

The practice of armed struggle of the *Organización Popular Revolucionaria – 33 Orientales* in Uruguay (1968-1972)

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze the formation, conception and armed action of the *Organización Popular Revolucionaria – 33 Orientales* (OPR-33), the armed wing of the *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya*, which operated mainly on Uruguayan soil and was later transferred to Argentina. In this article, we will analyze the organization's armed actions on Uruguayan soil and its relationship with social and union struggles in that country, in the context of the hardening of the constitutional regime. Against the backdrop of the Cuban Revolution, the action of the rights in Uruguay and the formation of a guerrilla grammar in the country, the article intends to elucidate the practice of OPR-33 from case studies.

Keywords: anarchism, armed struggle, Uruguayan anarchist federation.

Resumen: El presente artículo pretende analizar la formación, la concepción y la acción armada de la Organización Popular Revolucionaria - 33 Orientales (OPR-33), brazo armado de la Federación Anarquista Uruguaya, que actuó principalmente en suelo uruguayo y luego fue transferida a Argentina. En este artículo, analizaremos las acciones armadas de la organización en suelo uruguayo y su relación con las luchas sociales y sindicales en ese país, en el contexto del fortalecimiento del régimen constitucional. En el contexto de la Revolución Cubana, la acción de los derechos en Uruguay y la formación de una gramática guerrillera en el país, el artículo tiene como objetivo dilucidar la práctica de OPR-33 con base en estudios de casos.

Palabras clave: anarquismo, lucha armada, federación anarquista uruguaya.

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In 1959, the outbreak of the Cuban Revolution would not only impact the US political orientation towards Latin America but would also affect the internal discussions of leftist organizations across the planet. The victory of the revolutionaries in Cuba would bring about a debate on the best strategies to achieve the Social Revolution and would directly affect different political spectrums of Latin American society. The homogeneous social conditions in Latin America and the common problems of their countries echoed problems that the revolutionary process in Cuba had pointed out (SADER, Emir apud WASSERMAN, 2006). The agrarian question, external dependence, the deterioration of public policy conditions, the extension of dictatorial regimes and we added the role of the third world that, in a revolutionary process, made the Cuban Revolution enter the agendas of the left throughout the South American continent as a fundamental episode.

According to historian Jean Sales, this event “can be seen as a watershed in the history of the left” (SALES, 2005, p. 2) and which will pose important questions for the Latin American left. The debate on the Cuban revolution is generally presented as having its influence only within communist and national-popular circles, but anarchism at this moment will also face this issue, which will raise internal polemics and dissension. Researcher Eduardo Rey, who has studied the revolutionary left in Uruguay in depth, draws attention to the Cuban Revolution’s ability to encourage the “internationalization of mobilization on the continent” and the “development of the Latin American revolutionary left” as well as to internationalize repression (TRISTAN, 2006, p. 49).

The Cuban example was warmly welcomed by the left in different Latin American countries. The tool of the armed struggle arrived as a possibility and as a criticism of the thesis of the “peaceful coexistence” of communist parties and the “revolution in stages”¹. The issue of armed struggle and the discussions about its meaning still raise different interpretations today. It is difficult to walk through a terrain surrounded by memory traps and which constantly suffers the intervention of

¹ The idea of the Revolution in stages concerns an understanding and analysis that in certain countries, the social revolution would be preceded by a democratic stage, where it would be necessary to establish an alliance with the national bourgeoisies against imperialism and large estates.

the positioning of the present time. The term itself already triggers a certain meaning automatically in the reader, a meaning that does not always correspond to the complexity of the discussions that took place at that time within the groups of the left. Regarding the set of actions that comprised the armed struggle, as Jean Rodrigues Sales pointed out, this “did not always consist of armed combat between leftists and the military” (SALES, 2015, p. 9). Bank robberies (*expropriations*) for fundraising, *executions* of people linked to the regime, armed propaganda against the dictatorship and kidnapping of foreign diplomats were part of a myriad of actions that made up the repertoire of different organizations.

Armed struggle, therefore, is not always an armed apparatus of an organization, acting as a guerrilla army, or the embryo of a guerrilla army in the countryside or in the city. Smaller actions, but which are carried out with the use of *firearms*, *explosives* and other instruments are part of this universe of armed struggle. Not every political organization on the Latin American continent has opted for a rural guerrilla focus. Just as not every organization agreed to the development of an armed apparatus that would build a people's army. Small actions (intimidation, expropriation, or sabotage) were also part of this ideology and, in our opinion, can also be considered as armed struggle operations. The organizations also differed on the analysis they had of the current stage of capitalism, in their respective country and of the role of the various armed actions and the arc of alliances that should be carried out to achieve the goal of socialism (as well as, if there were steps until there) (SILVA, 2016). The group of organizations of the armed left also debated intensely whether the armed struggle should operate in the countryside or in the city and what would be the tactical relationship between these two spaces. Regardless of the debates, the stage of each strategic plan varied according to the development of the organization in question or its possibilities of action and adaptation in that country.

In the same year that the Cuban Revolution broke out, the Uruguayan Supreme Court granted authorization, on March 5, to the Chilean anarchist González Mintrossi to leave Uruguay (CUESTA, 2017, p. 250). The authorization was the end of a long legal process that involved, in addition to Mintrossi, several anarchists in armed actions in Uruguay. The case, in addition to having dragged on since 1932, involved accusations

against anarchist militants who lived in Argentine territory and began with the execution of Luis Pardeiro Sontie on a Tuesday, February 24, 1932, at 1:20 pm (Ibid., p. 144). The coincidence of dates between the end of the process against this action anarchist movement and the victory of the Cuban Revolution is extremely illustrative for us of the transition (and dialogue) between a conception of political violence and the internal maturation of Uruguayan anarchism. The use of weapons by Uruguayan anarchism was something relatively known in the first decades of the 20th century, due to the presence of expropriation actions in the Rio de la Plata circuit. However, the political crisis of anarcho-syndicalism in Uruguay reduced anarchist political power in the 30s and 40s. In the mid-1950s, there was a discussion to find an anarchist political organization: the idea of founding the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation emerged.

