day wake up just and say: Let's do criticism and self-criticism. As a logical counterpart many turned it into pure conformism for fear of what might happen next. And, in this way, everything was as it was before and so it remained. As it is jokingly said, in some cases: "Any criticism that is to say that all is well is welcome".

It should be emphasised that the daily practice of these values did not make one lose sight of the specific character of the activity. There were purely executive instances and permanent tasks that had to be done in a certain way. For example, no one questioned that, at the moment of the operation, it was the person in charge who decided on the problems that might occur and that, by chance, had been left out of the previous planning — the imponderable. This is not a time for meetings.

"Yes, the activity may be technically military, but we should get used to mentioning this word as little as possible. We must use terms like revolutionary political action", said Gerardo Gatti in a decision-making instance of the FAU.

With positions of this type, important cultural rudiments that materialised the values we prioritised were being created. Habits were created that made the militant see their rights and duties with clarity. Many things began to be "natural". Being authoritarian, arbitrary, not having modesty or solidarity were not things that went unwritten and were never tolerated in silence.

The term "commander" was used only as a joke. There was an ideology that drove and animated all that. Some comrades had been formed in conversations about episodes of struggle, demands for freedom, humanly just and respectful future societies.

All the mechanisms of power that demanded submission, that glorify the authorities and cardboard heroes were repudiated. Instruments of human robotisation in the service of the powerful, such as repressive apparatus, were completely rejected. The truth is that, in the framework of that culture, looking like a soldier did not gratify anyone.

It was a libertarian environment. From it emanated concerns not to produce soldiers of the revolution, but revolutionary comrades. There was a strong resistance to militaristic deviations and authoritarian practices. It was therefore normal for the armed apparatus to be subordinate to the political; that things were done according to the organisation's overall strategy, its conjunctural assessments. The sovereignty of arms found no breeding ground, nor the presumption thereof in general.

Did this approach to discipline and self-discipline, collective protagonism, absence of militarism, militant respect as a human entity, egalitarian treatment

In its Statement of Principles our organisation states more or less the following: Anarchism is fundamentally based on a critique of relations of domination in all social spheres – political, economic, military, legal, religious, educational, etc.; this critique is permanently being redefined according to the concrete society and historical moment in which it finds itself, distinguishing and hierarchising the determinant levels in the social structure – but always expressing, with all the rigour and coherence, the need to find the original foundations, the hard core of the social injustices and the crises generated by them.

With these analytical elements it is possible to perform a complete critique of the different social formations and guide the elaboration of an alternative social project; that can suppress the different forms of privilege and enable the revolutionary practice that this project requires in this long course of diverse struggles. A theoretical elaboration, a process and a struggle that have strongly organised political work as their central axis.

FC: Some sectors of our current often ended up stigmatising Piotr Kropotkin – mainly for his evolutionary and, in a certain sense, educationalist conception – often invalidating or diminishing him as a relevant theorist for "our" anarchism. I do not agree with this because I believe that Kropotkin, despite having different positions to ours — many because of the context in which he lived — also has important contributions that must be taken into account. I see that Kropotkin is often quoted and used by the FAU and by you too. From your point of view, what is the validity of Kropotkin's thinking for *especifismo*?

JCM: Kropotkin, his thinking and his anarchist communism had a lot of influence in the Rio de la Plata region and elsewhere in Latin America. It was books and articles such as The Conquest of Bread, An Appeal to the Young and writings translated in newspapers of the time that forcefully spread anarchism and, especially, its communist conception. So much so that, in Uruguay, the anti-organisationists, anarcho-syndicalists and *especifistas* were all anarchist communists. When Malatesta began to spread communism it was already known in certain environments. Much of this knowledge relates to Kropotkin and the contributions that a strong immigration brought to these parts: several libertarian militants from Spain, Italy and France who already knew these theoretical-political elements well.

There are no doubts that, regardless of the respect we have for Kropotkin, one can say that he has his pros and cons with respect to his theoretical and political proposals and postures at the international level.

One must bear in mind that he was linked to the First International in 1872 as a result of his time in Switzerland. Shortly thereafter, he began to elaborate his conception of anarchist communism in opposition to Bakuninist collectivism,

which had been dominant until then. It's also not correct to say that he was a person who devoted himself solely to intellectual work, to research and not to committed militant work.

Kropotkin was arrested in Russia around 1874 and was imprisoned for about two years; later escaping, traveling through some European countries and carrying out propaganda. At that time, he founded *Le Revolté*, an anarchist journal that reached the Rio de la Plata, where it was widely read, especially by immigrants who soon spread its ideas. He was also linked to workers' strikes and his connection with the International Workers Association cost him a trial and five years in prison in Lyon. Owing to mobilisations for his freedom he was not imprisoned all these years; he was released two years early.

Why am I saying this? Although I am not saying anything original it's always a good idea to deal with the political stature and size of this militant, even if we have various differences in relation to his positions.

Kropotkin's work is broad and varied in theme. It ranges from the spirit of revolt, from prisons to mutual aid to considerations about the state and the French Revolution. It seems clear to me that this is not the space for making broader comments about his work.

It must be added, to avoid possible confusion, that several of Kropotkin's positions were not adopted in our region and even less so in the FAU, which did not even take some of them into consideration. These positions include: his general organisational proposal; his enthusiastic optimism that the revolution would come soon, an optimistic conception even for that agitated social context; his fatalism, marked by the emphasis that "states are already heading, as historical fatality, to their decay"; his mechanical conception of the universe, which Malatesta would disapproved of.

Even if it's possible to find his theoretical-political enthusiasm being reproduced in materials of the labour movement in Rio de la Plata, it can be said that it had no negative effects. It must also be considered that this occurred at moments of great impetus in the anarchist-oriented workers' movement, which had a revolutionary objective in mind. However, it can also be said that most of his materials chosen for diffusion were not of a theoretical or philosophical nature but, essentially, agitational.

I am not arguing for anything like the defence of a "return to Kropotkin". He was not an influential theorist in the formation of the militants of the FAU, but neither can he be said to have been completely absent. Some previously much discussed materials were edited by the organisation, and I say this with total frankness, seeking to contribute to the orientation and strategy adopted. Many of these materials are linked to the working class or to topics such as prisons.

One can say that Kropotkin enjoys much respect and recognition in the FAU because of his extensive militant work and his writings, so widely disseminated

the classic conception and practices. We had to perform experiments, based on certain criteria of our libertarian matrix.

To begin with, we gave great importance to the words used, which were related to the necessary functions, because of this magical relationship between words and things. Along with the word comes the content, as well as the deviation. There was no "commander" anywhere; comrades with certain responsibilities should be called "responsibles". This was resolved, established and practiced.

Thus, the activity of the OPR has never had bosses or commanders. There were responsibles, and the content of this led to very different results. Clearly, along with that there were other things that formed a unity in this attempt to create a culture of resistance to commandment and militarism. Together with the different daily practices, internally bound by an ideology, we prioritised the training of comrades; we relied on having a broad training.

I will first talk about some of these small, everyday practices that helped so much in formation; the daily practices that are so effective.

"Self-criticism and values should not be empty discourses, detached from what we do every day." This was said, felt and done.

The problem of values was experienced daily. All OPR cells had an evaluation form focusing on the militants' behaviour. Periodically, monthly or every two months, this task of evaluation was carried out. The cell itself was self-evaluating, and in this instance both the cell and the leagues (organ formed by three cells) were analysed.

The evaluation form contained values such as solidarity, fraternity, modesty and ability to deliver, which preceded the "military" operative ability which, of course, was also properly assessed.

This had very positive effects. To begin with, criticism and self-criticism were not empty words, they were not something that was said and not done. Thus, it was normal, totally legitimate and natural for a person in charge to be questioned and even to be asked to change roles.

It thus broke with the arbitrary means of power which, visibly or invisibly, end up generating perverse practices. There was an express tendency to minimise and devalue such things. It was a process that demanded significant work, seeing as it does not occur automatically. At least in this "Western, Christian and capitalist" culture the question of power and exaltation of the ego should never be disregarded. Without a doubt, it was not the same thing to potentialise these resources and to combat them.

"The comrade in charge of the league must improve a lot. Your modesty leaves something to be desired. " Comments like this from a cell member were normal and positive. Therefore, by constituting a real right, not a formal phraseology,

FC: The OPR's distinct character in relation to "focalism" is clear. Could you detail the functioning of this technical armed task a little? Within our libertarian conception, how was the operation of the armed apparatus viewed?

JCM: This has been a major concern since the beginning of the OPR's regular task. The libertarian experience in this sense was very small. Not with regard to action itself, of course, but in relation to the work of armed direct action within an organisational framework and in appropriate relation to a general strategy, with responsibility, self-discipline and discipline. A process in which a group of comrades acted as another part of the organisation and affirmed their commitment to the collective resolutions in which they participated like the rest of the comrades.

There is a comrade, Carmelo, who was imprisoned in another country and lived, for many years, in prison with comrades from other organisations. He told us that militants from other organisations found the way we had approached the armed struggle strange, and at the same time interesting.

Carmelo is an old comrade with a lot of experience and a very good theoretical-political formation, and for many years he has been concerned with writing on the subject, expanding the attempt I made, synthetically, in volume IV of *Acción Directa Anarquista: una história de FAU* (Anarchist Direct Action: a FAU history). That is, this topic continues to interest us and, in due course, we will have more elaborated material on it. Now, I will refer to the book I mentioned.

Undoubtedly, armed struggle is a task that can contribute to many deviations and, also, for things to be observed from a different point of view to ours; in some cases, even worse, it can lead to behaviours that we have nothing to do with and that are the opposite of what we want in our struggle.

But, as I said, there was no anarchist holy tablet from which we could draw guidance and suggestions. We had to experiment, with fundamental aspects of our ideology as a guide. It was a challenge, but at the same time a true political obligation.

It was often said: "We have to be careful not to lose meaning of things. Certain values that are fundamental to us should not be abandoned along the way. This is an activity that can end in complicated deformations and have grave consequences".

Needless to say these precautions were based on our libertarian conception and the known experiences, both historical and recent, that were taking place in the guerrilla movements that existed in various countries.

It's possible to say that there was a libertarian concept about how this armed activity, which was taking its first steps, should take place. There was a set of ideas that, as we believed, could give a different character to this work based on

in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We appreciate that he was concerned with systematising themes, looking for theoretical and analytical tools but that the episteme developed at that time, which was very characteristic of the epoch, often limited him, making him believe he had a knowledge that was still distant and led him into a dead end.

His work, however, cannot be scorned despite questions that are incompatible with us, of which there are undoubtedly many. I reiterate, then, that there are materials by Kropotkin that have an historical contribution and can be selected with a view to partially adapting them to an anarchist organisation that does not have its "philosophical" conception.

FC: I see from what you are saying that there was, and still is, a concern by the FAU not to import a ready-made theory from Europe, or even from the classical theorists; but also to include Latin elements and its own reflections on anarchism, so that it can be adapted to our reality. Clearly, it seems to me that there was a great concern with adapting the ideology to the conjuncture, to the historical moment and to our locality. What were the local elements and reflections that were incorporated into anarchism so that it could be adapted to the Latin American reality?

JCM: This is true. In fact, we decided not to import theories, schemas, methods and proposals that had their historical moment and that do not constitute an effective contribution to our work at the social-political level today.

But we have to avoid confusion because we never wanted to produce our own theory, our own Latin American conceptual body outside of what was produced in Europe or in other parts of the world. That is, we never wanted to produce a Latin American science or a science from other parts of the world. Scientific knowledge that is produced, as long as it is consistent, is of value anywhere in the world.

To make a playful analogy: we would never reject the theory of relativity, its notion of time and space because Einstein was not Latin American. Something that might resemble the USSR's absurdities of demonising Mendel's research or Jacobson's works because they did not fit the schema of dialectical logic.

At the time this discussion took place, we considered that there was new research and new knowledge that put an end to previous notions and offered new approaches, and that should necessarily be incorporated into anarchism under penalty that it would otherwise remain an historical relic.

We assert that the categorical body adopted, because of its proper rigour – even with the notion that knowledge is infinite and that this body therefore cannot be dogmatic – should be complemented with elements that each specific locality could offer. Taking into account the existing realities in

Latin America — its dependence, its imperial oppression and all its history — we emphasised that it was fundamental to study each reality, each social formation, so that the theoretical tools and political co-ordinates have a basis, constituting proposals not in relation to a people manufactured in thought, but the effectively existing one.

The history of the emancipation of the Latin American peoples from colonial rule, the characteristics of these movements and their bases nourished cycles of debate that alternated with the discussion of other libertarian experiences, such as the Makhnovist movement, Magón and Zapata's Mexico and the Spanish Revolution.

Regarding the realities of Latin America, several magazines and contributions by militants who traveled through various countries and had an effective insertion in the labour and popular milieu of countries with large indigenous and *mestizo* populations were circulated. The federal ideas and struggles of José Gervasio Artigas, for example, generated much interest.

None of this had anything to do with nationalism, as has sometimes been said about the FAU. There was always a clear internationalist definition; but we knew we did not float in thin air, but were on solid ground with a people and history. It's certain that some of these things went against the "culture" of the time, which was very much rooted in very general and reductionist parameters. Latin America was sometimes spoken of as if it were something homogeneous and could be described and interpreted with a very narrow set of concepts.

Some things were being sold as science. Things that are well known today, such as the assertions that the places in which the conditions for socialism would first arise would be those with significant industrial development and a large concentration of the proletariat. It was said that the most important thing to consider would be elements of this type, and that beyond that, there were nothing but residual remnants that would be quickly liquidated by development.

In our region there were very strong "remnants", as in the case of the original and oppressed peoples who carried out struggles for important demands and, often, very deep resistances – some of which were associated with millennial ideologies and motivated by them.

The totalising, almost mechanical conceptions that I mentioned above did not come from our midsts. However, some of them were sometimes absorbed, bringing with it similar positions that have contributed to confusion and, often, to the rather contradictory character of our theoretical and political position. For example, along with the reductionist aspect of the economistic interpretation or with Eurocentrism came progressivism and evolutionism.

There was a position against Eurocentrism and its baggage, independent of the ideological environment from which they came. There were also precautions regarding our internalised cultural colonialism. This tendency to follow the trend

Back then, just like today, we looked at things this way. We have and execute a proposal that we believe conforms to popular demands; otherwise we would be leaving room for others, with other conceptions, to do so. And in that there is no possibility of return.

