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## **WE BUILD SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION NOW - POLITICAL PRACTICE, ETHICS AND MILITANT STYLE**

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*"For us, the greatest importance does not lie in what we achieve, because achieving everything we want would mean everyone accepting and practising anarchy, which will not be done in a day or through a simple insurrectionary act. The important thing is the method with which you achieve the little or the much."*

*Malatesta*

*"The traditional left has been sectarian, dogmatic and has often ignored the reality around it. I don't believe that anarchists, on the whole, have been much better. It's time to set an example. We must aim to build spaces for discussion and change the bad habits in our movement that don't contribute to the debate and that further dull the development of the necessary critical spirit that the revolutionary movement so desperately needs to face up to the difficult tasks of social regeneration that lie ahead. \_\_"*

*José Antonio Gutiérrez Danton*

For Malatesta, every end requires its means, and if we are fighting for an end that is different from the system of capitalist domination and exploitation, the means to achieve it must also be different. In this sense, we understand militant ethics and style as the values that guide our daily political practice, in permanent dialogue with reality and in coherence with our method and our conception of work. The germ of a fairer, more equal society, free from exploitation and domination, lies in the way we act in the "now", and this cannot be left for later. It's in the way we organise ourselves, through federalism, self-management and direct action. It is in the intention we give to our

practices and relationships in social and political circles; with the grassroots, with other militants and comrades, and in the relationship between political organisations. In other words, the militant style is the search for coherence between the practices of the militant, and of the militancy as a whole, with the principles, methods and political line of an organisation.

As well as defining a strategic programme with concrete proposals for intervention in reality, an anarchist organisation must seek a political practice that is consistent with a given militant style, which will serve as a fundamental element for building popular power and social transformation. Practice is also a propaganda tool and contributes to forming a favourable opinion of the organisation, since it is in the experience of the struggle and in living with militants that complicity is built in grassroots work and new comrades and supporters are brought closer.

It's important to point out that we don't idealise a perfect human being, much less an infallible type of militant. The most diverse problems and contradictions will be present in the dynamics of struggles or revolutionary processes, and it is by organising ourselves to overcome them, or reduce them as much as possible, that we move forward. There are countless examples, both contemporary and historical, where the anarchist proposal has contributed to organising and fighting for workers' demands. Because our ideological conviction comes from practice, our theory is for acting in reality and our programme is the fruit of daily struggles.

Making mistakes and working to correct them nourishes our learning and generates political accumulation and maturity. It's also essential to know how to criticise our fellow members fraternally when necessary, and to have the humility to accept when we've made mistakes, self-criticise and make an effort to change our behaviour. No "turning a blind eye" or "passing the buck" when we identify a problem with a comrade's practice. When activists and the organisation fail to address these problems and don't bring them up in the appropriate collective forums, it can create a "pressure cooker" that can undermine the organic relationship, damage grassroots work and generate disagreements that could otherwise be avoided.

The exercise of criticism and debate should therefore be seen as important organisational tools, put at the service of practice and with practice as the starting point, whether at the political or social level. Not criticism as a mere intellectual exercise, debate for debate's sake or with the sole aim of changing the consciousness of each individual. For it is not simply a change in people's consciousness that alters reality, but the construction of a particular subject of social transformation in the daily processes of struggle against the system of domination and exploitation. These individuals (black people, peasants, slum dwellers, students, young people, indigenous people, women, etc.) are incorporated into the organisation, bringing their experiences and struggles.

We know that the process of identifying and changing the practices with which we are shaped by the system of oppression and domination is not something that happens overnight. But we must be careful not to act selfishly and vainly or to reproduce prejudiced, sexist, homophobic or other forms of oppression and authoritarian attitudes towards our comrades. And when this happens, the collective must help the partner to recognise and change their behaviour, but taking into account their reality and limitations, without wanting to crucify them, caricature them or demand a "purity" from them that is impossible in real life.

It is also important to know how to motivate what is positive in the activist, recognising their different potentials, temperaments and singularities. Encourage them to exercise delegation, initiative, participation and positioning themselves in collective organisations. Knowing how to listen and how to debate, even in the face of divergent positions, always endeavouring to reach collective agreements without making a "hobbyhorse" of it. Prioritising collective construction rather than voluntarist practices detached from strategy, which is different from everyone's ability to take the initiative and help in any way they can. As well as prioritising organicity over informal political relationships and structures of a personalistic or paternalistic nature, which can give rise to inequalities and political manipulations within the collective. Avoiding personalism means strengthening collective structures and having clear criteria for action for everyone.

At the different levels of activity, activists must understand that their political practice, as well as being the "face" of their organisation, is also a reference for others, whether positively or negatively. That's why it's important to cultivate a spirit of fraternity and mutual support in the workplace, encouraging and promoting maximum trust, ethics and camaraderie among comrades. And, especially in social work, not to be arrogant in thinking that you are going to bring the "truth" to the people, but to first listen to them and learn from their wisdom, reality and culture.