According to Eduardo Rey Tristán, in the second half of the 1950s, three groups were relevant to the organization of anarchism at that time: the Libertarian Youth, the editorial group of the newspaper *Voluntad* and the libertarian group Cerro-Teja (TRISTÁN, 2005, p. 198-199). Alves (2016) and Rugai (2012) also reinforce the importance of the Cerro-Teja group and the Libertarian Youth in this process (ALVES, 2016, p. 53-54). Another relevant issue that influenced the political culture shaped by the FAU was the memory of the action anarchism. According to the militant Fernando O'Neill Cuesta, “some of the so-called 'action anarchists who were still alive had been linked to the anarchist activities that took place in the 50's and 60's: acts, libertarian assemblies and even in the prolegomena of the founding of the Anarchist Federation.” (Idem)

It is worth mentioning that, in the 1950s, expropriations and bank robberies were not common. Anarchist Alberto “Pocho” Mechoso (anarchist) would expropriate a branch of the bank *La Caja Obrera* in the 1950s with the intention of “raising funds for a work cooperative and donating the other part to the newly founded FAU”. (Idem) The action was obviously not organized by the FAU, which would only appear in 1956.

Cuesta states that in some cases, “like the Catalan Boadas Rivas, there was his willingness to talk with his OPR comrades in the opportunity of some kidnappings” (CUESTA, 2017, p. 9). Juan Carlos Mechoso, in an interview with the author, also indicates that at the founding of the FAU there are “militants with a long experience,

dating back to the 1910s, 1920s, 1930s.”² Several researchers have rightly underlined the influence of this component of the expropriating anarchism in the formation of the FAU and its armed apparatus.

In short, founded in 1956, the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation was born with a strong trade union tradition and a significant legacy of expropriating anarchism experiences, and soon after the Cuban Revolution, begins to pay more attention to the possibilities of using the armed struggle in its own country for various issues that we deem relevant. And what were the elements that made this anarchist organization join the armed struggle?

Firstly, the presence of anti-communist actions by extreme right-wing groups in Uruguay, some of which are also anti-Semitic, must be highlighted. According to Broquetas, the capture of Eichmann (one of the main organizers of the Holocaust) in Argentina unleashed a wave of violent anti-Semitic actions in that country and Uruguay, which ended with synagogues, sports clubs and Jewish businesses hit by bombs or vandalized (BROQUETAS, 2015, p. 186). The headquarters of the communist party had also been hit by firebombs and the most serious case was the kidnapping of Soledad Barrett (daughter of the anarchist Rafael Barrett), beaten and marked with a knife with two swastikas (Ibid., p. 188).

The escalation of violent actions on the right – usually based on an anti-communism that targeted any union or political action on the left – reached its peak in 1962, when, on February 20, 1962, they set fire to the headquarters of the southern sectional of the Uruguayan Communist Party (PCU), a propaganda kiosk of the Eastern Revolutionary Movement (MRO) and dropped explosive devices at the Communist Party club in Molinos de Raffo (a neighborhood of Montevideo). This action resulted in the death of Olívio Cela, a five-month-old baby, son of the caretakers of the place and had a great repercussion in the media. Such actions worried leftist organizations that, added to the influence of the Cuban Revolution's armed methods, decided to meet in 1962 to find a space for armed coordination that, in 1963, would be called *Coordinador*. It should be noted that the organizations that made up this space were critical of the

² MECHOSO, Juan Carlos. Juan Carlos Mechoso: testimony [apr. 2017]. Interviewer: Rafael Viana da Silva. Montevideu, 2017. Mp3 file (2h:10 min.).

thesis of *peaceful coexistence*, the foreign policy of the USSR and disseminated by Communist Parties throughout the world and, to a greater extent, were in tune with the recent experience of the Cuban Revolution.

In addition to the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) – a split from the Communist Party that took place in 1962 – the *Coordinador* included the Popular Action Movement of Uruguay (MAPU), the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU), the Oriental Revolutionary Movement (MRO) and the Peasant Support Movement (MAC). The researcher Daniel Alves points out that, in 1962, “during the internecine struggle at the FAU, there was a coincidence between part of the militants of its majority nucleus with those of other left organizations” (ALVES, 2016, p. 83). This coincidence was due to the felt need to have a common body and the “issue of the armed struggle was a common topic of debate” (Ibid., p. 84). This step forward by the FAU in starting to form an armed apparatus, also helped to accelerate the process of a small internal division of the FAU that will leave the organization.³ One of the common characteristics of this coordinating space was the fact that they distrusted or denied institutional action, but, also, the defense and possibilities of using revolutionary violence to promote the advancement of revolutionary proposals in Uruguay. The influence of newspapers with Latin American themes, such as *Época*, the news of military coups in different countries, the action of the right and the possibilities opened up by the Cuban Revolution were, therefore, a sum of factors that led the FAU and the other organizations to prepare militarily.

At the end of 1964 and beginning of 1965, the *Coordinador* was dismantled. Especially after a disastrous action to obtain weapons at the Swiss Club (ALVES, 2016, p. 84). In addition, the strategic differences between the organizations weighed, associated with the arrest of several militants in the robbery of the Bank of Collections. Despite looking at the action with sympathy, the FAU began to criticize the so-called “focusist deviations” on the part of the *Coordinador*.⁴ With the proposal to transform the

³ The group that had withdrawn basically did not agree with the position of adoption of the armed struggle and the positions of the FAU on the Cuban Revolution.