By then, the organisation needed to develop an armed apparatus for various functions and also to grow. To be able to direct sympathies and struggles that came to us, to push initiatives of a certain size, to take new organisational steps, and all of this also immediately required a sum of money. Of course, this was not the priority of the *Organización Popular Revolucionária* (Popular Revolutionary Organisation—OPR), especially if we consider the moment when it developed most. However, this would be one of the activities to be permanently faced and, initially, it was a priority for the reasons given.

Repression was high at the time because the Tupamaros guerrillas were already operating, and this required technically and appropriately empowering our people so that they could meet their objectives and get out of the process alive. Cooperation for certain armed actions at that repressive juncture no longer worked. The base of the armed apparatus was made up of workers, who invested heavily in their own preparation, and did so with much modesty and responsibility, being clear that some things would be learned as the process unfolded.

However, I think your question refers more to the theoretical aspect, related to the organisational form — in this case the Organisational Charter — which established the organisms, functions, rights and duties of fellow militants.

We sought not to leave questions on relevant issues open, so that they could then generate endless doubts. Congressional instances decided any interpretative differences or shortcomings of the Charter. We always consider that the collective should deal with these issues.

The discussions, the different approaches, the changes of opinion occurred, fundamentally, in the political and social analyses. And that was, and always will be, very constructive; the production of a culture of serious analysis and discussion is not a minor task of the political organisation.

It is important to mention, even without the proper elaboration, that the OPR (armed wing) had no strategic independence. That is, expropriations, kidnappings, etc. were not decided by it, but by the political organisation through the body that represented it and which was collectively legitimised. This model was different from practically all other guerrilla activities of Latin America at that time, with the exception of the Chilean *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionária* (Revolutionary Left Movement—MIR), which can be considered a party; but, to be clear, a Marxist-Leninist party, with its corresponding centralism.

even said, that the revolution was nearly there. Marxism in Latin America had a very different history and an imagination with almost no points of convergence with ours. At that time, the Marxists had in mind the Cuban revolutionary episode, which was atypical to the line of peaceful coexistence defended by the continent's political parties, which constituted the largest Marxist force.

For this reason the automatic transposition of the guerrilla strategy expressed by "focalism" has never been shared by us. We saw armed struggle in another way, in another historical perspective. We were very aware of the history of our countries. Just as there was no coincidence, there were no conflicts with those who were dedicating their lives to a different strategy from ours either. We walk different roads and, often, co-ordinate specific technical actions.

I will talk a little more about this subject, not simply by daydreaming, but because in certain libertarian circles they have identified us with "focalism" or "guerrilla-ism", as they said, and this was never the case; it is a misconception.

The decision to set up an armed apparatus was not made overnight; there was a whole prior process. In it organisational forms, infrastructure for emergencies, alternative places where the union and social comrades would operate in the public environment in times of persecution, establishment of basic security mechanisms and criteria – both for the public militants as well as for those that had already done armed work or harder support work in the union environment – were being adapted.

This began to be articulated in 1962. In 1963, it was stopped a bit because, when it became necessary to adjust the general organisational instance to functioning in accordance with the hard times we foresaw, there was a group of comrades who disagreed because they already had another strategic proposal, fundamentally based on non-violence, and completely disagreed with our decision. This was one of the reasons for the split of some FAU comrades in 1963.

The FAU then proceeded with the task of adjusting the Organisational Charter according to the assessment that had been made of the conjuncture ahead, and which we expected would soon get worse. Clearly this required finances and, for that, expropriations were carried out, mainly from banks. Thus, our Organisational Charter ended up keeping an important part almost intact, but it also incorporated a new part, which addressed new organs, commissions, secretariats and functions in order to be able to cover all the planned measures in an organised manner.

There was a logic that emphatically told us that if a conjunctural analysis suggested a determined action, we could not, after knowing this, say things like: "It's fine, but we can't face many of these tasks because they alter our principles and imply risk of diversion". If we did, we would be declaring the unfeasibility of anarchism as a social current that intends to transform the system. We would bury anarchism or leave it as a distant reference from the past.

of social themes, proposals, organisational forms that have nothing to do with our locality, with what we live through here, with what we urgently need. This practice of importing projects and strategies without taking into account all the analysis of the fundamental aspects of our social formation, of our ideal – our Latin American historical subject and each one of the localities involved – of that which allows us to establish an effective relationship with the people, to initiate processes within and with the people.

This relationship cannot be established solely by sudden ideas and decrees of conditions and characteristics forged by purely intellectual processes. Of course, our position against Eurocentrism does not imply negating or not incorporating rigorous and consistent contributions coming from Europe; that would be a kind of reverse discrimination.

FC: It can be concluded from your responses that *especifismo* is not something that was created by you in the second half of the twentieth century, but a name given to a practice that comes from classical anarchism. I see that you refer by "*especifismo*" to Bakuninist collectivism or, especially, to the anarcho-communism that existed in Latin America and so many other places in the world — which advocated the distinct "levels" of organisation, anarchist organisation and popular movements. Why the choice of the term "*especifismo*" then and when did the FAU start using it?

JCM: We never thought that *especifismo* was our creation. We never thought or said anything like that. That would, at the least, have been a childish vanity. *Especifismo* already had its rich history and ideological production. And, as I said, in the context of the FAU's formation we saw in Malatesta its clearest and most developed expression, especially in some of his works.

One should bear in mind that Malatesta was in Argentina for a while – including passing through Montevideo, Uruguay – in the years 1885-1889. It was at the request of Polinice Mattei, an Italian anarchist who participated in the labour movement, that Malatesta wrote the first statutes of a resistance society – the bakers' union. In a short time, the resistance unions developed strongly and formed the backbone of the great workers' "centrals" such as the *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina* (Argentine Regional Labour Federation–FORA) and the FORU itself, which comprised about 90% of the organised workers' movement.

Of course, this was not only due to Malatesta's influence. To say that would be to turn our sympathy and respect into religion. Within the working class there was a search for organisational means and Malatesta managed to provide some answers, which was no small feat. With his intense activity, supported by the Italian collectivity and many other anarchists, he founded or gave strong impetus to *especifista* groups in Argentina. It was at this time that the collectivists, especially the Spaniards living in Argentina, adhered to anarchist communism,

whose militants articulated these nuclei. This quickly reverberated in Uruguay as the relationship with Argentine anarchist militancy was constant.

In order not to dwell too much on this subject I should say that there was another FAU (Anarchist Federation of Uruguay) inspired by *especifista* ideas in the 1920s.

In relation to your question I can say that the decision to use the term "*especifismo*" was necessary to indicate where on the anarchist ideological spectrum we stood. We used this term to indicate, fundamentally, that we were in favour of an anarchist political organisation and, also, that our positions, strategy, general orientation and programme differed from other anarchist expressions. Such expressions, with which we might occasionally coincidentally agree, did not have regular activity that corresponded to what we considered fundamental in terms of daily work at the social-political level; which we thought should be articulated with a strategy and a tactic that we believed to be coherent and necessary for the process of rupture, our final objective.

At the same time, I must add, we did not think of *especifismo* as a completed theoretical-political body, but as an important milestone that should be further developed. Our organisation, as with all anarchist organisations that identified with this general orientation, should try modestly to contribute whatever it could, so as not to be stuck in the past.

Some of this was raised by the FAU at the 1957 Latin American Conference; that it was not enough to take stock and emphasise that anarchism was at a low ebb – which at that time was the absolute truth. Our responsibility was to locate it in time and relate it to the problems posed by the present.

It seemed to us that the first thing to consider was that something was wrong. It was easy to try place the blame outside of anarchism, to say that changes had removed us from the social arena and so many other things that sounded more like self-justification and a certain conformism. However, this would have prevented us from confronting the historical challenge we were facing and would not permit us to accept our inadequacy and lack of adaptation to the transformations that had occurred within capitalism. We did not want to keep repeating the same things about ourselves without the social sensibility of placing ourselves completely beside our people. We did not want to become, in practice, a kind of elite fit for overblown criticism, but with enormous difficulties learning from so much that the new times brought.

This position was not only defended by the FAU at this Latin American conference; the Argentine delegation, which at certain times demonstrated great lucidity, performed a broad analysis of our difficulties at that time.

We maintained that we misdirected the questions most of the time and, as a result, the answers could not be appropriate. As Gastón Bachelard points out, directing the questions well is already a big step forward. It seemed fundamental to broadly incorporate modesty, to know the situation we were in and to recognise

There are ideological, non-theoretical elements that constitute our collectivity, that involve imagination and cohesion and that, although they are not dogmas, provide certainty about the path sought and, therefore, do not vary much.

In any case, these instruments that articulate with the collection of tasks were not conceived as means, but as part of the general conception of militant dynamics. Considerations that are constitutive elements of organised anarchism and have the same value as other elements. We know that in our libertarian environment there is an old discussion about whether or not the organisation is only a means. To assume the organisation only as a means, for us, means to separate the way it is carried out from the practice; a position that implies a significant problem.

But I'll stick to your question more. Incorporating a specific armed apparatus to operate regularly requires a series of techniques consistent with the specificity of the tasks that must be faced and carried out. Moreover, and this question is fundamental, its existence has affects on the organisation as a whole. It is not just like adding another activity in addition to those the organisation already has. It means restructuring the entire organisation so that its articulation with the rest of the activities is coherently understood within the strategy and, naturally, within the general ideology that involves this social-political action.

In this concrete aspect, of armed action, the FAU did not start from scratch and neither did it add itself to the style of guerrilla action that was called "focalism".[13] It did not start from scratch because anarchism had a whole history of very fruitful direct armed action: heroic, justice-seeking, expropriator, of cruel and bloody confrontations with repression. To put it briefly, the anarchist struggles and episodes were very important in history, as in the case of the Chicago Martyrs, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Spanish Revolution, Durruti's Iron Column, and also here in Rio de la Plata with the Tragic Week, the Patagonia struggle and massacre, the avenging workers who executed executioners... The list would be very long, but I just want to give a few examples.

These examples are not generic, but they were in the imagination and sensibility of a large part of the militancy that founded FAU; atrocious persecutions, arrests, assassinations of anarchists, executions and "disappearances". This universe was not ignored. Many of these facts were the subject of regular conversations in different centres of anarchist activity, sometimes in great detail; but not only at the formal level, in written propaganda material or in debates. They were also told in fraternal conversations by comrades who knew of or participated in such activities: the Spaniards living in Uruguay who were part of the Spanish Revolution; the expropriators who suffered torture and long imprisonment; the workers who were fiercely persecuted and tortured in Argentina and some in Uruguay itself.

We were aware that the struggle was not easy at all and that the revolution would not happen quickly either. The guerrilla currents that were emerging at that time had another vision of the enemy, and there were even those who thought, and

below have carried out, largely driven by broad social organisations. Bolivia was the most paradigmatic case. But we know that it was not the only one, that this situation was like a river that flowed through different points on our map.

However, at the same time as they drive relevant social and political struggles and go beyond the positions of the "left" parties, popular movements at times fade away and leave a vacuum that is soon filled by old acquaintances. There are those that, almost always, assess this vacuum according to the logic of the absence of vanguard parties that propose to take spaces in the state, with a view to starting a process from that. It is worth saying that these people analyse or propose this kind of thing based on the same logic that caused the "left" parties to be absent or to deny that these popular ways were valid.

It is hardly mentioned that the question concerns another way of doing politics and another way of conceiving political organisation. What role should the political play today, in light of the historical experience we have had? We believe that the notion of "conveyor belt" [12] is no longer useful; what works, seen from another logic, is the notion of the political organisation as a "small motor", as was mentioned earlier. Without doubt the role of the political organisation continues to be valid and occupies a distinct space from the action of social organisations. But it seems to be increasingly necessary to specify in detail its area of action and practices that concern it. This is another of our tasks.

And it seems to us that it is anarchism that is in tune with these mobilisations and that has defended, in general terms, political actions of this type, necessary as a corollary of such processes.

FC: The FAU had, along with the other activities, a specific task of armed struggle. Did this generate relevant organisational problems? Did the organisational structure undergo important alterations?

JCM: This is a relevant issue that must be related to internal organisation, the preparation and formation of militants within the framework of the historical conjunctures that need to be confronted. It is well known that, like others, *especifista* organisations have documents such as a Declaration of Principles and Organisational Charter.

The political-social lines of work and experiences instrumentalise these lines in the different social spheres, causing — along with important conjunctural variations — the Organisational Charter to be modified occasionally. The Declaration of Principles of a period of the organisation also does not stay the same after several years of militant work. But in general I have the impression, according to our experience, that it is less modifiable. It also depends on how the Declaration of Principles is elaborated. If it addresses conjunctural aspects or historical stages it should be more modified. General principles are adjusted, developed and updated as knowledge advances, but generally at a slower pace.

that we would, necessarily, face many difficulties in trying to get out of this social labyrinth. After all, we had lost the reference of a great historical period without having asked ourselves what was happening.

We must look for references in those old congresses, in which the "old" theorists participated, and in which they boldly and creatively put forward philosophical and political positions that sought to advance and attract the interest of a broad public. It is not relevant, for what I want to highlight, that many of those positions were imbued with the knowledge framework of that historical moment and may, in light of new research and discovery, be considered inconsistent today. I only emphasise the political attitude.

In a certain period, which was not short, anarchist militants analysed the problems that they faced and formulated proposals for action. All the periods experienced many changes. Therefore, the lack of adequate answers indicated that the problem had not been properly addressed, that there was a lack of creativity, of political boldness to explore the new, to exercise critical thinking. The "old" theorists did this very well, giving their lives to anarchism and achieving continuity in various later movements.

I must stress that we do not present ourselves as *especifistas* in our "public" appearance, in our media and to other political and social organisations; we present ourselves as an anarchist political organisation. The term "*especifismo*" is useful only among anarchists or to answer that question that journalists often ask us in their reports about which anarchism we promote. If we referred to ourselves as *especifistas* at the popular level it would mean that we would have to carry an explanatory leaflet in our pockets to distribute whenever we made this statement.

We make it clear, internally in the organisation and to anarchists in general, that we are part of the anarchist ideological current and that it has always been our desire to contribute, even with a small grain of sand, to the continuation of its advance. This advance also implies the incorporation of various contributions, studies and researches that appear, here and there, both from the works of historical archeology as well as from the search for new things.

I must add that, today, many of our comrades prefer a precise and clear definition and thus define the FAU solely as an anarchist political organisation.