The activist is expected to be attentive to their organisation as a whole, beyond their specific work, contributing and seeking solutions to organise and articulate work in the different spaces in which they operate, helping to build a policy in which the fields of struggle in which the organisation operates are increasingly in dialogue. Knowing how to balance their participation by contributing and committing themselves to both the internal running of the organisation and the external tasks related to grassroots work. Acting responsibly and informing the group when they are unable to fulfil a particular task. Because it's normal to have unforeseen problems, but a lack of communication is detrimental to organisation. On the other hand, being overloaded with tasks doesn't mean that the policy is moving forward, but that we may not be acting with planning or setting priorities.

Training is another important element, especially when thinking about a policy that is articulated with the organisation's other internal activities and concerned with welcoming activists and newcomers to grassroots work. This is complemented by theoretical training that will strengthen and qualify the activists' practice, equipping them with the necessary tools to produce and reproduce the organisation's proposals. In addition, all newcomers must understand that the process is not starting from scratch at that moment, and that they will contribute in the best possible way to multiplying the strength of a process that has already been underway with other comrades and that has its accumulations. All militants build the organisation, but they must know how to respect collective decisions and act on them.

On a social level, working at grassroots level teaches us many things, whether it's in social movements in the countryside, in the city, in workplaces, in schools or in resistance initiatives in slums and neighbourhoods. We must help ensure that the collective spaces we help build are pleasant and encourage everyone to participate. Since capitalist domination and exploitation work to keep people away from political participation, placing the electoral route and individualism as benchmarks, in our work the exercise of politics and militancy must not appear to people as something boring or something only for "professionals", far removed from their reality. An empty grassroots meeting or assembly indicates that we might be doing something wrong. A certain militant style applied to grassroots work can also be pedagogically stimulating if it provides the conditions for greater participation in deliberation spaces, taking into account the realities and limitations of each individual. For example, even with modest experience in the community field, we can testify that strategically focussed work based on a relationship of equality, respect and encouragement for political participation has resulted in people coming together at different levels of participation, from the most specific to the most organic. Gradually, important relationships of identity with our proposals are being established, with the ability to value popular resistance initiatives and articulate the work politically.

At the same time, at the political level we must also strive for a militant ethos and style in our relations with other political organisations and left-wing currents. Acting in broader spaces of ideological diversity such as forums, campaigns and mobilisations presents us with other challenges. Our proposals are not the only ones and we will not and do not want to be alone in the processes of struggle. In order to stand up to the powerful and the oppressors, we will often be composing with other sectors of the left, building consensus on the basis of what we agree on, which does not mean abandoning our principles. It would be very comfortable to politically compose only with those with whom we have agreement or ideological affinity, but that would be to adopt principlism as a policy of action, which neither advances the struggle nor enriches our experiences.

It's common to experience situations of disagreement, political differences or a lack of ethical conduct on the part of individuals or groups, but beyond denouncing, our focus must be on publicising and advancing our proposals. We need to be able to differentiate between class enemies and ideological adversaries. Without this, we run the risk of acting as a "steamroller" in political spaces, reducing them to spaces for disputes or the "capture" of militants.

We must know how to deal with disagreements calmly and avoid unnecessary conflicts and polemics, differentiating between disagreements over principles and those over strategy or tactics, and recognising the merits of others. Before being critical, be self-critical. We defend anarchism firmly in the face of attacks and slander, and we fight the ideological battle when necessary, but we put our positions and opinions without dogmatism and contextualise our criticisms instead of generalising them to an entire current, group or ideology. Discussions must be held and disagreements will often exist, but they must be held without sectarianism or dogmatism.

Publicly, we must know how to position ourselves without feverish virulence, which makes it appear that we are more concerned with asserting our positions or competing with another current or organisation than with addressing the daily problems of the oppressed and exploited. You can't convince or persuade simply by using violent language or speaking loudly. Theoretical and ideological vanity are sides of the same coin. Above all, today we must be more vigilant with virtual communication tools and social networks, which by their very nature end up facilitating and encouraging this type of harmful practice.

In this way, ethics and militant style are not understood by us as dogmas, but as working concepts to be embodied in our political practices and, in this way, the organisations of the Brazilian Anarchist Coordination (CAB) seek to act. And our militancy in the sectors of rural and community struggle, in collective production work, student unions, pre-university entrance exams, popular education and culture, as well as in mobilisations and popular forums of articulation, we seek to stimulate and influence, but we are also modified in the day-to-day struggles. And it is within these social dynamics that an ethical basis and a conception of militant style are also forged and qualified as the fruit of political maturation and reflection in everyday struggles.