⁴ The guerrilla focus thesis was defended mainly by the Argentine Ernesto “Che” Guevara and greatly influenced the organizations of armed struggle on the South American continent.

Coordinador into another organization, the FAU militancy will withdraw, claiming that it already had an organization and it made no sense to found another political space. Thus, the Tupamaros National Liberation Movement (MLN-T) and the FAU were born, which would continue with the construction of their armed struggle apparatus in other ways.

At the end of 1966, the FAU would work internally in the assembly of its armed apparatus and would have the fundamental support of the anarchist militant Abraham Guillén (in internal formations), who at the time was living in the country. Abraham Guillén had not only practical military experience (he was commander of a military division in the Spanish Civil War), but he had considerable theoretical production on the armed struggle and even argued with Ernesto “Che” Guevara about the best guerrilla strategy on the continent. Latin American (SILVA, 2018, p. 184). Guillén had published in Uruguay, in 1965, the book *Estrategia de la Guerrilla Urbana*, a material that certainly influenced the FAU in its armed conception. It should be said that Guillén's influence on the OPR's conception of the armed struggle is generally rarely mentioned in research on this topic, but it certainly has its weight.

Another decisive moment for the conformation of the FAU's armed strategy took place in the growing closure of the Uruguayan regime, which occurred mainly between 1967 and 1969. Historian Clara Aldrighi accurately states that the 1967 constitutional reform “provided new legal instruments for the application of authoritarian policies” (ALDRIGHI, 2016, p. 34) and political scientist Álvaro Rico characterizes this period as a government under decree, where “increase state powers and expand the jurisdiction of existing punitive bodies” (ALDRIGHI, 2016, p. 34). One of its results was the notable increase in the powers of the executive, which could, for example, set prices, have the legislative initiative of a private nature in the retirement system and increase salaries (ALDRIGHI, 2016, p. 39). The presidential term was also increased from four to five years.

The closing by Jorge Pacheco Areco of the *Época* and *El Sol* newspapers by a decree signed on December 12, 1967, deepened the repressive action of the Uruguayan State and also officially outlawed the Socialist Party, the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation, the Revolutionary Movement Oriental, the Uruguayan Popular Action

Movement, the Revolutionary Left Movement and the group of independents linked to the *Época* newspaper. During this period, the “FAU Letters” were born, opinion instruments produced by the organization, and which were distributed clandestinely to all its members. During this period, the organization began to adopt clandestine measures that would guarantee its survival and began to have considerable development, joining other militants and expanding its scope of action. In addition to rentals with false documents, FAU set up – according to Alves – “a network of hidden places for the activities of the armed apparatus, then called Chola, and its Federal Board, which is now called Fomento” (ALVES, 2016, p. 81). To fund this sort of thing, the organization conducts a “sale of counterfeit treasury bonds. The amount was relatively low (\$15,000), but it was received with enthusiasm and euphoria; it was a symbolic act” (Idem). In general, the Uruguayan situation in 1967 had explosive elements. Economically, the country was experiencing an explosion in the consumer price index and was witnessing a decline in the purchasing power of real wages at the same time. The year in which it would force the CNT, a trade union center founded in 1964, to carry out a national strike in October 1967 (YAFFÉ, 2016, p. 168).

The FAU was already preparing itself with security measures and the formation of clandestine measures. This situation had sharpened with the conflictive year of 1968, which was taken by violent student demonstrations in the streets of Montevideo. And, in the same year, the armed apparatus of the FAU was already in full operation, although it continued as a total unknown to the repressive apparatus since it did not sign any public document. The armed struggle structure set up by the FAU was composed of Aguillar, the mechanism for all armed activity (MECHOSO, 2009, p. 220-225). Aguillar was made up of those responsible for the different operating units (leagues), and a member of Fomento. There was also an Information League, which was not part of Aguillar and was associated with the member of Fomento who made up Aguillar. The Chola (the name given by the FAU to the armed struggle) had three leagues (of “names” 8, 10, 12), these were compartmentalized among themselves and each of the leagues had three “teams” (cells), usually of 5 members and a supervisor. Each in charge of each of the leagues made up Aguillar. Aguillar did not make political decisions, he followed what the FAU decided, but he had a certain tactical autonomy.

This structure already anticipated in practice, a critique of foquismo that was rehearsed in the internal and circular materials of the FAU and reproduced a model armed with internal democracy, in the manner of anarchism.

In several research, it is stated that political-military organizations necessarily incur militarist postures. If there are indeed organizations that sought, through armed struggle, to constitute an embryo of the future people's army, for the FAU the armed apparatus had an accessory function and the people's army could only be constituted based on popular organizations. On the issue of militarism, the militant Augusto "Chacho" Andrés, a member of the OPR at the time, stated in an interview that "the tupas were a column, a commander and all that, we had no commander or column or anything" (ANDRES, 2017). The names of "teams" and "league" were intended precisely to remove the militaristic meaning that ended up determining certain internal practices. This did not mean, however, that the armed action of the FAU did not have great internal discipline. The first armed actions of the OPR were carried out basically with the intention of acquiring finances for the organization, with the expropriation of Banco Ubur (in La Teja), on March 11, 1968 (MECHOSO, 2009, p. 252) – day in that the historical slogan of the FAU "Arriba los que luchan!" – expropriation of Banco de La Paz on August 24, 1968, and expropriation of Banco Divino on February 7, 1969. According to researcher Ivone Trías, between 1969 and 1972, Uruguay lived permanently under "security measures" and was called the "short summer of the armed struggle" (TRIÁS, 2008, p. 67). The deepening of repression was accompanied by an increase in armed actions by political-military organizations.