FC: Have you used this organisational concept of *especifismo* since the beginning of the FAU? I say this because when the FAU was founded there were already some documents that, at least from my point of view, are the result of this very "soup" in which the FAU's *especifismo* develops and which bear some resemblance to it. I am referring particularly to the *Dielo Truda* group's 1926 Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists,[4] the 1945 Platform of the Federation of Anarchist Communists

of Bulgaria[5] and George Fontenis's 1953 Libertarian Communist Manifesto.[6] Did you encounter these documents at the time of constituting the FAU and updating this concept of *especifismo*? Did they have any influence on the creation of the FAU's *especifismo*?

JCM: I think part of this question has already been answered. But we can reiterate that with the exception of Balkansky's text, which came from the Bulgarian Federation, none of these documents were circulated during the process of constituting the FAU.

In the process, a *Comisión Pro Federación Libertaria Uruguaya* (Pro-Uruguayan Libertarian Federation Commission–CPFLU) nominated by a national plenary was formed, which worked during 1955 to circulate positions on various topics. The commission's work mentioned experiences such as the formation of the Libertarian Federation in Argentina, in 1901. At the time of drawing up the Statement of Principles and the Organisational Charter (*Carta Orgánica*), there were contributions by the "old" comrades – who had participated in many organisational initiatives in Rio de la Plata between 1905 and 1950 – and also by young militants – especially the *Juventudes Libertarias* (Libertarian Youths–JJLL), that had a decisive proximity at that time to the Federation of University Students, which operated with a completely federalist structure and libertarian matrix. Another group present in this process, Cerro, included comrades who had participated in various organisational instances – one of them participated in the Spanish Revolution – who had experience and who had already elaborated concrete proposals in organisational terms, not only of principles or the Organisational Charter but also of strategy and programme.

Lots of preparatory bulletins containing separate documents were published; they included any proposal that had to be considered at the founding instance. If someone had proposed any of these documents you mention they would have been incorporated, because that was the dominant criterion. I must say that the emphasis on the "here and now" – as it was then said – did not mean any willingness on our part to disregard previous experiences, documents or struggles. Nothing was excluded. The issue of the documents that were circulated in the founding process was dealt with exactly the way I put it.

The fact that the documents you mention did not appear in the founding process does not mean that the "old" comrades did not know about them. For example, exemplary militants such as Nestor Makhno and Piotr Arshinov were often mentioned in conversations held a few years before the founding of the FAU, both in the Cerro Athenaeum and JJLL. Besides this, the edition of Argonaut about the Makhnovist movement was widely circulated.[7] Interestingly enough, this book was also published in Russian and there were some militants linked to the FAU's activities from that region.

which at this moment is essentially directed at opposing the coup, is something far more complex than the simple return of the constitutionally elected president.

There are various expressions of the capacity of social movements to act and challenge the worst government regimes and the measures they produce. These movements have confronted police and military repression in the streets with blood and fire. They are adopting different organisational forms and today they are mobilising around social and economic problems, struggles for health, water, employment, roads, electricity, human rights, the rights of indigenous populations and against dictatorships. These are movements that constantly go from social to political, because their demands touch the interests of the dominant power and the state quickly intervenes to repress them. Furthermore, in the medium term efforts are generally made to push them down the path of bourgeois institutional domestication.

It is sometimes said that there is little or nothing beneficial left after these struggles. This view results from a criteria that, you could say, is made up of categories of old discourses that are not adept to a reading of the present. In many of these discourses we see that is implied that if the old vanguard party is not present, with its group of professionals and technicians, there is no way out. Thus, no other way of doing politics is conceived; this enlightened elite must be present to guide everyone.

Political organisation is still of the utmost importance for liberation, rupture and the destruction of capitalism, as well as for the beginning of another process founded on different bases. However, the political form to be sought is different. The political organisation must not be a vanguard but a level or sphere distinct from the struggle itself and that operates within it, as part of it, which is an indispensable condition.

I want to highlight something that has already been said. All these struggles, demands and confrontations imply a process of active participation by the population, accumulation of knowledge from experiences and approaches that ferment in favour of legitimate solutions, questions that are fundamental to the building of popular power, in the midst of which we must be at all times. The political organisation must be completely inside and never outside of these processes, with the double articulation that something of this nature requires.

Could it be our moment?

Everything that has been said led us to establish the role of the libertarian political organisation in this historical period: its strategy, its organisational form, its way of operating in the present. The "vanguard" parties, those that "represented" the proletariat and the people, seem more than ever to be in bankruptcy. If we consider our Latin America in recent decades there are rich examples of how these parties have been on the sidelines, or reproducing the dominant positions, in the various radicalised mobilisations and demonstrations that those from

However, positions – permeated by a lot of elitism and vanguardism – that all these expressions and struggles of popular power are of little use and, finally, end without relevant electoral victories do not seem rigorous.

Victories must be sought in another domain; they have a rhythm that, maybe, is not suitable for the anxious to see their fruits. We must look for them in the multiplication of expressions of direct action; of self-management in different spheres; of popular organisation with forms that do not point toward institutionalisation; of disbelief in the growth of classic bourgeois democracy, the political "caste" and a particular way of doing politics.

For example, in Bolivia Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was deposed and Carlos Mesa succeeded him, following a similar policy. However, the popular movement went back onto the streets and deposed Mesa, an indicator that their organisational experience and participatory consciousness had not died in the face of frustration. This does not mean that Evo Morales now represents these demands, but he does not have many alternatives but to take part of them into account, as his political life was based on that.

Even with the infamous regressions, promoted primarily by the so-called progressive parties, we have seen that the struggles of those from below do not die; they have roots of some depth. There are reactionary structures and political proposals full of "new" promises, which imply choices in this relatively new universe that is emerging, of ways that are sometimes risky; provisional ways arise in concrete and deceptive instances that are not yet completely abandoned. They will only be so when those from below are able to shape their own general proposal for new social relations, which will not come from outside, but from within. To create it, it will be necessary to have a certain social-political force.

We have seen that, in Latin America, struggles for popular power begin in day-to-day struggles. Mass movements have, at times, had a great capacity to accumulate forces in neighbourhoods, in committees that articulate around concrete themes, such as the struggle for water in Cochabamba and demands for land and respect for community life in the case of indigenous populations. Besides indigenous movements workers' and peasants' unions have arisen at times, forming a strong, combative social fabric that won the streets and raised slogans that, in general, no leftist party had on its agenda.

Various popular expressions with a decisive impact on social organisations, that have sustained struggles against the system for the past fifteen years, are know of. In Argentina, we can mention "*Que se vayan todos*".[11] Governments have fallen in Bolivia, Ecuador — three in the last five years alone — and Peru. These expressions also played a key role in preventing the right-wing coup in Venezuela.

Even today a popular uprising is under way in Honduras. I must say that we are strongly in solidarity with the anti-dictatorial positions of this vigorous mobilisation, in which various social organisations are intervening. This event,

FC: Today, the documents that I quoted above form the basis of the strategy of organisations that identify with the Platformist tradition and call themselves anarchist communist. Since *especifismo* – by that name – is only identified with here in Latin America many of these organisations have been our interlocutors in other countries. First of all, I would like to know if you have had access to these documents and would you comment on them. Then, I would like to know: what, for you, is the difference between *especifismo* and platformism?

JCM: The criteria for information and militant formation was very broad. Indeed, even before the FAU was formed there were social organisations, such as Ateneu del Cerro, and unions that had large libraries. These environments sought to stimulate reading and create an environment for the exchange of ideas among militants. Lots of anarchist materials and other related works or works of general interest were read. I am referring especially to the labour milieu. In that context, many of the libertarian militants or those close to our ideas read Luigi Fabbri, Rudolf Rocker, Fausto Falaschi, Ricardo Mella, Anselmo Lorenzo, Piotr Arshinov, Ricardo Flores Magón, Rafael Barret, Manuel Gonzalez Prada and, of course, Bakunin, Malatesta and Kropotkin. These authors were read and discussed, formally and informally. Along with them leaflets and articles with new approaches, such as the texts of Gastón Leval and others, were also read.

It's most likely that platformism was not known by very many militants. I do not know if its primary texts were circulated in these spaces, either among FAU militants or among those that comprised the Latin American Congress. They were never mentioned in the libertarian initiatives that were articulated in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time the anarchist communists that were partisan to organisation, in Argentina and in Chile, agreed with Malatesta's positions.

However, regular mention of the authors of the "Platform" – who were considered to be exemplary militants – was always very common; they have always been spoken of with great sympathy and respect, but only that.

Year later it seemed to me, personally, that what the platformists argued for was very close to *especifismo* – particularly the *especifismo* practiced by the FAU. An analysis of the differences and similarities between these two proposals – and that considers aspects that are still current and those that are strictly linked to a particular historical conjuncture – requires specific work, which could be very interesting. But this is something that requires time, dedication and consulting a lot of documentation; a daunting task and a subject on which one cannot improvise. Right now, this is a task that does not excite me. I cannot even think about making a schematic and basic analysis without many pretences. Since, as I said earlier, I am focused on finishing an historical work about our organisation and I do not have much time available these days.

Therefore, this response will be given only in terms of "impressions". I could add as a contribution that if we were to ask the FAU comrades of the previous

generations about what platformism is they would – I suppose, based on how things happened around here – answer something along the lines of: it's about an *especifista* group like ours, that was nourished by another history and another experience.

As you can see I make various mention of things we have to overcome, the challenges that lie ahead, the need to start taking firm steps to make up for so much lost ground. I say all this from the perspective that anarchism has a vast past experience and that it still has a lot to say and to accomplish today. It's obvious that libertarian history is not starting now; we are heirs to a past full of struggle, of exemplary militants, of true heroes of the people.

Anarchism has written great pages in the book of history. The world of workers world knows the abnegation and integrity that characterises it, along with a past that even amazes us. Anarchism has given full answers to the necessity of transforming the structures of the capitalist system and has precisely laid down the general lines of social reconstruction which, in their fundamental aspects, have an unquestionable validity; it emphasised popular participation, direct action, the imperative not to participate in bourgeois initiatives. Faced with the failure of the other conceptions of socialism, anarchism can today, before the court of history, reclaim the right to develop its model of society. Of course, this can only be done within history, but not within the prevailing power – which must be defeated as it will not fall on its own. In our view this power must be fought with blood and fire.

FC: Within authoritarian and anti-authoritarian socialist currents there are sectors that, like us, defend this separation between the political organisation and the popular movement. Could you explain what the difference is between the relationship between the anarchist organisation and popular movements and the relationship of the Leninist / Trotskyist parties with these movements? That is, what differentiates a specific anarchist organisation from an authoritarian party? Could you talk a little about the relationship between the anarchist organisation and popular movements?

JCM: I will separate the themes so that the answer is clearer. First, I will address what have traditionally been called authoritarian parties. This theme brings us to another: the need for a new way of doing politics; which at the same time amounts to looking at political organisation in another way, emphasising aspects generally opposed to those of Marxist groups and organisations.

All of these have strategies that consider minimal or even passive participation by the working class and popular movements in general. They believe they represent the interests of the workers and that it's the party that must be strengthened since transformations or, in some cases, revolutionary events come from above

There are diverse social mobilisations: indigenous movements with certain specific and general demands; armed struggle, as in Colombia and Mexico, coexisting with social movements; popular uprisings against governments demanding nationalisation of natural wealth against imperial plunder; popular referendums against government decisions or in favour of certain social and political issues; repeated insurrections, as in the case of Bolivia; resistance that crosses borders and transforms into a single voice, as in the case of mobilisations against the FTAA; ecological movements in defence of the abused nature, which has been devastated by the system; the discontent who express themselves in traditional elections, voting against what seems repugnant to them, having hopes of different levels and waiting for the arrival of new and better things; elections that, generally, frustrate small or large existing expectations.

Although not directly contributing to the creation of popular power these experiences, linked to electoral processes and institutions, must be taken into consideration as part of a reality distinct from other historical moments.

This has been said other times. Elections can be considered as polling research that uncovers the discontent and aspirations of a part of the population, given that the elections and all the political technology of those at the top that is engaged in them cannot nullify a certain state of consciousness that conjuncturally expresses itself through this disguising mechanism. The electoral mechanism does not correspond to the outcome of the struggles that point to other horizons, as in the case of Bolivia, and in it things get very confusing at times.

In spite of all the influence of this research we can notice, on some occasions, that important and active social sectors, of organised or spontaneous expressions, are decidedly positioned in favour of profound changes and, for a moment, waste their efforts on the institutional arena due to the symbolic power that this web still possesses in certain imaginations. Other times, popular rejection of governmental politics also has something to say. Clearly, in all electoral processes we must take into consideration the mechanisms that bring right and centre-right alliances into play, the fundamental role of the mass media, the multinationals, the United States embassy and so on.

The electoral question is confused with various and distinct expressions of popular power, of direct action by social movements in search of new forms of social organisation with another level of popular participation. Expressions that react against the old practices but that appear, at "opportune" moments, together with all the electoral paraphernalia and with discourses that touch, even with exaltation, on central aspects of the people's demands.

In this domain, of episodic elections, this is how things work: there is a preference for figures who, in fact, represent little or nothing to the people, and who quickly try to demobilise the elements of greatest transformative potential. There is a very perverse symbolic world that possesses strength and that, as can be seen, will continue to project itself in time and to impede authentic changes.

capitalist world — have, at the same time, singularities that provide particular spaces to be taken advantage of. It is not the same thing to live in capitalism under a dictatorship and under a classic bourgeois democracy. Without making a value judgment it is possible to say that, in both situations, there are spaces for action with different possibilities.

Why do anarchists always seek a revolutionary process? It is neither a romantic nor a nostalgic choice, but something almost blatantly rational. This choice is based on a logic that this capitalist century, full of so many horrors, indicates to us. What are these such horrible things that demand such vast transformations? Some data can help answer.

Transnationals, neo-liberalism and imperial power

I will work with data that cannot be considered radical and raging. The audit that was done at the Vienna Counter-Summit not so long ago is undoubtedly interesting. "Transnational corporations wield an enormous power in the world, one that affects everyone's life. Transnational corporations continue to confront workers, communities and even entire regions and countries, generating inhuman competition in which human rights end up being undermined everywhere. Transnationals are indisputable actors in the promotion of neo-liberal ideology, fellow traveller of 'this globalisation'. Latin America and the Caribbean are the two regions in the world that have suffered the most devastating consequences: unemployment and precariousness of work, growing poverty and marginalisation, destruction of agricultural systems in favour of the monopoly of agribusiness, violation of the rights of indigenous peoples and peasants, spoiling of natural resources, privatisation of public services, deindustrialisation, shrinking of states and governments to regulate their economies."

