

MSE – Movimento Sem Emprego/ Unemployed Movement

MSE's beginning

Ana Rajado made a Facebook event on March 1st, 2012, summoning an unemployed plenary session. 40 people got together on that same day and MSE was born.

On the Facebook group there were some right wing extremists that we needed to keep away: we decided to write a manifesto based on the 58th article of the Portuguese Constitution (Labour Law) and on the 23rd article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We uploaded it to our website and made it available for subscription. The subscribers were asked to give either an e-mail or a cellphone number but also where they lived, so that we could organize them

How to attain public visibility

Requirement: own an effective way of mass mailing.

Procedure: gather as many e-mails as possible – from journalists, bloggers, and opinion makers; assemble those with institutional e-mails from newspapers, radios and TV stations; send the same information to all of them.

When we prepare an important event, we first speak to a trusted reporter, asking for their secrecy. We tell them what is going to happen so that they have time to prepare a large piece. We also carefully inform, without giving any details, another reporter from Lusa agency (Portuguese news agency). That way, all the other reporters will also want to have something exclusive (market laws working). Adding to that, all the other newspapers, TV stations and radios copy what Lusa says.

MSE has a list of 1500 e-mails from journalists and the ability to mass mail them. On top of that, our lists contain tens of thousands more e-mails, giving our newsletter a decent audience.

MSE's funds

We first considered the possibility of registering MSE as an association, so that we could open a bank account. However, that same process would cost several hundred euros. We chose not to legalize MSE and instead use the bank account of one of our activists. The bank reference is online, on our website. The very same day we put it online, donations were made. On a regular basis, MSE publishes on its website the anonymous donations amounts and dates of deposit. That way, whoever made the deposit can confirm it. Similarly, MSE also publishes where it spent the money. We thus create confidence and transparency, in order to encourage more donations. What usually happens is that organizations have a legal relationship with the State, but they do not say how the money was spent. MSE, on the contrary is an unregistered movement but it makes public how the money was spent.

When we mass-send emails, we add the bank reference and a link to the manifesto for subscription.

We can say that MSE never had to give up organizing or joining an event due to lack of funds. We can say MSE is independent, from an economic point of view. We can say MSE does not owe anything to anyone. We can say MSE always has at least a few hundred euros on its bank account. We depend entirely on the population's solidarity.

What did we learn?

When we have issues, they are usually due to our relations with other political forces, either from a party or from a union. We learned that the way to solve these problems is by worrying about what we want to do and talk about what we talk and thus create our own narrative, instead of speaking about what other political movements do. Because of

the plurality of political sensitivities present in MSE, we learned to accept each other. This is likely the biggest treasure of MSE.

Our biggest problem

Even though we have some visibility, we are having difficulties attracting unemployed people to the movement. If we cannot solve their concrete problems, they do not come to us. If we cannot solve their unemployment situation, they do not want to see us. That is our biggest and hardest debate.

There are some proposals, like organizing systems of exchange amongst unemployed people, as a means of survival. But how can an exchange system pay the electric bill, water bill, or internet access? If there is no money entering the system, there is none coming out and the bills remain unpaid. And there is, of course, the possibility that such a system might simply aggravate problems of social auto-exclusion.

There are other proposals, such as promoting social canteens where people can satisfy their hunger. But that can be confused with right-wing charity organizations or the church – the only thing they do is help perpetuate the system. Where is the limit between charity and solidarity?

Despite not liking it, we might have to turn to governmental institutions and make them do what they should be doing, their social function: promote job creation - hopefully as cooperatives. This is, after all, a matter of the physical survival of the unemployed.

Main political victory

MSE has made available online several statistical estimates, which are updated by the second, regarding the number of unemployed in Portugal and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is not being produced due to people having been laid off. These estimates are made on the principle that the GDP cannot grow without people's work. They are based on the studies of the communist economist Eugénio Rosa. When the last unemployment statistics were revealed, the media and the Socialist Party - PS (the Portuguese PAZOK) did not make use of the official statistics, but those which we (MSE) call the real unemployment rate. It is the sum of the official unemployment rate with those who are inactive but available and those who are underemployed. While the official rate is 16.9% (920.000 unemployed people), the numbers we give are around 25,5% (1.450.000 unemployed people). This was a public political victory for MSE. We can help foreign social movements calculate similar statistics.

MSE's goals

- Reduce the number of working hours without a reduction in pay;
- Fight the legislation that facilitates layoffs and promotes precarity;
- Fight for free social services: end user fees (like those required to receive medical treatment), free essential medicines, and a social pass for transports;
- Freezing the payment of housing instalments for the unemployed and ending pledges;
- Prohibiting the suspension of essential services, such as water, electricity, phone and internet access when families cannot pay;
- Ending the use of social security funds for programs that promote precarity – “Youth Impulse”;
- Allow the participation of unemployed people in the administration of IEFP (Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional - Institute of Employment and Vocational Training) and its centres, in order to influence vocational training and employment creation policies, in a role similar to union advocates;
- Study the possibility of supporting the creation of cooperatives of unemployed people;
- Monitor and disseminate, according to our possibilities, the struggles inside companies

against collective layoffs and closings;

- Raise the legal possibility of representative structures of workers that can have access to the economic and financial situation of the companies they work in, so that they can better fight the reasons offered for collective layoffs and bankruptcies;
- Try to create and organize more MSE chapters in different cities;
- «Resistance Day», still being organized, would be a meeting to debate with other social movements, unions and activists as a means to think and create new partnerships and plans to go on the offensive.

Appeal

We make an appeal to the people present here for the necessity of international cooperation, in order to be able to fight together against unemployment. As a first step, we would like to exchange experiences and information with everyone.

Some of MSE's events:

- MSE is known for being present in all anti-austerity demonstrations.
- 30th of July Demonstration: MSE promotes its first demonstration in which the theme was exclusively unemployment.
- September 15th: After the demonstration, with one and a half million people on the streets, MSE started singing «Grândola Vila Morena» and went to the Parliament.
- S. Bento's Siege: MSE promoted this demonstration alongside other social movements.
- Solidarity with workers and its teachings: MSE learned that solidarity is not always answered with solidarity. During the 14th of November European Strike protests (the day of a severe police charge) there were some workers of organized structures which abandoned MSE in front of the Parliament. Afterwards, they did not subscribe to the criticism that several social movements did of the police charge. MSE learned that it should focus on its own struggles. The unemployed should receive our undivided attention because they are the ones who need solidarity the most.

These latest events made us realize the need for allies.

Other organizations that deal with unemployment

- Precários Inflexíveis (Unflexible Precarious): Unitary organization, mainly connected to Bloco de Esquerda;
- MTD (Movimento de Trabalhadores Desempregados – Movement of Unemployed Workers): Organization funded a few years ago, which is nowadays controlled by CGTP and PCP.
- ANDP (Associação Nacional de Desempregados – National Association of the Unemployed): association that belongs to an entrepreneur from the north of Portugal.