On April 27, 1969, an accidental explosion at the home of FAU member Juan Carlos Mechoso, a member of Fomento and OPR, attracted the attention of the police and captured Daniel Bentancour Méndez. Police also say they found ten weapons, bomb-making material, and a tent. Until then, the police temporarily attributed the incident to the Tupamaros and the armed apparatus of the FAU remained invisible to police radar.⁵

His public "baptism" would take place on July 16, 1969, in which the OPR carried

⁵ Explosion in Tupamaros Refuge. *El Día*, Montevideo, April 27, 1969, p. 6.

out the operation to steal the historic flag of the 33 Orientals, one of the main symbols of Uruguayan independence. The flag was in the possession of the Uruguayan National Museum and in the action, in addition to pamphlets, a circle with an “R” was drawn on the wall where the flag was displayed.⁶ The security forces came to understand the link between the two actions and three militants of the OPR were arrested, which did not prevent her from continuing to act in union conflicts. In the same month, the FAU would carry out the explosion of the electronic brain of the Commercial Bank in the context of the bank strike. Police investigations into the armed wing of the FAU would follow and, on October 22, 1969, Elena Quinteros, a militant of the FAU and the Resistencia Obrero Estudiantil (ROE)⁷, was arrested by the security forces and would only be released in October 1970 (OLIVERA, MÉNDEZ, 2003, p. 24). With the continuity of the actions, FAU invests in ancillary operations to operate its armed apparatus, the so-called *supply* operations, targeting hairdressers, clothing stores⁸ and various accessories that aimed to provide the organization with effective disguises in the actions, avoiding identification police and facilitating the work of the *information* teams. Until now, there was no distinction between the participation of public and armed militancy. Public activists of the organization were part of the armed actions that, in 1970, were carried out with the expropriation of Banco da Avenida Comércio e Itália and Banco Curva de Maroñas (MECHOSO, 2009, p. 276-277). It is worth mentioning that until 1971 – before the military coup, therefore – the armed action of the FAU only operated with expropriations and supply operations. Something that, keeping the proportions, was inserted in the historical strategy of the use of anarchist violence of *expropriation*. Although it differed in terms of methodology, since for the first time in Uruguayan history, the application of violence was decided not by small insurrectionary groups or expropriator anarchists, but by an anarchist political organization with extensive union and student work.

⁶ Fue Robada la Bandera de Los Treinta y Tres. *El Diario*, Montevideo, July 17, 1969.

⁷ This organization was created in 1968 by FAU militants. It aimed to be an intermediary organization, between the anarchist political level and popular movements. ROE's intention was to bring together a “fighting camp”, not necessarily anarchist, but sharing common principles and strategies. The militancy of the FAU acted by promoting this tool and bringing together previously dispersed militants.

⁸ Two actions were carried out with the objective of obtaining clothes. One at the Casa Soler branch, on August 25, 1970.

The year 1971 was one of the most active years of the FAU's armed apparatus and, in a year marked by the intensification of repression and the action of the paramilitary apparatus, they began to operate another type of actions that will try to respond to the growing state violence. We reject, therefore, the culturalist thesis of analysis of the armed struggle, which tries to understand armed action only from the internal *political culture* of organizations, ignoring or undervaluing the historical context. The FAU's strategic line for its armed apparatus was to only intervene if the tools of union and popular organization had reached their limit and this year the FAU starts to intervene more frequently in union conflicts precisely because of the state and employers' irreducibility in solving class conflicts. For this critical position of focus movement and of what they considered its militarist deviation, militants from outside the FAU also arrived and who, with certain defeats and falls of the Tupamaros, started to have a closer view of the anarchist proposals. This was the case of the “micro-fraction”, an internal tendency of the MLN-T constituted in the late 1970s, which, after exhausting its criticisms, the Tupamara military strategy will be expelled from the organization and will end up constituting its own army, the *Frente Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (FRT). Most of its militants will later join the OPR-33 and others will re-enter the MLN later (ALDRIGUI, 2016, p. 204).

In the following year, FAU became intensely involved in labor disputes at the paper production company Companhia Industrial Comercial do Sul (CICSSA), at Frigorífico Modelo and at the Seral rubber footwear and articles factory, incorporating a new tactic of armed struggle into the experience of anarchism in the Rio de la Plata: the kidnappings.⁹ The organization would intervene in the last two conflicts. In that year, in April 1971, the cañeros workers would make a march to participate in the First of May and members of the Resistencia Obrero Estudiantil, a political organization (a political-social tendency) founded by the FAU and other militants, would be arrested while receiving the gait (OLIVERA, MÉNDEZ, 2003, p. 26). Anticipating the hardening of repression, this year they would expand the structure of the military apparatus; for that they would carry out on April 19 and 20 at Fábrica FUNSA, at the home of

⁹ It should be said that the experience of kidnappings was never used by anarchism before this period. On armed actions and anarchism, Cf. TRÍAS, 2008, p. 121.

collectors and military personnel, such as Captain Mario Mutter, Javier Pietropinto and Ricardo Rimini, an operation aimed at obtaining weapons for the organization. This operation, according to Mechoso, involved many FAU teams (practically all of them) and ended with a good ballistic balance. In the case of the FUNSA action, it had valuable information from the group of FAU comrades who worked at the factory, ensuring the success of the operation, a fact that demonstrated that despite the compartmentalization, there was a relationship between the social and political level of the federation, which was the minimum required to operate. armed actions, this universe being more diffuse than we are used to considering.¹⁰

However, even with all the information possible and avoiding further wear and tear, not every operation carried out by the OPR-33 ended without incidents. In the same year, an operation considered simple by the organization, supplying, and aimed at obtaining electrical and electronic products in a store ended with the balance of a dead militant (Wilmar) and another arrested militant (Blanca) (MECHOSO, 2009, p. 297).