Those who declared imperialism dead do not serve to be gravediggers. Imperialism lives and oppresses like never before. At the same time as states in more industrialised countries have been multiplying their functions in various spheres, it is certain that another form of capitalist state has ceased to concern itself with some of its former functions and assumed others instead.

This is a form of state that is related to the present stage, in which the large transnational corporations have a different role to the classic companies of previous stages, and in which international financial capital is involved daily with the political level. These are economic, legal-political and ideological-cultural structures that have a very specific articulation today.

Our Latin America and the building of popular power

I think it is important to mention some historical facts, since we are having a more-or-less theoretical discussion.

and are determined by the party. In all cases – some more so and others less – the so-called "masses" act as conveyor belts. It's the party that steers the process, determining what should be done without leaving the "mass" movement with any relevant decision-making alternative.

Without doubt, we must differentiate the strategies of these parties: the social democrats and the Marxist-Leninists.

The history of social democracies is well known, yet in spite of everything they always reappear in one or other guise. The reformist positions of the social democracy of the Second International promoted gradual transformations through reforms; transformations that did not challenge the structure of domination. These parties very quickly became champions of small changes or minor adjustments in systemic functioning. Although mentioned the word socialism renounced all real possibility of overcoming capitalism in its discourses, and soon in the facts. Reformism did not adopt a strategy of power but settled within it until it was integrated into all the structures, functioning, the institutions of capitalism. Its logic developed along the same lines: asking the people for their votes and claiming to represent them. Finally, social democracy created the best environment for capitalism's existence and reproduction. Today it speaks little, if at all, of socialism and the pursuit of fundamental transformations through improvements in capitalism. So much so that it has made deals with right-wing parties in many countries.

On the other hand we have the case of Lenin who, appropriating Kautsky's thesis that ideology comes from outside, entrusts the party with the ideology of the proletariat. Thus, it's the party that does politics and is the enlightened bearer of the ideology of the multitudes of workers. A clearly vanguardist conception that, appropriating everything, finally places all its expectations on intellectuals; almost all of them from wealthy sectors or from the upper middle class of society.

It's necessary here to make a parenthesis in order to emphasise the importance of a theme – that is the confusion between two very different concepts: ideology and theory – which we will briefly discuss below. But let's go back to Marxism-Leninism.

For Marxist-Leninists those "from below" – I will use this term, which seems clear to me and is close to those that Bakunin used on occasion – are subordinate to everything that is not of the order of immediate demands. And this as long as these demands never call into question the alliances and priorities established by the party. In this schema there is, in fact, only one direction: from the party to the class and the entire population. The fundamental belief is that the population – and its historical subject, "the class" – must remain subordinate to the party, since the class is unable to create instances of liberation on its own. It was often said that the class "was not conscious of itself". It was also argued that it would not be possible to create the fundamental conditions for rupture from below within capitalist society. The level of development, of self-organisation, of the self-

management of popular initiatives therefore does not matter. Fundamentally, it's not about creating a strong people, but a strong party.

This logic did not change once Marxist-Leninism came to power. The proletariat and the people must stay loyal to the party under penalty of being treated as traitors to those that represented them and promoted their interests. The pilar of the regime's continuity rested on an obedient people or one that did not clearly express its disagreements.

We can say that we *especifista* anarchists do not separate the two levels, let alone subordinate one level to the other. We believe they are specific levels that fulfil distinct social functions and must be in constant interaction.

The organisational form is no less important. "Democratic" centralism is a conception that is linked to the party's vanguardist dynamics; without this organisational tool such an orientation would not be possible. Thus, this organisational form should be evaluated as an important part of the conceptual framework of these organisations. In our organisations federalism fulfils this role.

There are other historical currents of Marxism, but it's possible to say that they have a common denominator: the vanguardist conception. Currents that are often masked, but which do not change the axis of their fundamental political action. They all consider the state as a centre from which to promote the transformations they propose to carry out.

However, there are also some anti-authoritarian currents that, perhaps, can not be rigorously defined if we establish a common standard. Historically, in Rio de la Plata there were significant groups, mainly in Argentina, that were called anti-organisers. Over time and through a complex process they incorporated into union work and stimulated a revolutionary type of unionism.

In this region there is anarcho-syndicalism, which constitutes a rather unique anti-authoritarian movement; in practical terms it does politics and ideology through union work itself. Anarchist syndicalists hold a view that unions are capable of promoting revolution and, subsequently, rebuilding society on distinct socialist and libertarian foundations. But, unlike most other anti-authoritarian groups, they are embedded in the trade union milieu and deal on a daily basis with the rights, demands and struggles of the working class to which they are linked.

For example, a few years ago sectors of the Spanish *Confederación General del Trabajo* (General Confederation of Labour–CGT) that were clearly anarchists stimulated an initiative that served the meeting and dialogue of anarchist groups interested in revitalising our ideology. This initiative was called International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS–SIL) and José Maria Olaizola, at that time secretary of the CGT, was the one who propelled this initiative. It was an instance where we could analyse our current situation with comrades from different countries. The new commission, nominated by congress, that took over the CGT did not give continuity to the ILS, which eventually ceased to exist. Most of the comrades that

sticky and deceptive webs that were at times so appealing to many. We used to say at the time: "Do not enter the enemy's enclosures".

The upper and lower part as homogeneous spheres. The destruction of the old

A revolutionary process has to be carried out from the bottom up, as Bakunin said, and not the other way around; as it has almost always happened. It should not involve hierarchy, but social organisational instances that are constituted by the people themselves, from the bottom up; by those who suffer the consequences of the system, who resist, create and seek organisational forms to defend themselves.

This requires that militancy produces a culture for the process of proposed social transformation. It also requires some changes, an internalisation of the project, a change in militant "style" and behaviour. For, as a *mestizo* would say, "It is hard to make pumpkin jam with potatoes".[10]

The task of removing the old, modifying it, deconstructing its structure is something daily, not intermittent and episodic. We contribute to the constitution of a particular conjuncture and our possibilities for taking advantage of it will depend on what we have done before.

This daily task must be carried out in the midst of the different popular expressions, seeking broad harmony with the concerns and urgencies of the people and ensuring that the necessary condition for popular participation is present. We should not carry out solitary practices or operate outside popular sentiments. This will only make us angry with the people.

Sustaining this position does not imply blindly following the habits imposed by centuries of constructing a subject who was created for a given system, but performing daily activity, militating for the destruction of these habits within and among the people themselves. It implies attacking the structures that have their genealogy, their unfolding and that reside in different "territories" of the system.

It is a task to be performed in enemy territory, linked to multiple resistances and struggles, most of which are around immediate demands, that demand improvements, reforms of what exists today.

But, as our theorist Malatesta rightly said, the question is not only to win reforms, but to focus on the spirit in which they are sought, what the background involved in this process is. He added that fighting for reforms is not the same as being reformist; what is being built in terms of popular power must have a north: socialism. Without this north there will be no emancipatory future.

This process of building popular power may lead to imposing improvements and may not be in line with the somewhat magical premises of "the worse, the better" or "it's all the same", which obscure the specificities of the different processes that — even though they may have elements of the system, and such is the

The building of "a strong people", in this sense, requires a determined regular social work and a political organisation that articulates with it, that makes it its "office". Seen from afar this may seem like a very complex plot. However, when we deal with it, when we utilise it and combine it on a daily basis with different events it is not. In this process the appropriate elements for the work are generated and from these results a suitable craftsman for action of revolutionary intention. Certainly, to do so laziness must be totally abandoned.

It seems convenient to point out that I will use the concept of "social" to describe activities such as that of unions, cooperatives, issue-based community work, human rights, indigenous movements, peasants, general and specific themes of a demand-centred type or struggles for immediate improvement like health, housing etc.

I will use the concept of "political organisation" to refer to an instance of synthesis that seeks to ensure the continuity of the strategy, theoretical elaboration, the development of technical instances, general orientations in the conjuncture, the search for effectiveness in confrontations, the general vision about the partial struggles, the study of the enemy's strategy at each moment, the constant learning of what the popular struggle involves, the forming of alliances favourable to the process. That seeks to build a proposal of social functioning for the present, for the whole society, in which a change takes place without interruption.

This must be done taking very precisely into account the state, in its current form, as the political structure of the class enemy — with all its repressive capacity, with all its institutions of "perverse fantasy": elections, parliaments, etc. — but, at the same time, bearing in mind that the dominant power is not only found in the state, but runs through different arteries of the social body.

Thus, the social and political are conceived as two simultaneous and properly articulated plans of action but, with its relative independence, each one has its own specificity. We are, therefore, partisans of simultaneous work within the same project: of the libertarian political organisation and of work in the whole social sphere. We are in favour of building popular power, as our organisation has declared in materials produced since 1960.

However, I must say that the fundamental aspects of this conception were formulated in the context of the very emergence of the libertarian conception of socialism: the pursuit of social revolution; the notion of the state as an expression of the class enemy; the struggle for a society based on solidarity, in opposition to the cruel selfishness of capitalism; the necessity of not using the mechanisms of the system, such as elections, parliaments, positions in the state; the struggle against the institutionalisation of the unions...

It was these social and political proposals and practices that set a general course so that it would be possible to break free from the deadly grip of the system, its

promoted the formation of the ILS formed the *Apoyo Mutuo* (Mutual Aid) group and continue with the same concern. This nucleus is organisationist and has very close relationships with specific (anarchist political) organisations, both in Europe and Latin America. This is an example that demonstrates the uniqueness of some of these movements and the points we can have in common with them.

I refer, briefly, to a resolution of the 1986 FAU congress, as it appears to me that it has a lot to do with this topic. It was established in that resolution, ratified by the 1988 congress, that we should do as much as possible to accomplish specific tasks and base-level agreements with all libertarian comrades who were active at whatever level within the organisation. It was also established that we should try our utmost to avoid the polemics – so impoverished and futile at other times – that were threatening to resurface. In order to establish any kind of joint action we had to keep in mind that these other anarchist groupings had other conceptions, other preferences and other strategies. Within these frameworks we, as a distinct organisation with its own strategy, would co-ordinate what was possible in terms of social action. We knew there would be groups that would want to do this and others that would not. It was decided that the discussions to be held in these situations should only take place around the concrete points in question.

In practice this happened on several occasions. For example, there was co-ordination with other anarchist groups and comrades during the war against Iraq, on dates commemorating anarchists like Sacco and Vanzetti and events such as the Spanish Revolution. But there is no doubt that this co-ordination depends on each place and on the established relationships.

Concerning the question about the issue of the party, I must say that there has been a tendency, particular in recent times, to confound the concepts of party and politics; besides this, the party has been identified with a way of doing politics that has largely been discredited in various sectors. It's generally said that electoral parties with a democratic-centralist structure only take the people into consideration during times of elections. The rest of time the distance between the parties and the people is immense. In some cases there are politicians who support the repression of their own voters because they are mobilising around some or other issue.

We, like many other libertarian groups, do not conceive politics in this way. However, we cannot throw the baby out with the bath water.

I will now deal with the relationship between social and political organisations. I will only address a few aspects at this time, and leave the questions about popular power to be dealt with further on.

The first point that I think needs to be addressed is the question of class independence. By class I am referring here to the entire set of oppressed classes produced in this historical period. This relationship between classes and the

historical period will also be developed a little further on. The question of class independence is closely linked to the possibility of creating popular power; or, as the FAU said in the 1960s, of "creating a strong people". The development of a corresponding discourse is also undoubtedly of fundamental importance. As some scholars on this subject say, "In any society multiple power relations traverse, characterise and constitute the social body. These relations of power cannot be dissociated, established or function without a production, an accumulation, a circulation, a functioning of the discourses".

A conception and practice of popular power has its specific production, its own discourse; it has its own production. For this conception and practice to intervene as a transformative force, for them to condition the conjuncture and produce disruptive advances, there is one necessary condition: they must maintain their independence at all times. At other times of historical development we spoke of "class independence"; today, adjusting to the new context, we would say, "independence of the oppressed classes" or, that is, of all social movements. With this category we want to include the particular characteristics of each social formation, its history, its transformations; without neglecting what there is in common with other countries, fundamentally those of our region, and the conditions established by world power structures.

It is well known that the networks of the dominant power crush, manipulate and mould; they encompass parties, ideologies, movements and histories, moulding them and turning them into good followers of what is old and into reproducers of what is there. This mechanism is constantly repeated. Incommensurable forces confirm this logic and spin this wheel of madness. These devices must be combatted with proposals and actions of distinct content, with a consistency that enables stability. It is not too much, therefore, to reaffirm that the immense circulation of the same dynamics and logic cannot create anything new. It can only recreate what already exists with greater or lesser fantasy.

In order for other social relations to be established the facts seem to indicate the necessity of utilising other materials for this new construction: another focus, another perspective, another logic, other practices, other mechanisms and another point of departure. There is nothing original about this. It's about the new civilisation outlined by the old socialists. This process must be supported and developed through the iron independence of the oppressed classes, of a people who create their destiny as far as historical conditions enable.

Obstacles, relationships, tacit and explicit alliances themselves must be made from this perspective of independence. Since we cannot and should not isolate ourselves, as we must be part of the "confusion" and of the complex and variable social events, this factor acquires an importance of the highest order in strategic terms.

We have seen that populations often make their claims, their protests and their demands outside the traditional channels. However, it was not only widespread

increasingly excluded. This universe, which includes those who are deprived of everything (indigence), almost everything (poverty), or who have very restricted access to that to which they aspire (lower middle class) makes up 80% of the world's population today.

In this universe there have been various cultural changes. Survival mechanisms, original forms of mutual aid, experience with transient forms of work. In such conditions of daily existence new techniques emerge, new ways of thinking and feeling, as well as many behaviours that are not desired by and are combatted by the system. It is a world that does not believe in certain discourses, institutions, social and political practices, and in which there are different levels of changes in notions of justice and rights; changes that distance themselves from established positions.

With this another historical subject is produced, both in personal and collective terms. This process involves the aforementioned militant work, although there are others of greater intensity and volume which must not only have our attention but also, if possible, be foreseen in our analyses.

There are moments when lots of social problems are condensed and social responses and mobilisations of different forces and significance emerge. These are moments of direct action that enable combative social development and politics in line with our ideas. Depending on how we intervene in these contexts, we will emerge more or less strengthened. There are abundant examples of popular uprisings in our Latin America that open up cracks that can be preserved and deepened or, on the contrary, be closed back up by the system.