The organization's first kidnapping was carried out around the Model Slaughterhouse conflict and its target was the company's legal representative, lawyer Alfredo Cambón. Cambón also worked for the FUNSA factory and was a well-known police collaborator as president of the Comisión Vecinal de Colaboración con la Policía.¹¹ The factory owner traveled to Germany and gave Cambón extensive powers to represent him. The slaughterhouse workers complained about unpaid overtime and the lack of half an hour of rest, as provided for in the collective agreement. Since 1970, the conflict has extended and the non-fulfillment of the criteria of the collective agreement, added to the authoritarianism and the closing of the regime contributed to more drastic attitudes by part of the armed apparatus. As stated earlier, the fact that a political proposal defends revolutionary violence does not explain why such a tool is used in one context and not in another. It is the forces' correlation and the concrete conjuncture that implies actions and decisions of this type. The decision to kidnap

¹⁰ I am referring to a certain research methodology on the armed struggle. It is impossible to analyze the armed struggle without relating it to the popular movements around it.

¹¹ Secuestran a Conocido Abogado. *El Día*, Montevideo, 24 de Junio de 1971, p.1.

Cambón came from *Fomento*, which communicated the operation to *Aguillar* (MECHOSO, 2009, p. 317).

At that time, OPR already had specific houses and locations for this type of operation. Four members of OPR-33 (one woman and four men) would be responsible for the action, which would take place on June 23, 1971. The operative group invaded the Cambón mansion, in the Malvín Norte neighborhood, in the morning and he was transferred to one of the organization's "devices" (*berretín* as they called it). As usual, the organization held a conversation with the kidnapped and made demands: in this case, resolve the issue of the slaughterhouse workers. The press claimed that Cambón had no political activity and described the kidnappers as "terrorists and seditious."¹² On the second day, Cambón was released on condition that he fulfilled the agreement to resolve the situation of the workers. At this point, intelligence forces and the press already knew that the action had been organized by OPR-33.

On August 18, 1971, Luis Fernandez Lladó, vice-president of the Modelo meatpacking plant and a member of the FUNSA board, was kidnapped. The main objective of the organization in this event was to finance the organization economically, but also to generate social effects on the group of workers at the slaughterhouse in the countryside (MECHOSO, 2009, p. 319-320). The first contact with Lladó's family dealt with issues related to the company's dealings with employees in the city of Tacuarembó. The armed wing of the FAU already had members of the organization in this province, contacts dating back to the bank workers' strike, in which "Pablo" (fictitious name) joined the organization through contact with Gerardo Gatti.¹³ From this, the FAU had information about the disrespect to the work norms in the pig farms for the slaughterhouses in the interior and about the employer repression in the Montevideo Model Market.¹⁴ The OPR demanded 200 thousand dollars and, between trips and from the negotiation, the amount was delivered and Lladó returned to his

¹² Secuestran a Conocido Abogado. *El Día*, Montevideo, 24 de Junio de 1971, p.1.

¹³ About this Cf. PALERMO, 2012, p. 62.

¹⁴ Mechoso says that one of the first topics of conversation with the kidnapped was this kind of thing, like waking up a family of workers at 3:00 in the morning, because a pig escaped from his pigsty and the like. MECHOSO, 2009, pp. 319-320.

family.

It is worth mentioning that after the kidnappings, the newspapers highlighted the technical issue of the actions, with drawings indicating where the militants entered, where the target car was captured, etc. This type of practice was inscribed in a technical-military imaginary, let's say, a shared imaginary of the period – in which leftist militants were also immersed – even though its use had different purposes.

The newspapers we consulted also worked to build an image of sadists, terrorists, and seditious members of the armed apparatus, even though, in the case of the OPR, there was a great concern with fair treatment of prisoners, choosing to differentiate themselves from a “ordinary crime”. Such a stance was not enough to win the battle for hegemony of communication. What often happened was that the organization was the target of complaints in the newspapers for mistreatment, a fact that made the organization kidnapped, on October 23, 1971, the editor of the newspaper *El Día*, Pereyra Gonzalez, to explain their position. Gonzalez would have highlighted the fact that LLadó's mother had died during her captivity, a fact that was treated by the organization with some care, as it knew that this type of event would be used to create a negative consensus in public opinion.

The newspaper's repeated accusations made the OPR, which considered the newspaper an enemy of popular struggles, carry out this arrest and interview with the editor (*Ibid.*, p. 325). Confronting the editor with articles that attacked popular and union struggles, the OPR released him four days later. This time, there was no formal engagement, but the newspaper *El Día*, for a few days, covered the union press conference in FUNSA and Pereyra Gonzales would write about his experience as a kidnapped.

Under the same political logic, the OPR kidnapped journalist Michele Ray on November 28, 1971. Initially, the kidnapping of journalist Antonio Mercader was also planned. The idea was to hold a kind of press conference of the organization with these two journalists within the scope of the elections that were taking place in the country. Although a decree of the time had recently allowed the “legality” of the FAU¹⁵, we can

¹⁵ We put legality in quotation marks, because if, in fact, the FAU was made illegal in 1967. This was never a legalized political party, in the legal sense of the term.

assume that the armed actions of the organization made its public actions continue with a high degree of difficulty. As a contingency of action, OPR-33 decides to abort Mercarder's kidnapping action, and the press conference will be held only with Michele Ray who will be released in two days. The FAU would assess that the period is of full "Constitutional Dictatorship" and that the "repressive apparatus develops and becomes technical". For the FAU, the "electoral file" is a "pseudo-political opening, which, within the framework of its strategy, fulfilled different purposes".¹⁶ For the FAU, "bourgeois parties continue to talk about their relative effectiveness in the electoral field, they cannot, however, hide their crisis as fundamental pieces of the structure of domination".¹⁷

In 1972, a labor conflict breaks out at the Seral factory, a rubber factory that, together with FUNSA, was one of the most important in Uruguay and produced footwear. This conflict can be considered an example of the action of the OPR and its conception of armed struggle. According to Sérgio Molaguero's testimony, Seral had 300 to 328 workers. In 1972, journalist Hugo Alfaro, who contributed to the newspaper *Marcha*, published an article reporting that the wages received by workers corresponded to 40% of what they were entitled to and that several arbitrary acts were committed by the factory owner, such as, for example, to fire two mechanics that the boss had no affinity with and to fire pregnant workers.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the conflict finally erupts after the suspension of a holiday for the workers. The FUNSA union approaches and offers its support in the formation of the Seral union. The union is constituted and after three months of its formation, some of the workers are fired for being part of the association. The Ministry of Labor and the legislation committee of the House of Representatives recognize the right of workers and direct the immediate reinstatement of those dismissed and the solution of irregularities. For nine days, according to Alfaro, Molaguero accepts the agreement but soon after "fires thirty minors and two mechanics" for allegedly not being able to maintain the factory with the regularization of workers' rights. After thirty-one days of strike, the newly formed

¹⁶ Apud Mechoso, 2009, pp. 340-341, our translation.

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ ALFARO, Hugo. La lección de FUNSA ocupada. *Marcha*, Montevideo, 1972, No. Reportajes a la Realidad.

union remains firm against the new layoffs and is repressed by the police and the army. In a demonstration that brought together about a thousand workers – some in solidarity with Seral workers – eleven workers are arrested, and several beaten by the police. After this fact, three workers will start a hunger strike. The conflict lasts five months.

On January 18, some factories were stopped in solidarity with Seral workers. The definitive support of the Resistencia Obrero Estudiantil (ROE) it was threats from far-right organizations, which distribute leaflets threatening both the ROE, the Movimiento de Independientes-26 de Marzo (M-26)¹⁹ and the Frente Armado de Revolución Oriental (FARO) (PILO, 2005). According to OPR-33, Sérgio Molaguero was a member of Juventud en Pie, a far-right (fascist) organization in Uruguay. The unresolved conflict in union terms ends up leading the FAU to decide for an action by its armed apparatus. The objective was to resolve the workers' conflict in favor of the workers. It should be noted that actions of this type involved great complexity (technical and political) and were not carried out without a high degree of responsibility, discipline and technical knowledge of the various trades involved. Recalling that, due to its anarchist ideological affiliation, the FAU was excluded from any possibility of obtaining training in armed struggle in Cuba (unlike the Tupamaros), which implied, in the adaptation and in a collective learning, extracted from the Uruguayan experience and from the literature, existing practices, which involved the workers' knowledge and crafts of its members.

In relation to armed actions, the first step was to activate the information apparatus, to recognize the target's reality and provide information to the "team" that would carry out the action, in this case, a kidnapping. The action was carried out on May 11, 1972. With Molaguero they found a 7.65-caliber semi-automatic pistol, a gun possession guide, 16 Brazilian cruzeiros, identification card, vaccination card and a pamphlet from the Colorado party.²⁰ After the kidnapping, the factory owner decides to talk to the union, with the decisive support of the FAU militant, León Duarte. On

¹⁹ Political expression of the Tupamaros.

²⁰ Consultation of the photographic collection, Archive of the FAU.

the same day that the agreement was to be signed, Duarte disappeared. Other FUNSA and SERAL workers had previously been detained, demonstrating the permanent presence of repressive forces in labor conflicts and how the militarization of work also provoked military responses from revolutionary organizations.

The reaction of the FUNSA union and the workers is immediate. The Camino Corrales factory is occupied, requiring the immediate appearance of workers. The meaning of occupation goes beyond the purely trade union conflict and demonstrates the position of this sector in the face of the action of repressive bodies. As the union conflict unfolded, negotiations between Sergio Molaguero's father and OPR-33 continued. The OPR demanded the delivery of 20,000 Uruguayan pesos for each worker in the company Seral and the delivery of materials for the children of the city of Santa Lucía, with the following items: 300 black pencils, 300 boxes of colored pencils, 300 notebooks. Children in the El Abrojal neighborhood were also required to have 150 pairs of shoes, 150 pairs of socks, 150 pants, 150 coats and 150 school uniforms; for children in the “Behind the cemetery”, 100 units of each of the goods. The OPR-33 emphasized that the goods “must be acquired in different shops in the city of Santa Lucía” and must be “in the neighborhoods indicated on Wednesday, May 16th”.²¹ Such measure, according to J.C. Mechoso, “to awaken the sympathy of the action in the local merchants”.²² This type of practice coincided with the organization's theoretical reflections in relation to armed actions. According to *El Copey*, the FAU's main internal document on this topic, it was to capitalize on “politically the popular sympathy that can promote its action” (FAU, 1972, p. 22).

Four points were also required: 1) the end of the conflict at Seral and the signing of the company's agreement with the Union of Employees and Workers of Seral; 2) publication of a note in four newspapers in the capital and in four newspapers in the interior, making the agreement reached public; 3) after the publication of the notes in the newspaper, an amount of economic reparation to be defined; and 4) when complying with the clauses of the agreement with the workers, the company should

²¹ Orlando Pieri. 12 de mayo de 1972. Archivo de FAU.