The fluidity of a path

The timing of processes cannot be determined only by our will. That is why we have been talking about the need for a new way of doing politics, of building a strong people, of articulating these two instances in a coherent front.

It is also relevant, in the same way, that the strategy, at its different levels, and tactics have a relationship of reciprocal influence – since the tactics must exist within the strategy, which is carried out through them. Although they constitute distinct spheres both must be permanently connected. The strategy frames general spheres, action guides, fundamental co-ordinates; the tactics should zigzag according to the fluidity of concrete historical action. But this zigzag must be done within certain boundaries and with certain contents — otherwise no project of transformation is accomplished. Strategy and tactics involve different practices and you cannot consider them as something similar or be unaware of their singularities, the sphere that each one encompasses with greater possibilities.

Reducing principles to tactics without the corresponding "mediations" turns discourse into something declamatory, which may even give it a pleasant ethical tone but that clearly is not our purpose.

Our political obligation now

According to the model of society we want to build, our action today and on the tomorrow of transition must take place on two interdependent and indivisible axes: popular power and specific political organisation.

Regarding the first, as I said, every act of direct democracy, of participation, every self-managed instance constitutes a contribution to this construction. But at the same time, it is important to acknowledge the lesson of history that it is impossible to reach a society of socialism and freedom without a strong political organisation that is embedded in the reality of its time. The complexity surrounding a process of transformation demands a high level of understanding of social mechanisms.

It requires proceeding with a long-term goal-directed project and with a flexibility that allows it to be able to operate in various circumstances. Posing and solving problems, planning periods of action, being aware of changes, estimating your own forces, the forces of the enemy and of specific allies. Developing an analytical capacity to visualize events so as to be able to operate more effectively. Working for technical and political development that permits a relevant focus.

Socialism demands another path, another production

I will briefly enter somewhat pretentious paths. So, what is the path today? You can ask this question, which is a correct question.

It seems that the historical experience of the last half century indicates a point of departure, which is not to participate in the hard core of the system with the aim of transformation. Not to choose elements that have reproductive force with the aim of creating something totally different. It seems to be necessary to strategically seek out the points where the system is most vulnerable, where its control is relative and it has weaknesses, as does a "virus", and, in this way, to strengthen the reactions and resistances that oppressive politics arouses in social zones not entirely controlled by the system.

One can rightly ask: Concretely, what does this mean? An initial and synthetic response brings us closer to a very important subject, which I will only briefly address.

The system does not only reproduce its fundamental relationships. By basing itself on domination, exploitation, the pursuit of the greatest possible profit, inhuman competition, atrocious individualism, the market as its great god, the constant physical or psychological repression of oppressed agents, concentration of wealth and power in a ruling class, on a "cultural" industry that transmits values this system produces at the same time, albeit involuntarily, another universe, another situation.

There are a huge number of people who are excluded from the basic enjoyment of goods and services, and most of humanity is walking towards misery and is

struggles that toppled governments or prevented right-wing coups, but also direct action battles over specific issues that, sometimes, exercised popular justice.

In recent times, it has not been the social-democratic governments nor parties that have sought to effectively break the advancing neo-liberal onslaught. As recent history shows us the only social forces that acted, in fact, seeking to block, resist and even defeat neo-liberal regimes were the forces of the movements of the oppressed classes that took the streets. "Progressive" governments of different kinds came afterwards, but that is another matter.

Those who are grounded in paradigms of a past that no longer exists speak of channeling this popular expression and its struggles into authorised avenues and seek to do so. They do not want to be convinced that these ways only domesticate bodies and have perverse results in satisfying popular aspirations and urgencies; they want to lead the energy and hope that are resurfacing into dead ends.

A process of advancement of socialism is the result of definite practices that allow a real formation of consciousness of the genuine objective, and in this solidarity – as well as the mobilisation and organisation of the different popular expressions, of this whole universe of those from below – has a more than important role. We know that socialism will not be decreed nor realised only by parties claiming to be socialists.

A political organisation in tune with its time and with the popular movement has a fundamental role to play. However, the strength lies in the people themselves, both with regards to the previous as well as the later stages. The independence of the popular movement, of all its organisational forms – self-managed, self-organised, effectively participatory and federalist – is what will solidify the process and provide real possibilities for a socialist transformation.

There are others who venture into somewhat bold opinions. They tell us that the germ of the new, of the "post-capitalist" society is in these mobilisations and that it is a process that cannot be stopped. No fatalism is good. It will take the organisation and will of social forces to bring about profound transformations and to establish the line of a consequent process. However, this is a function of the political organisation; in tune with this process it becomes indispensable.

FC: Is there a scientific socialism? Can one produce a conceptual framework that leads to it? If there is no inevitability that leads us to socialism, as in fact there is not, how would we then define socialism – in our case, libertarian socialism?

JCM: Two concepts have been used somewhat regularly as synonyms, as if they were the same thing, and so-called "scientific socialism" is related to this. I'll explain. Theory (realm of science) is one thing and ideology is quite another. Perhaps it would be more instructive to address the question of ideology and

theory before we broach that of scientific socialism. There are writings from different moments of the organisation that grappled with this problem and I will try to summarise them.

Theory – in the social context, which is our object at the moment – points to the development of conceptual instruments to think about and to know all that can be known, in a rigorous and profound way, of this concrete social conjuncture, that is, of the social formation that corresponds to the ensemble of its structures and practices. In this sense one can speak of theory as the equivalent of science, and this is how it should be understood.

Ideology, on the other hand, has elements of an unscientific nature that contribute to dynamising and motivating action based on circumstances that, although related to existing social conditions, do not derive from them in the strict sense; action is not mechanically determined by what, at some point, has been called an objective and not even by infrastructure. Primary components of ideology are: ideas, representations, behaviours, reflections and sensibility. The expression of motivations, propositions of objectives, aspirations, ideal goals, utopias, hopes, hatreds and desires also belong to the ideological domain.

Rigorous analysis of a concrete situation is thus a theoretical analysis, which should be as scientific as possible. Theory needs and circumstantiates the conditions of political action. There is certainly a close link between theory and ideology, since ideological proposals merge with, are supported by and instrumentalise the conclusions of theoretical analysis. An ideology is more effective as a motor for political action the more firmly it is supported by the contributions of theory.

Theoretical work is always underpinned by and based on what happens in historical reality. However, it is work that is completely in the realm of thought: there are no concepts that are more real than others, just as ideology is only as real as the productive forces.

It's therefore worth noting some things that will be dealt with below.

Firstly, the distinction between the existing reality – real historical processes – on the one hand; and thought processes – which point to knowledge and the understanding of reality, on the other. One can say, in relation to this, that the thought process is a distinct reality that fulfils certain functions. Scientific, theoretical production has its specific character and must be approached with precision and without confusion. It counts on an effort for knowledge, using the tools that each era provides, aiming to treat the object with the greatest possible scientific rigour. The scientific "toolbox" to be used does not exclude creations and possible discontinuities, however episodic they may be in the history of knowledge. Anyway, it is from a certain level of knowledge that it becomes possible to create new knowledge, which will affect the episteme[8] used.

But let's return to the question of political theory, which is what interests us right now. Theoretical work in this domain is always carried out from a given raw

appropriating the tutelary functions exercised by the state sphere. Therefore, a strategy of popular power must have as its essential premise the construction of these bodies, and this is a fundamental political task that must be given priority right now. It will determine whether the future will be revolutionary and socialist or not. For this reason, the defeat of the capitalist and authoritarian order and the building of a legitimate popular power is being carried out on a daily basis, due to the way in which political and social work is permanently oriented and concretised.

We must, therefore, create or recreate, strengthen and consolidate workers' and popular organisations, of all the oppressed, and defend their protagonism as a means to fertilise, bit-by-bit, the only possible socialism. A socialism that is founded on freedom, in which all the technical and scientific advances we know today are placed at the service of a more suitable social functioning that benefits all human beings, the people in general.

The teachings of capitalism and the cause of those from below

The last century of capitalism and of people's struggles, in particular, left much material for reflection and study. It taught us that the system has a very great capacity to develop, to circumvent its difficulties and to digest its intestinal struggles. It taught us, too, that deviant practices do not cause it deep crises and can even constitute life-giving elements that ensure its improvement and changes in the dominant power, including at the imperial level.

Everything seems to indicate that such a system does not commit suicide and that we cannot expect its internal process to make life easier for us; this process does not create elements that accelerate the arrival of socialism. Its whole strategy of existence is contrary to the necessary foundations for a society based on other social relations and conceived in socialist terms. The popular power of which we speak is conceived in terms of libertarian socialism.

The devices, mechanisms, institutions, habits, behaviours, the ideas that flood social life, the very way of envisaging the production of goods and services, its relation to nature — all of this has to be turned upside down to enable another form of social life. This social and organic universe does not produce anything useful for those from below. The old ideas of progress increasing with capitalist development have been buried by history, along with a host of other paradigms.

We use the concept of "those from below" or "people" in a very precise sense. It has nothing to do with the concept of "civil society", which makes a blank slate of the classes and the class fractions that exist within them. This "civil society" which excludes the dominant power structures that circulate throughout it and that also prop up the system. This "civil society" which equates different interests while abducting and masking a brutal reality.

The protagonism of those from below and their power

We define power as a capacity to accomplish something and not as repression. In this particular case, the ability of a people to realise their various interests and to constitute for themselves a form of organisation that is founded on other bases, on values different to the existing ones, and which legitimately ensure solidarity, freedom and justice.

Power, thus defined – no matter how much it is conceived to function in complex societies and at technological levels that are not at all simple – does not equate, at any moment, to the concept of government. I will give some examples to make this idea clearer. Popular power is concretised in the control of the means of production of goods (factories, fields, mines, etc.), the mass media (newspapers, radios, television channels, information in general), services (transport, energy, sanitation works, communications, etc.), decision-making mechanisms (research, scientific work) and of the corresponding means at the political level, of collectively established "legal" instruments, ideological structures, education plans, different cultural manifestations. This control is of the people-collective, established by organs and institutions that have been developed during the process and at the moment of assuming power. And this will depend on an articulation between the "upper" and "lower" parts, of which Bakunin speaks, without authoritarianism or hierarchy.

It is certainly not about the end of history, nor does it mean the end of the ideological struggle and, perhaps, of others.There will still be many ghosts of the past, a capillary power, disseminated throughout society, which can reproduce the system's values and institutions. In addition, all the affected circuits will be worn out in this first stage of profound transformation.

The complex nature of power obliges us to adopt equally complex strategic lines. In the face of an established strategy of power, designed to perpetuate it, one must oppose it with a strategy of the oppressed classes aimed at constructing a popular power that ensures a better and fair functioning of the whole of society. The concretisation of popular power requires the preparation of the organisations of the oppressed classes dedicated to assuming it, and the consolidation of these organisations with their corresponding role. This is necessary because building popular power does not mean conquering, through the social and political force of the oppressed, the constitutive elements of power and that, immediately after the work of rupture, they meet all social needs.

Finally, it is not simply a matter of uprooting the ruling classes of today's centralised global power; but of disseminating it, decentralising it into popular organisations, transforming it into something else. Making it conform to a new political and social structure.

The popular power exercised by the workers and the people in amply democratic and participatory bodies controlled by them will assume this control,

material. However, it should be noted that it starts from information, data and notions about the subject in question. In the process of this theoretical work the primary material is treated by means of certain conceptual instruments, certain instruments of thought. The product of this treatment, of this work, is knowledge.

In more appropriate terms, one can say that there are only singular objects: certain historical situations, in certain societies, at certain times. Theoretical knowledge aims to understand these singularities as much as possible. In the process of the production of knowledge, therefore, the raw material (superficial perception) is transformed into a product (rigorous, scientific knowledge). Many productions become instruments that no longer refer to the singular; they are general concepts, such as the concept of class.

By this I mean that the process of knowing the whole social reality is susceptible to infinite theoretical deepening since knowledge, as such, is infinite. Thus, one cannot wait for a "finished" knowledge of social reality as a whole to begin acting upon it in order to transform it. One also cannot try to transform it without knowing it properly.

Socialism, the idea and aspiration of a different society, the establishment of just and solidaristic social relations, the "dreams" of equality and freedom belong to the realm of ideology. Ideology, whatever it may be, is inherent to the human condition, to this social human being; human beings do not exist without ideology, there is no Jurassic Park for them. Aspirations, "dreams", hatreds, desires, loves – all of which often coexist with the gods – have always existed within the human being. Of course, these concepts, which are from different eras, do not even closely express all those feelings.

There is no universal subject in itself, an invention of our times; the subjects are very different at different times. The subject as historical product is a child of its time. For us, today, what is of interest is subject and ideology in this structure of domination called capitalism.

It is in this context of the differentiation of theory and ideology that one can speak – and, indeed, we speak – of ideological certainty and "philosophical ignorance", as Malatesta said. "Ignorance" in the sense that knowledge is infinite, which is something that does not exempt us from trying to understand our times as much as possible, so that our political and social activity is not carried out in a disoriented way.

There is no such thing as scientific socialism. No social law will necessarily lead us to this sublime aspiration. Nor will it be possible to know the general laws of social functioning at such a level that it would be possible to predict with complete certainty the events, the future, the specific character of a particular future.

History has given us some lessons, and one of them is that participation in events is fundamental, that it is struggle that creates new possibilities. It is this kind of teaching that, along with all the theoretical development that an

organisation can perform, will allow us to take steps towards a socialism that, by itself, will never arrive.

FC: Do you believe that ideology, together with theory, is a fundamental element for political action? Regarding social formations, can one speak of the existence of only one ideology?

JCM: Ideology is a fundamental element for political action; it is always present in one way or another and exists simultaneously with action. It is a primary sphere of social reality and cannot be conceived as a mere reflection of others. In some cases it is ideology that "determines" the events in which a wide range of elements such as economic and legal-military ones undoubtedly intervene.

Marx defined ideology as a mirror in his economistic scheme of infrastructure and superstructure. Far from it; ideology is a sphere of relative autonomy, it operates in constant interaction and has enormous gravitation. Even scholars of the subject give it its own time of development and transformation, thus breaking with the homogeneous concept of time, which is implicit in most social studies.

One can transform the economy and, at the same time, transform the ideology very little and even continue reproducing a lot of the previous conceptions. The USSR and Cuba prove this condition of ideology empirically. Some have argued quite well that ideology, or much of it, tends to continue even if the material conditions that originated it have disappeared.