²² MECHOSO, Juan Carlos. Juan Carlos Mechoso: testimony [may. 2017]. Interviewer: Rafael Viana da Silva. Montevideo, 2017. Mp3 file (2:10 min.).

publicize it through the newspaper and radio. Having met these four conditions, Molaguero would be released within 72 hours and the organization would not intervene in the factory. On July 11, 1972, a public commitment by José Hugo Molaguero (Sergio Molaguero's father) to resolve the conflict at SERAL was published in different newspapers (all specified by the OPR-33). The company committed to reinstate all those laid off, pay compensation to workers who initiated a lawsuit, recognition of the Seral Workers Union as an organization representing workers, the creation of a bipartite factory commission (comprised of two workers' representatives and two of the company), the payment of salaries in accordance with the reports, as well as the adjustment of the payment of overtime, the management before public bodies to obtain the freedom of the workers imprisoned by the conflict, the payment of three million pesos for legal advice of workers and the debts incurred by the union and, finally, the company committed itself not to take any reprisal measures against the workers.²³

On the morning of July 19, Sérgio Molaguero – as promised by OPR-33 – is released and admitted to the Armed Forces Central Hospital. The medical report of the Armed Forces evaluated that the patient entered a state of cachexia (extreme degree of weakness) and with nutritional deficiency. The army report clearly aimed to represent armed action as an instrument that violated human dignity and was part of a broader plan of delegitimizing the guerrilla in the face of public opinion. In his testimony to the newspaper *El Día*, Sérgio Molaguero claimed to have been the target of “torture after the interrogation”, but he did not objectively explain what torture he had been subjected to. The only visible marks were bandages attached at some point to his hands and a wound on his head. Subtly, the newspaper concealed the fact that the head wound was the result of an escape attempt by Molaguero, which resulted in a coup by an OPR-33 member. As pointed out by Baczko, the “social imaginary is, therefore, an effective and efficient part of the device of control of collective life and of the exercise of authority and power”, which, at the same time, “it becomes the place and object of social conflicts” (BACZKO, 1985, p. 310-311).

²³ JOSÉ HUGO MOLAGUERO S.A. CALZADOS SERAL. Ahora, Montevideo, 11 de Julio de 1972, p. 7.

To construct a specific narrative about Molaguero, journalists and newspapers aligned with the counter-insurrection were more widely involved in a dispute over the meanings of events that involved social conflicts. The arrival of Molaguero in the city, for example, was covered by journalists and evidenced a work of building political myths as a way of emptying support for the guerrillas:

His sudden discomfort was produced when he was embraced by his parents, he was heading towards the Artigas monument, where he had proposed to place an offering of flowers and say a few words of thanks.

Also at that same moment, the population, which was striving to approach and speak to him, intoned the stanzas of the National Anthem.

Sergio's legs gave way and silence covered the square. He first leaned on his crying mother, then was assisted by police officers and friends.

He was transferred to his home at 105 Chile Street, reacting in a few minutes. The backyard was surrounded by the crowd, who continued to chant his name.²⁴

Flowers delivered to the bust of Artigas (a hero of Uruguayan national liberation), the National Anthem sung by part of the population, the presence of an effusive people chanting his name or wanting to say something to him and the affable presence of police officers and friends who carry him. But the news doesn't stop there. The newspaper states that “hundreds of people gathered in the streets to express their feelings to him” and, with a drama that goes beyond the limits of exaggeration, the newspaper emphasizes that “Sergio Hugo asked them to stop the vehicle” to “observe the place where I was struck”.²⁵

Each step taken by Molaguero is recorded in a detailed and dramatic way. Upon his arrival in the city of Santa Lucía, the newspaper stated that the neighbors “held posters and banners” and that the square was “covered with people who were desperate to convey their greetings to him. Many cried.” The newspaper emphasizes

²⁴ Molaguero se Repone Ahora en su Casa de Santa Lucía, *El Día*, Montevideo, 24 July 1972, p. 7, our translation.

²⁵ *Idem*.

that “Sergio – who repeatedly raised one of his hands in a gesture of gratitude – before going down, was transferred to a park. ‘You need to get some air,’ said a family member.” As if so many references to the homeland and the nation were not enough, the newspaper emphasizes that “the young man came down with cheers and applause, covered with the Uruguayan flag” and then “walked to the monument of the hero. The people sang the national anthem.”²⁶ It was at this moment that, according to the newspaper, Molaguero had fainted. Already at home, the newspaper emphasized that, at this moment, Sergio decided to speak a few words, surrounded by a “crowd that elbowed against the crystals”. Among his friends was Senator Agustin Caputo. The newspaper ends the article by stating that Molaguero “had some tea before 6 pm. Then he had dinner. At night he finally rested in his own bed.”²⁷

In all this narrative construction, which involves journalists, politicians, the police, Molaguero's family and a sector of the city's population, there is an absence that is felt. The newspaper, despite treating Molaguero as a true popular hero, does not make a single mention of the conflict at Seral, the repression that took place during the workers' march, and even the problems with the agreement between the factory owner and the union.²⁸ This event provoked an internal debate in Fomento about the negative effect of this advertisement for the organization. While propaganda against the armed struggle advanced in the newspapers, the agencies of repression also gained positions and dismantled the *Cárcel del Pueblo* (People's Prison), the main hostage detention center for the Tupamaros. Since April, the Tupamaros have been hard hit by repression (ALDRIGUI, 2016, p. 174).

In October 1972, the FAU took stock of the blows suffered by the repression and the passage of several comrades into hiding. Several of the organization's devices fell into the hands of the repression – which monitored the OPR's actions very carefully – and the military apparatus “overloaded themselves with clandestine”. Such an overload meant that, for example, the militants had to be transferred every 2 or 3 days

²⁶ Idem.

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ While Molaguero remained in the hands of the OPR-33, the CNT would hold a congress with the presence of over 1,800 delegates, representing over 400,000 workers. The unions of Funsa, Tem, Atma and Seral, under the influence of the FAU and combative sectors, would propose a union action plan for the CNT. ROE and FAU would give full priority to this event.

to new places to stay overnight, which, according to the FAU, caused a multiplication of contacts, “the comings and goings, the transfer of illegal immigrants and decompartmentalization alarmingly. The organization found that in 4 weeks a partner could “get to know 7 to 8 different places”.²⁹ In the document, the organization also criticizes the difficulties in the relationship between the public part of the organization and the armed apparatus, in which the former did not know how to properly sympathize with the clandestine members of the armed apparatus. Members of the armed apparatus were extremely overwhelmed by the pressure of security forces near their runways. The relationship difficulties between the clandestine apparatus (OPR) and the public part of the organization were reported by the companions. One of them, the criticism of the decision of the public part of the organization not to support the clandestine militants.