It is also quite relevant to observe the functioning of ideology in concrete social formations, for it is not strange that the general concept is linked solely to the proletariat; that is, the class which, in abstract-formal terms, is antagonistic to the ruling class. What is noticeable in a social formation, however much it is marked by the domination of the capitalist system, is that many things are not in a pure state, but rather "mixed". In any case, it is essential to take as reference the ideology developed among the workers in history and the values that have been left as its legacy, in terms of the aspirations of a new society founded on other bases.

The ideology and values of the workers

The transformations that occurred in the social sphere, in the sphere of labour, produced a set of new and dispersed social practices. Many "watertight or semi-watertight compartments" were created, with little or no relation to each other. However, what I want to point out here is the ideological problem generated by this.

At another historical moment, on a path of another unfolding and another articulation of the capitalist system, a collection of ideas, representations, notions and feelings were produced in the imagination of the workers' universe with

The more popular participation has developed in the stage prior to the fundamental transformations, the greater will be the possibilities for forms of organisation that move towards authentic socialism.

Even so, we must keep in mind something that seems to have a basis: the disruption of a system opens up new possibilities, giving rise to new combinations that had not previously presented themselves. For this reason, the limits cannot be observed only from a notion of horizon that is presented before us today. Faced with some changes, possibilities must arise that previously could not even be imagined. There are situations, produced by a process of rupture, that generate discontinuities with a part of what exists and establish a new scenario. They are not magic "jumps", but are related to what precedes them. However, it should be noted that these possible situations cannot surprise us; in terms of political organisation we must be technically prepared for such events in case they should occur.

Popular power and rupture

Ensuring the viability of implanting popular power, according to what we define and from our libertarian perspective, implies, in strategic terms, a determined definition of revolutionary rupture. This definition constitutes one of the fundamental cores of the strategic debate of the Latin American left today, as there are proposals that do not point to the empowerment of the people, but seek their adherence and channel their combative energy and their desire for transformation into the classic ways, that is, into the institutionalism of the system of domination.

The autonomy of this process of popular power depends as much on the course that the revolutionary process can follow, as on the concrete characteristics assumed by the actions to confront the system. In this sense, we conceive of this task as an effective accumulation of the people; creating their own organisational instances, new forms, independent institutions, new mechanisms that make revolutionary rupture that has a popular base possible.

There is no doubt, and history itself has shown, that the possibilities for socialist construction grow stronger by the extent to which there is popular participation and weaken if rebellious events are conceived solely to change those who control the structures of domination.

We know that what has been said here has a precise and very general purpose; however, this is necessary to clarify an orientation of militant work. Another relevant theme is how to place this question of popular power in the concrete formations of our Latin America today, in the social and political activities themselves.

formation of a government aristocracy, that is, a class of people who have nothing in common with the popular masses; and this class would surely go back to exploiting and subjecting the masses under the pretext of common welfare or the salvation of the state. [...] In reality, what do we see in history? That the state has always been the patrimony of a privileged class."

From the present, but modifying practices and logic

It is certain that the transition to a different society must begin to be made within this system. But experience tells us that there are means, orientations, instruments, institutions and forms of organisation that must be abandoned if we are to construct social forces capable of producing real transformations in the contents and forms of social organisation. This is an indispensable alternative if we want to build a different society that seeks to modify the collection of social relations that exist in a given society.

There is extensive experience regarding attempts to choose short cuts, basically those of a statist type, on the part of socialism and movements that claimed to want to overcome capitalism. All this in the name of realism, of the need to see the process of transformation pragmatically, to choose supposed paths that, as was argued, could reconcile aspirations for transformation and the mechanisms of systemic reproduction in our favour.

They told us it is possible to be inside these same circuits of power — historically constituted to ensure greater effectiveness of domination — and, through them, to work and produce politics in the direction of changes that, gradually, would suffocate that dominant channel itself, in which we would be inserted and by which we would be influenced daily. In terms of logic this is something quite poor.

What history demonstrates, as do rigorous theoretical works, is that these apparatuses of power absorb and make functional that which circulates within them. It also seems clear that one cannot conceive questions contrary to the logic of the system by means of it.

This whole institutional body, all these mechanisms are not empty; more than that, they are full. Full of constant productions in favour of maintaining, reproducing and recreating this kind of social order. It does not in any way seem to be a good strategy to choose these ways, these places and these routes that have a master and, at the same time, the power to stamp their mark on everything that forms part of them.

"Society can and must begin its own reorganisation," says Bakunin in the material quoted above. It should be noted that there is a series of activities that can and should be carried out right now, within capitalist societies. Social and political activities that enable the exercise of participation and resolving the population's problems. These activities produce notions and experiences that increase awareness and confidence in our own strengths.

some force. The capitalist system and the bourgeoisie were obvious enemies, since their interests were directly opposed to the objectives of the working class. The workers, concentrated in large factories, created organisational forms to win improvements and, for this reason, suffered multiple and brutal repressions.

A good part of the imagination of these workers began to be filled with determined certainties: there was no place for them in that system; to seek justice in that system was a chimera. The struggles faced, the cruel living conditions and group solidarity aroused dreams that related to social emancipation. Ideological elements antagonistic to the system animated immediate struggles and future dreams. The big factories and unions allowed the workers to meet and strengthen a sense of strength and belonging to something different to the current system; this latent feeling, mixed with other ingredients, could be organised coherently.

If it is true that one can only organise something that actually exists, under such social circumstances one could organise – and, indeed, did organise in primary terms and also with a certain development – an antagonistic ideology; an enemy of the capitalist system and that aspired to a very different social order.

It seems obvious that it was not the abstract and intellectual discourses that gave rise to this ideology, but the conditions of everyday life and the practices, struggles, and shoulder-to-shoulder solidarity of the workers. Theory had a role in this process: to organise this world of very "plural" ideas and feelings, with several powerful antagonistic fragments.

In this historical period values such as solidarity, mutual aid, the conception of a different world from the existing one, and the vision of the oppressor and exploiter as irreconcilable enemies were produced. The bodies that were disciplined for regular and methodical work recreated this condition, promoting the pride of being a worker, of producing social goods, of considering their task as indispensable for the well-being of society, of thinking of all reconstruction on the basis of the necessary production of goods and services. However, this perspective was not strictly promoted and reflected by the free time needed to enjoy "life"; this is how we struggled to reduce the working day. The idea of not working more than necessary was also part of this ideological horizon.

Did these ideas and values die with the stage of capitalism that lasted until about three decades ago? Were these ideological elements banished or buried by fragmentation? I can say, initially, no. Many serious studies show that ideology does not have the same pace of change as other social structures. It has, as I mentioned before, the particularity of persisting even if the conditions that brought about its existence disappear. That being true, a significant part of this historical production would still be alive, perhaps more embodied than ever. Ideology would thus be in the popular imagination, which is as material as any other matter.

Where is it exactly? What state is it in? These questions, and of course others could be asked, are the ones that matter today. I will add another: Can it be reconstructed with intellectual or purely theoretical discourses? Nothing seems to indicate so. Where is this ideology that is so indispensable for rupture today? Where else can something similar to it or capable of being articulated to it, be produced?

Here we would have to reconcile Malatesta and Bachelard. The first said that we are always in a state of philosophical ignorance, which allows us to practice critical thinking and to know that certainties are not absolute. The second would tell us that it is already a step forward just to correctly pose a problem, even if we cannot advance much in its treatment. That is the question; we just want to pose a problem in order to think about it. We do not believe that we can go much further than that today, but the problem is posed anyway.

But why do we want to talk about things we ignore so much? The reply is the following: We are convinced that without an antagonistic ideology and corresponding values there is no chance of beating this filthy system; today, without such elements, we cannot even achieve important gains for those from below. On our continent there are diverse ideological expressions that must be studied; without considering their specific codes communication from a political organisation may be being sown in the desert.

There are indigenous peoples who cannot be reduced, in explanatory terms, to the "peasant" category of economic roots. There are oppressions in communities of different ethnicities, of African descendants, women, the "marginalised" who lack the most basic things. In these and other universes you cannot create a classical proletarian ideology, since that would mean disconnecting the subject from their daily experience and also from the way they live. Let's add some more considerations on this.

Social behaviours derived from fragmentation

The regular and concrete social conditions that must be faced by a group at any given moment produce specific behaviours. They develop ideological elements that are of considerable relevance to people who have been socialised in certain "behaviours" since childhood. Basically, the difference with this situation is inequality. A brutally unequal distribution of material and symbolic goods.

There are those who claim that, in this way, "the structure of the social universe in which the individual or group's existence occurs is reproduced in them". Social behaviours are similar for all those in a particular compartment. Thus, a fragmented oppressed class does not produce the same thing, in ideological terms, in each one of its compartments.

Consequently, in this fluid and atomised social situation, there are class fractions that have a distant relation with little or no connection to class consciousness.

frameworks of the strategy and the project adopted; a project that can be short- or medium-term.

Stage of resistance

Social, political and ideological conditions seem to indicate that we are not in a revolutionary stage, nor even of combative accumulation. Profound transformations in the short- and medium-term are not on the horizon. This statement is important not in order to have a theoretical and abstract discussion, but to elaborate our practice today. From this theoretical and practical perspective we can say that, today, we are in a stage of resistance. When we set this general line we are not discounting the armed struggle of the legendary Colombian guerrillas or the creative and vigorous Zapatista movement, which has clear and innovative revolutionary propositions.

One of our documents said the following: "Resistance, therefore, for this stage. To strengthen struggles, raise spirits, regain confidence in our own forces, think of a just tomorrow, create a collective alternative, combat individualism and defeatism, rescue solidarity, generate new revolutionary possibilities." We have to work to ensure that all practices are consistent with the established plan. That is, social and political practices that are in line with another moment of society should not coexist with practices corresponding to this historical moment due to the inertia of the past. This difference can create confusion and impact on the social environment. Even if we share the same objective of revolutionary intention this does not mean that we should keep repeating the same strategies; we cannot import models used in previous situations that were unique.

Why a strategy of popular power? And what power?

I must now answer as to why a strategy of popular power is important for popular movements. In fact, this strategy is important for both popular movements and the anarchist political organisation.

Our libertarian idea of power has its foundations in the theoretical and political conceptions that were developed by Bakunin with such lucidity, even foreseeing the future. He could not foresee the possibilities of rupture and the creation of a new civilisation — as many militants of that time called the new world they sought to build — without the destruction of the capitalist state, without popular action and participation. Bakunin said things like this:

> ***"Free organisation will occur after the abolition of the state.***
>
> *Society can and must start its own organisation which, however, must not be carried out from the top down, nor according to any ideal plan designed by a few wise men or philosophers, nor by decree promulgated by some dictatorial power, or even by a National Assembly elected through universal suffrage. Such a system, as has been said, would inevitably lead to the*

for improvements or defence of victories that mobilise the population must count on our participation. Obviously prioritising those that are most combative and have the most appropriate social sensibility.

However, just being present is of no use – you must be present with an "intention". Because of the major changes that occur in the social situation it is convenient to establish short-term programmes that do not contradict what was planned for the medium term, let alone the central long-term objectives. It is also relevant to set deadlines as it is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of a job after a few months or even a year after completion. There are tasks that take some time to bear fruit. What is accomplished only from a narrow short-term perspective, something occasional, ends up having little or no result. Political-social accumulation is a complex task that depends on several factors. In time, hits and misses, corrections and reiterations are combined.

In relation to a certain culture that has been spreading we can say that creativity does not mean changing the project every hour, but "inventing" and renewing it within the framework of determined objectives and methodical tasks that have regularity. One thing is creation, another is instability. A project of a certain period requires perseverance, regularity and stability. The issue of regularity must be emphasised, as what remains is everyday work; the continuity of an established strategy in which the different tasks are finally convergent. Carrying out merely occasional and episodic activities and tasks leads nowhere.

Can one think of a time-frame for our programme right now?

The programme must constantly assess our strength, taking into account our militant capacity. The distribution of effort should be based on this capacity; all established objectives must be related to this capacity. The programme not only comprises the articulation of external work, but must also encompass internal work. The times and activities of these two planes should be articulated systematically. Neglecting the tasks in either of these planes causes a particularly delicate hypertrophy. Care must be taken to ensure that all activities function in a coherent manner.

The "vessel" that embraces the fruits of militant work is the anarchist organisation, and it cannot be relegated to the background. It unites efforts and gives continuity and meaning to action. It is the vessel that embraces a purpose of transformation, drives the growth of combative and transformative consciousness in the population and endures its own changes when carrying out this task. If our force and our external presence grow we must, at the same time, have a specific organisation with a force that is proportional to its insertion in popular movements and the sphere of social relations.

The organisational forms capable of embracing such a varied militant work process is something complex and requires a balance of our forces within the

Both the compartment stranger to any direct experience, due to the absence of concrete conditions that would permit it, and, almost at the other extreme, those who benefit from symbolic material ever more "full" of reproductive content, without opportunities of incorporation into the universe of the workers.

It seems essential to see how to break with this or even how to penetrate the different compartments that are not reproducing the dominant ideology. Practically, it is about asking: How can we articulate the specific practices of each class fraction with the historical legacy and rational discourses in order to achieve an ideology of confrontation and rupture?

When we talk about the construction of an ideology of resistance, we are not referring to an intellectual elaboration but to a social dynamic in relation to which we contribute with our intentionality, and taking into account its mechanisms and its real sphere of possible interpenetration.

The attempt to understand this complex phenomenon belongs to the sphere of theory, the production of which is a task of the political organisation that does not take place in routine, in the repetition of schemas or in pure abstractions. Abstractions are of great value in their specific domain and, if properly considered, can guide the understanding of concrete historical phenomena, located in unique times and places.

If well developed this theme takes on a particular importance in the strategic conception of the front of oppressed classes and popular power.

FC: What positions should anarchists defend in popular movements? How can the specific organisation function as a catalyst within them, influencing them to have certain characteristics and connecting diverse movements in order to increase their social force?

JCM: I will use FAU materials to answer this question, tailoring and synthesising them.

Politically organised anarchism is decisive

The problem of power, which is decisive in profound social transformation, can only be resolved at the political level, through political struggle. And it requires a specific form of organisation: the revolutionary political organisation, for us of a libertarian matrix.

Only through its action – rooted in the masses, in the different popular processes – is it possible to attain the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus, of the set of micro-powers that sustain and recreate it.

It is imperative that this structure be replaced by mechanisms of popular power that have a political perspective and are supported by a strong people.

It seems necessary to add, even briefly, a few more things about power. Studies that seem sufficiently rigorous indicate some fundamental questions: power circulates throughout the whole social body, through the different structured spheres; that is, through all social relations. Thus, there is power in the economic sphere, in the political-legal-military sphere and in the ideological-cultural sphere; power exists at all levels of society. On smaller scales power also acquires importance in light of the formation of embryos of a new civilisation, in the expression of different forms of self-organisation or self-management. On a large scale power presents itself, concentrated and with greater irradiation, in larger places.

It is very relevant to consider that there is a small, everyday social universe that constitutes a factory for the production of new notions, resistances and techniques of popular power. In this universe the anarchist political organisation has a big job to do.

In fact, forms of power, and the state as a special instance, are located at a precise level of the current social structure. Although they obviously have relations of interdependence with other levels of the social reality – economic, ideological, legal, etc. – they cannot simply be reduced to them. In concrete terms this means that political activity cannot be reduced to economic struggle, nor to union and popular practice in general, even though this practice may have "political" elements, as indeed it does.

Economic and popular struggle for immediate demands does not spontaneously produce a struggle against political power as such. Nor does it produce the organisational and technical means for the struggle for power, nor the capacity to end the social relations that reproduce it. Therefore, if not properly channeled and instrumentalised spontaneism – the spontaneous mobilisation of the masses, a reflection of an accumulation of unresolved problems that soon "explodes"— scarcely transcends to the political plane in the sense of changing power relations, of opening spaces for a new process of profound transformation.

This is because the overthrow of power – which the bourgeoisie cannot permit, because their lives depend on it – presupposes the creation of another social order, with another "model" of organisation – with another economy, another ideology – and, besides this, an inevitable struggle, a constant process of popular struggle, and technical means that the mass movement alone cannot successfully develop spontaneously. This is also not its specific task. Taking into account an ample historical period as well as our time, the teaching we have is that great spontaneous "mass" movements are very rich in the experiences they develop, but do not necessarily have a strategy that points to the transformation of the system. Even in the case of mass movements that are creating a certain level of popular power, developing some new social practices and new ideological notions.

At the present level of systemic development the only thing that guarantees victory is the destruction of the bourgeois power apparatus, its entire structure

> *The persistent recurrence of these positions, especially on the part of certain sectors of the educated petty bourgeoisie, has generated — due to a reaction that, although explicable, is mistaken — an underestimation of ideological elements, considered part of a 'theory' with which we could do without. Overcoming this underestimation is a current task. We must depart from these aspects and advance on the paths of the most effective knowledge and theoretical elaboration as the increasingly firm foundation of an already defined strategic-tactical line."*

The concept of "strategy in the narrow sense". Why?

In the congress discussions we had arrived at the conclusion that the concepts of general strategy and tactics left a kind of void between them. There were questions that did not correspond to the general strategy and did not belong to the realm of tactics either. The concept of strategy in the narrow sense emerges as a provisional definition for this "intermediary" concept.

We situate this concept between general strategy and tactics. We assign to it a function of general design, in a plan of greater approximation of social-political action. The concept of strategy in the narrow sense comprises the general lines already established in different spheres, but it serves as a tool for a closer approximation of social reality. This means that we will not operate in this reality in a pragmatic or only empirical way, and that we will also not operate from the limited tactical dimension.

On the other hand, strategy in the narrow sense feeds the programme of work for a period, starting from conjunctural orientations.

About the programme

We situate the programme "specifically and concretely in the arena of social practices. In the arena where social tensions and struggles are expressed". The programme compiles the evaluation carried out about the stage in which a particular system is analysed and, from the existing space of action, develops the possibilities for work. The programme comprises "the orientation of all our action for a period".

It is about not doing what appears, nor assessing everything that arises in isolation, nor being discouraged because the advance is not immediately visible. It is about setting goals and moving towards them. Choosing action and setting priorities according to these objectives. Clearly this implies that there will be activities that we will not undertake, events in which we will not participate. They can be important and even spectacular, but they should be disregarded if they do not fall within the intentions for the stage of our programme. In other cases we will be the absolute minority or have major complications in activities that match our objectives. Choosing what we like best or what gives us the least complications is not the right politics. For example, the various struggles, experiences, demands

situations that change and follow each other — is the only suitable 'judge' to decide these controversies.

However, strategy only provides the general lines for a period. It is the tactics that give body to it in the actual, concrete reality and that translate it into facts. Tactical options, as they concern more precise, concrete and immediate problems, can be more varied, more flexible. However, they cannot be in contradiction with the strategy.

An appropriate strategic-tactical conception, as stated, must take into account the actual situation and the expected timeframe for its realisation. But that is not enough: facts, practice, 'pure' experience are not enough. What's more, 'pure' experience does not exist. Every politically active organisation comes to a strategic-tactical conception on the basis of certain assumptions, implicit or explicit, which are ideological, theoretical.

There is no apolitical, ideologically neutral strategy. There is no way to deduce it from a presumably 'objective', ideologically acetic analysis. Those who believe in the possibility of such an analysis, of a definition without ideological orientation, almost always limit themselves to accepting as the maximum level of 'political' development that which may derive from spontaneous development. Ideology is replaced by conceptions emanating from 'common sense', which is always, inevitably, penetrated by the 'common' ideas and beliefs spread by dominant social groups. The only way to overcome these 'common' ideas and beliefs is to confront them with a set of positions, organisationally structured and the widest possible; with an ideology. Ideology is an essential motor for political action and an inevitable component of every strategy. All political practice implies definite motives and meaning that only become clearly discernible to the extent they are made explicit and organised into an ideology.

We should make some notes here. The more-or-less mechanical shift of schemas from other realities – that function as a kind of substitute for the real ensemble, of the true social reality before us – has been very frequent. For a long time — and many continue to do so — strategic and tactical lines have been drawn not on the basis of a careful analysis of our reality, but on the basis of what 'so-and-so' said, often in relation to situations that occurred in other distant and distinct regions. [...]

In Latin America this way of proceeding, according to prefabricated 'models', was responsible for immense damage. Even the simple production of information — which should be carried out by rigorous descriptive work on local or regional conditions and circumstances — encountered major obstacles. In this situation the 'copy', the mechanical displacement of effective 'recipes' proven by [...] outside experience, becomes a fast and attractively 'easy' initiative.

of domination, in which the state has a primary role – some talk of condensation, some of coagulation. This implies more or less prolonged political-revolutionary action, with a renewed strategy and tactics adjusted to the conjunctural variations. To deny this means to renounce all revolutionary transformation, since this is the only real and profound transformation that can change the system of domination as it is structured.

It is correctly said that to demonstrate to the people a perspective of victory, a path of hope, of confidence in the possibility of a profound and revolutionary transformation is something ideologically fundamental. This "demonstration" is a function of a political organisation; in our case, of organised anarchism. In all its actions the political organisation promotes an ideological level, of consciousness, different from that generated by the spontaneous practice of the masses – saturated with notions, values and representations that the system promotes with its mass media and the discipline promoted through varied mechanisms. It is a matter of building a level that will enable the overcoming of this kind of spontaneism.

This requires the development of specifically political activity, which is the only way to channel the rebellion and the constructions that are generated at the popular level in different processes towards victory. For this, a political organisation is indispensable. At the current juncture, here and now, it has certain characteristics which derive from the strategic peculiarities that the situation imposes. In any case, this political organisation must be the bearer, internally and externally, of the values it considers to be primordial to the establishment of new social relations.

When a new way of doing politics is only rhetoric

To maintain a new way of doing politics or creating popular power does not mean adopting elaborate rhetorical phraseology, or embellishing old and repeated discourses that lead, once and again, to the same place. There is an interesting saying: "Slowly, because I'm in a hurry." Because haste has repeatedly led to dead ends or to deeper entanglement of those from below, and those who want to represent them, in this cruel and violent system.

Our project of revolutionary intent understands today, like yesterday, the coherent choice of paths to follow. There are no dogmas in relation to the theoretical tools that should be used. Every rigorous production that enables a more accurate reading of reality must be taken into account, with that openness that allows us to live our time, knowing all the changes it has brought and still brings about.

In the end, we should have a reading that allows us to see the real problems of our time clearly. At the same time, we must have the firmness and the intransigence to confront everything that the present system produces and sustains, with a heart and perseverance rooted in a future that must be built every day, in the different areas of militancy.

This process must be carried out without elitisms and vanguards, which constitute two ways of hierarchising practices and, even unconsciously, incorporating values that do not belong to the camp of the oppressed. It must contain new values so that it is not confusing or negative. Otherwise one would not be deconstructing these hierarchical values, which are so connected with domination and obedience, but reinforcing constructs alien to the historical subject.

Political organisation, as we conceive it, is not synonymous with vanguardism or the "enlightened" elite, without which the poor "ignorant people" cannot exit the capitalist labyrinth. Political organisation is a fundamental part in the construction of this exit; but starting from other values, other ideological and ethical practices and another social sensibility. Efficient organisation is not synonymous with hierarchy. The political organisation must always be within popular processes and be part of them together with the people, living with their level of consciousness and aspiring to contribute to their development and positive change. This must come from a sense of belonging to the people, from a plane of equality, and not from the "heights" of knowledge.

The self-proclaimed vanguards – with a classic conception that they are the bearers of the future and who carry it into the heart of the people as though it were something new – deserve to be extinct today because of their historical judgment. Ideology does not come from outside, but is produced within the very practices, ideas and behaviours that people develop in their confrontations. The development of a new social-political technology and "discourses of knowledge" that correspond with freedom cannot occur without confronting those who produce domination. These discourses should promote confrontation and feed on all instances of resistance in which the people propel struggles. In this regard, the political organisation is also in a process of constant re-education.

Finally, we will use a synthesis. For us, political practice is any activity that has as its object the relationship of the exploited and oppressed with the organisms of political power, the state, government and their different expressions. Political practice is the confrontation of government, expression of imposed power; the defence and extension of public and individual freedoms; the capacity of proposals that correspond to the general interest of the population or its partial aspects. Political practice is also insurrection as an instance of violent questioning of a situation we want to change. Political practices are the proposals that, appealing to popular demands, confront the dominant organs of power, provide solutions to general and concrete issues, and force organs of power to adopt them and make them valid for society as a whole.

An example of this is mobilisations that extend popular rights. Clearly these conquests, won by means of a social force, can only be maintained and expanded when there is a corresponding social force.

They say that "power exists in the act", and the same can be said of revolution. It's not about a potentiality, something that is conjured up, nor is it an isolated act.

Overall strategy

In order to broach the concept of popular power it is necessary, before entering into the theme, to make some general notes based on materials that were developed by the organisation in 1970. I will make minor adjustments to what is essential, as it seems to me that the elements put forward are clear enough to enrich any debate. Let's see.

> *"The activity of a political organisation implies a prediction of the possible unfolding of events in a more-or-less prolonged period of time, which includes the course of action to be taken by the organisation in the face of events in order to influence them in the most effective and appropriate direction."*
>
> *These predictions are called the strategic line. Normally, a strategic line is valid as long as the general situation to which it corresponds persists. For example: The strategy of prolonged struggle, the creation of the conditions and the development of armed struggle actions within the framework of the process of socio-economic deterioration, with its predictable derivation of intensification of struggles.*
>
> *Of course, if the overall situation undergoes very significant changes they will change the conditions under which the organisation will have to operate; if the organisation is to act effectively it must revise its strategy to fit the new situation.*
>
> *It should be noted that this does not imply changing the desired objectives, the ends, nor the ideological principles. Strategy concerns a more modest, albeit decisive, plan that relates to the organisation's operational activity, its political practice.*
>
> *This is relevant because, often, there are those who tend to turn into 'principles' questions that are, and can only be, strategic formulations valid to the extent of their suitability and effectiveness in operating in a given situation. These formulations can become dangerous if they become dogmas with the pretence of universal applicability and utility.*
>
> *Because of these arbitrary and dogmatic extensions of the validity of strategic experiments, endless discussions about what we might call 'false problems' took place. […] In some cases, such positions motivated, for years, discussions in which the various 'arguments' were repeated and scrutinised. And, as these discussions were taking place they were creating rigid positions and giving them a transcendence they did not deserve. What was only a matter of strategy became a matter of principle. As a result, the fact that the only appropriate method to resolve these issues is to undertake an analysis of the concrete situation — economic, social, political — within which one has to act has been lost sight of. The situation, the social reality — which is dynamically constituted through*

It is true that part of this constitutes a legitimate reaction to empty totalities and globalities, which are not based on the specific elements that supposedly compose it and which have created many "scientific" dogmas and theories that lack consistency. But one cannot think about the effectiveness of partial elements, that are so frequently advanced, mostly with the best intentions, by alternativists, techno-optimists and the like, when we are faced with a system of domination and exploitation, a global repressive apparatus, a generalised neo-liberal model, an ideological apparatus of such deep penetration.[9] Understood in this way these partial specificities resemble the ideology of the old Vizcaya: 'Stay in your hiding place'. They also sometimes serve to save conscience from purgatory.

Approaching what we said above, traces of a more barbaric individualism seem to have grown; with anger and conflict circulating more within the population and among equals than in relation to those above.

Together with the new phenomena the ideological apparatus of the system – to which is added a deep 'left' liberal-reformism – sustains a determined "no you can't", or does something within what is considered 'educated' or 'new', of recent manufacture and admission. All within a perimeter that does not include the "wretched" or the confronters. This, in certain sensibilities, seems to generate discouragement, confusion, frustration, despair and, finally, the desire to turn to oneself, devoting oneself to one's own things.

Obviously, these and other factors affect solidarity and collective values, prospects for tomorrow, efforts towards something that does not exist today, and stimulate individualism, corporatism, lack of respect for others and short-term perspectives. Are they also engendering complicity with the system?

There is an ideological torrent that floods a vast terrain and that often does not even allow us to think properly. As it was said, one must "separate the wheat from the chaff" and, while this is not a simple task, it is essential.

FC: I know you were very involved in the discussion about popular power. Could you explain to me what popular power is, for you, and why this strategy is important for the popular movement? I believe the same should occur in Uruguay as in Brazil, where various other sectors also use the concept of popular power, each to refer to something different: some with strategies more or less similar to ours, others with vanguardist or diametrically opposed proposals. How can we defend popular power and differentiate our proposal from authoritarian ones? Could you explain your conception of popular power within the framework of strategy and programme?

JCM: I will also use FAU documents to answer this question.