Far from being a “perfect machine” – like any organization inserted in real contexts and far from idealizations – the FAU sought to address the internal deficiencies in the functioning of the armed apparatus. For the FAU, a correct formation of cadres for the apparatus was necessary: “acquiring experience in front of the masses as a fundamental means of politically qualifying all comrades” and “acquiring experience at an intermediate level” which implied “technical training and the acquisition of security criteria”.³⁰ Even so, the FAU made an effort to ensure the smooth functioning of the teams. One of the mechanisms was the internal questionnaires. In the questionnaire, were the name (obviously false), age (approximate), team (in code), seniority (how many years you have in the organization) and sector. Below is a set of characteristics that were evaluated with a score ranging from 1 to 5 (1 was Bad, 2 Fair, 3 Acceptable, 4 Good and 5 Very Good). There were five blocks that organized the characteristics: a) Security, b) Political Information, c) Political Training, d) Theoretical Training and; e) Morals and Militant Functioning. In Safety, the following characteristics were evaluated: a1) punctuality, a2) discretion, a3) alertness, a4) attitude towards the classification criteria. At point b, the characteristics were b1) reads newspapers, b2) reads books, b3) knows the concerns and problems of

²⁹ Untitled brochure. Montevideo, 10 de septiembre de 1972, our translation. FAU File.

³⁰ Idem, ibidem.

their environment, b4) experiences these problems, b5) knows the positions of other groups. In point c they were grouped as follows: c1) formative restlessness, c2) theoretical capacity, c3) analysis capacity, c4) transmission capacity. In Theoretical training, d1) theoretical capacity, d2) operational capacity, d3) aggressiveness, d4) information, d5) search for infrastructure (probably, infrastructure). And finally, e1) solidarity, e2) fraternity, e3) constancy, e4) audacity, e5) patience, e6) firmness, e7) ductility (a possible synonym would be malleability or flexibility), e8) modesty, e9) initiative, e10) common sense, e11) delivery capacity, e12) act (attitude?) towards the private sector, e13) permanent risk disposition, e14) political aggressiveness, e15) faith in the cause, e16) willingness to work as a team, e17) exercise of self-criticism, e18) acceptance of criticism made by others, e18) communication skills, e19) management skills and finally, e20) discipline. On paper, it was emphasized that the evaluation was carried out between the partner and the person in charge of the team (SILVA, 2018, p. 201-202).

The evaluation should emerge from the agreement that was established between the partner and the person in charge, based on a critical and self-critical balance. Those in charge were also elected by their peers and had to go through the same evaluation process. Still reaping the effects of Molaguero's kidnapping, just ten days after his release, the organization kidnaps Héctor Menoni, a journalist for the United Press International (UPI). The decision to kidnap him was since the organization evaluated that he was losing the dispute in the field of public opinion over the action involving Molaguero. The action aimed to present to the journalist how Molaguero was treated and to present the working conditions at the Seral factory (MECHOSO, 2009, p. 332-333). Released soon after, the journalist gave his impression of the organization's position, which, internally, considered that the objective of the action had been fulfilled, therefore, positive.

With the advance of the repression and the decision of the FAU to move to Buenos Aires, the OPR-33 apparatus will be moved to this city and will still be able to carry out some more actions in the city until it is completely dismantled by the action of the Argentine repressive forces. in 1974 and in the context of the dark Operation

Condor.³¹

Conclusive notes

The action of the OPR-33 and the FAU, in the universe of armed struggle, demonstrates that the political violence operated by this organization had its own identity and particularities in its action, which gave it unique characteristics. We understand that the emergence of the OPR-33 was influenced by several political and social elements, among them, we highlight the decisive influence of the Cuban Revolution and the theories of “Foquism” in the South American continent and, specifically, in the way they spread in Uruguay. It is also possible to mention the influence of the radicalization actions of the Uruguayan extreme right as possible conditions for the formation of this armed conception, in view of the concern of the FAU in preparing for a possible regime closure in Uruguay. It is worth mentioning that the 1964 military coup in Brazil changed the political horizon of expectations in Uruguay and hastened organizational solutions within the Uruguayan left, which was in favor of armed struggle. The increasing closure of the political regime by Pacheco Areco in 1967 and the exclusion of the FAU from any public political arena coincides with the development of the armed apparatus of this organization. This element is a consensus among researchers who have focused on the OPR-33 (Rugai, 2012; Alves, 2016; Silva, 2018). Finally, we highlight the presence of a certain expropriating anarchism already in the foundation of the FAU, whose experience of armed actions in the Rio de la Plata axis helped not only in the creation process of this organization, but also influenced the development of its armed apparatus. The second is the influence of Abraham's theoretical reflections Guillén on the armed struggle, whose internal formations, and debates, helped to structure the conception of OPR-33.

Regarding the actions of the OPR-33, as numerous works on the history of the armed struggle indicate, actions of this nature were not exclusively actions of clash

³¹ Operation Condór was a military alliance between the regimes of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. Its objective was to coordinate the repression of opponents of these governments.

against the forces of repression, but mixed actions of expropriation, supply, sabotage and/or kidnappings. We also emphasize that, in the case of the OPR-33, such actions, far from being isolated from the social reality of the country, or of the working class, were mixed with the social struggles of that period, interfering through armed actions in their solution.

We also saw that OPR-33 also had to deal with the dispute over public opinion and its effects on workers. It is also worth mentioning that these were important experiences of the OPR-33 in the training of its members, in the search for direct democracy (in anarchist fashion) and in the fight against a militaristic internal culture.

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