It requires modifying, disruptive, interrupting practices in spheres such as the economic, ideological, political-legal and cultural in general.

All this is concretised in a process with active popular participation, driven by a people of which we are a part and that make up a wide spectrum of the oppressed and exploited that, at this historical stage, we call the oppressed classes.

It is a people that, within the structural changes that have taken place, suffers from a relevant fragmentation that must be overcome through ties of solidarity that create bonds. The unity of their struggles must be a primary foundation for a social force to be able to carry out effective struggles and to advance qualitatively. This does not involve any kind of "gradualism", linearity or taking the enemies' posts one by one. It is something else.

Knowing the environment in which one acts, being inserted in it, having a political purpose in this daily routine, having proposals in line with what people want and need and establishing priorities are some elements that allow the development of a political organisation like ours. There are instruments of our ideology that must be put into practice in concrete circumstances: direct action, direct democracy, self-management, federative forms of organisation etc.

Your question involves the question of social force as well as how we might define the work we do as a political organisation within popular movements. These are good questions, which I will not discard. Far from all elitism, as I put it earlier, our task is that of a small motor that functions within the people and is in constant motion. Social force seems to me to be a concept of great importance. I think this is very closely linked to the next question, so I will say something about it in the next answer.

FC: I would like to address the question of class. We have defended a position of anarchist activity together with the segments of the population that most suffer the effects of capitalism. Therefore, unlike the orthodox authoritarians who prioritise a type of urban and industrial proletariat we propose action that, in addition to this proletariat, takes into account other subjects, such as workers from other sectors, peasants, precarious workers of all kinds – the "lumpen" in the classical definition – and indigenous peoples. How do you see this question of "where to prioritise the sewing of our seeds"? In this case, would all social movements with these subjects, besides the unions themselves, be a priority?

JCM: Our forces as a developing political organisation undoubtedly place limitations on us. Prioritising the whole social sphere – which, no doubt, would be great if we could do it – is not possible until we have the necessary force. Therefore, prioritising places based on previous analysis and depending on the strategy is of prime importance.

We could say, quickly, that at different levels according to social formations there are significant aspects being felt by the population: wages, better working conditions, housing, health, human rights, survival, working class neighbourhoods, extreme poverty and education, among others. But it is quite possible that, of the three or four fundamental elements of the established strategy, it will start with those which offer more concrete possibilities at any given moment.

We must always be careful that this does not hypertrophy the political project and that, in its dynamics, it does not become a lock, thus enabling us to act on other fronts that we consider indispensable. It is something that the political organisation regulates in its organisational structures, producing a style of analysis and discussion that allows this to occur naturally.

That is, there are priorities that are conjunctural and others that are constitutive of the strategy itself. These are different situations that often intersect, and do not have to be in contradiction or generate orientations that, later, may become divergent. Articulating the political organisation's action in the popular domain requires this fluidity, which does not imply a loss of coherence. It should be noted that there is a construction that concerns the organisation itself: the establishment of the necessary mechanisms for the various domains of action, as well as the evaluation of forces and of the experiences that one does not have, in order to obtain them.

There are a series of "concepts", such as that of the lumpen, which stem from reductionist conceptions that attempt to explain everything from the economic structure and the role that, a priori, is expected of the labour movement, primarily in industrialised countries. This type of position was very common in specific historical moments, but today it can be said that this is a paradigm that, given a rigorous approach, does not hold up. In this sense there is a kind of belief in the existence of a universal subject in itself and, also, of elements of progress. It is a conceptual structure, with its "methods", that excludes and even disqualifies, in no elegant way, everything that does not fit into its schema.

I think it may be interesting to refer to some FAU material that deals with this theme, and which was later developed, with greater richness, in a joint work.

The subject of change must be produced

"The subject is also a historical product," the scholars tell us. Therefore, practices should be put in place that can produce and organise it. The practices of the system, added to those inherited from other previous brutal systems, were oriented towards the creation of an individual-collective subject that adapts as much as possible to the existing order, to the values that sustain it. There is no doubt that it is significant that this has been internalised in them and in us.

Thus, another historical subject will not come out of nowhere, it will not appear with a stroke of magic; it must be the result of practices that cause other notions

for its survival and reproduction, establishes at this stage a struggle against the 'wretched'? This new situation generates many reflections.

The world is full of prisons and they are still open in many places. There will be more prisoners and the 'new poverty' will increase their bond with this world. Will a good part of the 'new poverty' be even more enabled for this war?

More than half of our Latin America's population is in poverty. Under the current structure this situation will not improve, but will worsen in the coming years. This is what the official figures themselves reveal. Moreover, in many places there has been a greater alternation between work and hunger aimed at preventing people from entering the 'miserable' and hostile world.

There have been uprisings by populations that, sometimes confusedly, express dissatisfaction and discomfort regarding their situation of marginality and misery; they have been driven by peasants, the unemployed and indigenous people. Mobilisations of this kind can be seen in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico and Bolivia. In Bolivia, correctly, a movement was created around the question of water, an unorthodox mobilising element. And this general mobilisation, driven by the poorest people, took place in the poorest country on the continent. Perhaps the vector of rebellion, that uses violence for change, is coming from those who are most oppressed.

The 'miserable', their struggle and this feeling of revaluation of human rights and certain values are perhaps the central axes of this moment. At the ideological level, as we put it in our overall strategy, we reaffirm the values of labour, the ideology that the world of work produced and produces under conditions of oppression and exploitation. It is an orientation for the militant task. This does not mean that it is already present in large sections of the popular movement, nor even that when some of its elements exist they are clear.

At the same time, in order to carry out its readings and act in accordance with these strong phenomena, a movement must have spiritual preparation. That is, it must have an understanding and some notions that are beyond the reading carried out about them; certain levels of collective experience.

Returning to the theme of fragmentation, it should be added that it can easily be seen in political and social institutions. It can also be seen in less institutional spheres, often linked to the varied and 'inoffensive' cultural offering that is promoted by the system itself or that this system allows to develop. In many ways there seems to be a general tendency to observe or be interested only in partial aspects of things. Corporatism joins this perverse and interested fragmentation. We are of the impression that, besides the cultural influence of the environment, some practices are due to poor readings, with ideological distortions that cause failures even though they are developed with research and reflection materials that contribute a lot. Among other things these distortions lead to overestimating what is specific and giving an almost self-sufficient character to partial issues.

This stage of capitalism has reached unprecedented globalisation and has promoted neo-liberal policies across much of the planet. International organisations have acted with overwhelming consistency and have successfully promoted an even more individualistic culture in many places.

All of these fundamental mechanisms, which work acceptingly and cohesively for the benefit of a small group of powerful people, are at the same time producing an effect of popular fragmentation. The world of work, ties of solidarity, social life, the situation of the poor itself is fragmented.

Along with this, there is an exclusion of multitudes of people, of leftover populations, as well as the great and inhumane struggle for survival among those in the midst of what might be called the 'new poverty'. This 'new poverty' is made up of hopeless people for whom the prospect of work does not even exist. For them, it's essential to get their daily bread at any cost. Even the much propagated consumption of less important objects is completely denied to these people. Those who are part of this 'new poverty' see those who have a lot, something, little or very little as sources from which to get a bit of what they need.

This 'new poverty' is actually a 'new misery' as it's greater than in any other period in history. Given the developments that have occurred, what these people lack is also more than ever. These "miserables", like new characters coming out of the pages of Victor Hugo, are forced to contemplate opulence, corruption, luxury and all that consumer society offers without having access to anything or almost anything. There is even a difference between those who have the security of daily work, who eat every day and who can raise their children with the bare essentials.

Will all this not produce more hatred, more feelings of injury and contempt? Will the word justice not be considered, in the most different contexts, a grotesque deceit?

Mention is made, in different parts, of a new phenomenon that is formulated in a rather fragmentary and superficial manner. Could we be in a historic moment of deaf war in the world of 'new poverty' and 'new misery' against the rich and powerful; and even against those from below, who are seen as such?

This problem indicates that there are sectors of the lower classes that do not refer to the ideology of the workers and are producing another. This may be the case for those who are completely marginalised and for peasants living in utter misery; as well as for indigenous peasants, with the difference that they incorporate into their worldview elements from ancient cultures. In this universe what would the articulating effects of the workers' ideology be?

Would the so-called "citizen security" that, supported by the media, holds that every 'wretch' is a common enemy not have to do with a lot of what we are talking about? Is it not intending for, and achieving, a tacit alliance of the police, the system, and those who have something – even if this "something" is only safe, well-paid work? Would we not, even subtly, be playing the system's game that,

that contradict the dominant order to be internalised. Effective participation, self-management, direct action, federative forms of truly democratic functioning, solidarity and mutual aid need regular mechanisms, organisations and practices in order to be developed; they are constantly in need of organisation.

The continuity necessary for deployment that enables change requires sustainable strategic activity. A coherent strategy that makes it possible not to deconstruct what was built at a given moment. A strategy that contains within itself a different world, that can be promoted within the shell of the world it is antagonistic to. The so-called "by all means necessary" can be an effective way to ensure that no antagonistic strategy is developed that carries the elements destructive of the prevailing system. For this reason the general orientation, established strategy and corresponding tactics are fundamentally important. This strategy must circulate within all practices, both at the social and political level, obviously respecting the specificity of each arena of action.

This does not mean sustaining the "all or nothing" and not even "planting in the desert". We have to establish the starting point as precisely as possible – the specific character of the set of social relations that shape and sustain the system, as well as each precise historical social formation in which we intend to act. We must start from this cruel and brutal social reality and not work out solutions with independent mental processes, unrelated to the workings of concrete social processes.

The place in which people are found in the whole structure of domination has a fundamental role in the production of a determined subject. What people live every day, and how they live, conditions a certain view in different social groups. It is not a static thing; there are factors such as resistance, the incorporation of other notions and representations that will generate, or may generate, certain "short circuits". We must make these factors work in our favour.

At the present stage of the system:
the oppressed classes as revolutionary "subject"

You asked me how we see class composition at this historical moment. The general abstract-formal schema for defining classes as bourgeoisie and proletariat, which undoubtedly exist at this level, has long been shown to be of little or no practical use when the analysis reaches the level of social formations. This suspicion is present between the lines of many documents of historical anarchism. It can be said that the bourgeoisie, even at this level of analysis, is more complex than that: there are class fractions, certain strata linked to them, and even political and ideological influences on their establishment. It is the same thing in relation to the classic proletariat. However, what interests us as a political organisation, in theoretical terms, is the operational aspects that serve the here and now.

This question was raised at the 1986 FAU Congress and the public act of the same year. But it was only at the 11th FAU Congress that we decided to take a more

complete approach to the question of social classes at this stage of capitalism. It was a theme that remained open; the proposal was to continue working towards the production of a hypothesis, an initial draft, that would deepen the concept of class in this stage of capitalism.

We discussed the need to reformulate the concept of class according to the changes that have occurred, avoiding giving continuity to the definition established in the previous period of "Fordist splendour" and the "welfare state". In sum, we considered that the purely economic foundation was not sufficient for a definition of class. Roughly, the need to take into account the way the complex and articulated set of relations of domination is expressed in the sphere of social relations today was pointed out. This is relevant and has decisive implications for how to establish an operational strategy of rupture under the current circumstances.

The document emphasises: "We put, in first place, the need for a popular outcome as a corollary of a long process of struggles with a revolutionary orientation." And continues:

> *"It is clear that in the under-developed and dependent capitalist countries, as in the case of the Latin American countries — with their particular economic and class structure more affected and weakened than in other periods — one cannot think of the possibility of a revolutionary process being driven exclusively by nuclei of the factory proletariat, nor even by all the wage earners. Especially because, at this historic moment, our continent has huge numbers of unemployed, excluded, super-exploited and semi-employed, and the statistics tell us that more than half of the population is in poverty, below the poverty line or is indigent".*

It is necessary to think about building a front of oppressed classes that, as a basic strategic tool, seeks to have the working class — or a sector of it — as a central core; but that also includes, with equal rights, rural workers, peasants, the great diversity of informal workers — a sector increasingly thickened by the crisis and the system's responses to technological changes — the marginalised who demand work, students and the new and diverse self-managed popular expressions.

We believe that, in principle, demands for rights for different sectors, such as the black, indigenous, feminist and other human rights movements, must be incorporated and, in particular and from a specific approach, the ecological question must be considered. However, you cannot stop taking the working class into account, especially its antagonistic values. Globally, the "subject" would, then, be in this set of oppressed classes.

As the document states: "The front of oppressed classes to which we refer is constituted as a network of permanent relations, programmatically linked, starting from the multiplicity of grassroots organisations, capable of expressing in struggle the immediate interests of these social sectors, of developing and deepening them, seeking to constitute transformative orientations and objectives, and making them into social forces of effective gravitation".

This translates into a variety of questions in the work of the organisation: struggles for housing, against evictions, in defence of jobs, support for workers' struggles for land, for shelter, defence of advances and human rights, health and education, social security, youth, self-managed initiatives, ethnic expressions etc. The organisational forms that can encompass such a varied process of militant work is a broad theme, and there is some consensus on its basic aspects.

As I said, performing a prior definition of classes — which is not based on economic reductionism, but incorporates relevant political and, especially, ideological factors — does not mean abstaining from the definition of priorities; established according to the current situation, our evaluations and our strength.

FC: Could we say, in this sense, that the so-called neo-liberal model produced more and different places due to its effects in the social sphere?

JCM: Yes, the neo-liberal model realised its specific production by the means of the effects that it had in the domain of social relations, very linked to the world of poverty of those from below. I even think that they sought, by means of the production of techniques and mechanisms of power, a new discipline that meant that the universe lost in poverty adopted behaviours that ended up by making them resigned to and inserted into this miserable social reality.

I will use FAU materials again.

Fragmentation and the new poverty

This title is part of the notes made at a FAU congress, held around 1998. Despite the changes in the current conjuncture several themes addressed in these considerations seem to be quite interesting. This paper, which reflects on new situations, raises questions and the suspicion that certain dynamics could develop more widely, and that we should strive to become aware of this.

The current world conjuncture and all its economic, political and social effects – which today impact on our Latin America and the world at large – do not invalidate the considerations of that congress. We do not know exactly what the scope of the so-called crisis will be, and it seems that for the world's poor — now including a high percentage of workers in the highly industrialised countries — the situation will get worse.

I will transcribe these notes because I believe they are useful for understanding the situations and processes that are underway. It is not a completed material, but simply some initial notes that we aim to order so as to reflect on issues that have been debated for a long time.