



Contemporary Platformism

a critical study

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society according to one's needs, while giving to it according to one's mood or not at all; toilers have suffered too long from the application of that absurd principle and that is why they are unbending on this point. Our feeling for justice and logic is also outraged at this principle.

The position will change completely as soon as the free society of toilers entrenches itself and when there are no longer any classes sabotaging the new production for motives of a counter-revolutionary nature, but only a handful of idlers. Then society will have to make a complete reality of the anarchist principle: „From each according to ability, to each according to needs,“ for only on the basis of that principle will society be assured of its chances to breathe complete freedom and genuine equality.

But even then, the general rule will be that all able-bodied persons, enjoying rights over the material and moral resources of society, incur certain obligations in respect of production of these.

Bakunin, analysing this problem in his day, wrote in the maturity of his anarchist thinking and activity (in 1871, comrade Nettlau reckons): “Everyone will have to work if they are to eat. Anyone refusing to work will be free to perish of hunger, unless they find some association or township prepared to feed them out of pity. But then it will probably be fair to grant them no political rights, since, capable of work, their shameful situation is of their own choosing and they are living off another person's labour. For there will be no other basis for social and political rights than the work performed by each individual.”

Contemporary Platformism: A Critical Study

by Karl Klien

Generally speaking though, and with the exception of extraordinary cases (such as civil war), victorious labour will have to grant free speech and freedom of the press to left-wing views and right-wing views alike. That freedom will be the pride and joy of the free toilers' society.

Anarchists countenance revolutionary violence in the fight against the class enemy. They urge the toilers to use that. But they will never agree to wield power, even for a single instant, nor impose their decisions on the masses by force. In this connection their methods are: propaganda, force of argument, and spoken and written persuasion.

6. THE PROPER INTERPRETATION OF THE ANARCHIST PRINCIPLE: „FROM EACH ACCORDING TO ABILITIES, TO EACH ACCORDING TO NEEDS“. Without question, this principle is the cornerstone of anarchist communism. No other economic, social or legal precept is as well-suited to the ideal of anarchist communism as this one. The Platform also says that: „the social revolution, which will see to the reconstruction of the whole established social order, will thereby see to it that everyone's basic needs are provided for.“

However, it is a broad declaration of principle on the problem of an anarchist society. It has to be distinguished from the practical demands of the early days of the social revolution. As the experiences of the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution have shown, the non-working classes are beaten, but not definitively. In the early days a single idea obsesses them: collecting themselves, overthrowing the revolution, and restoring their lost privileges.

That being the case, it would be extremely risky and fatally dangerous for the revolution to share out the products that would be available to the revolutionary zone in according to the principle of „to each according needs“. It would be doubly dangerous for, aside from the comfort that this might afford the classes inimical to the revolution, which would be morally and strategically unconscionable, new classes will immediately arise and these, seeing the revolution supply the needs of every person, would rather idle than work. Plainly this double danger is not something that one can ignore. For it will quickly get the better of the revolution, unless effective measures are taken against it. The best measure would be to put the counter-revolutionary, non-working classes usefully to work. In one sphere or another, to one extent or another, these classes will have to find themselves useful employment of which society has need; and it is their very right to their share in society's output that will force them to do so, for there are no rights that do not carry obligations. That is the very point that our splendid anarchist principle is making. It proposes that every individual in proportion to their needs, provided that every individual places their powers and faculties in the service of society.

An exception will be made for the children, the elderly, the sick and the infirm. Rightly, society will excuse all such persons from the duty of labour, without denying them their entitlement to have all their needs met.

The moral sensibilities of the toilers' is deeply outraged by the principle of taking from

endeavours, but also with an eye to better discerning the essential traits, arguments, plans and intentions of their enemies.

It is untrue that the capitalist and social opportunist press can lead the revolutionary toilers astray. The latter will be quite capable of deciphering and exposing the lying press and giving it the answer it deserves. Press freedom and freedom of speech only scare those like the capitalists and the State socialists who survive through dirty deeds that they are obliged to hide from the eyes of the great toiling masses. As for the toilers, freedom of speech will be a tremendous boon to them. It will enable them to listen and give everything a hearing, judge things for themselves, and make their understanding deeper and their actions more effective.

Monopolisation of the press and the right to speak, or the limitation of these by their being squeezed into the confines of a single party's dogma, put paid to all confidence in the monopolists and in their press. If free speech is stifled, it is because there is a desire to conceal the truth: something demonstrated sensationally by the Bolsheviks, whose press is dependent upon bayonets and is read primarily out of necessity, there being no other.

However, there may be specific circumstances when the press, or, rather, abuse of the press, may be restricted on the grounds of revolutionary usefulness. As an example, we might cite one episode from the revolutionary era in Russia.

Throughout the month of November 1919, the town of Ekaterinoslav was in the hands of the Makhnovist insurgent army. But at the same time, it was surrounded by Denikin's troops who, having dug in along the left bank of the Dniepr in the area around the towns of Amur and Nizhnedneprovsk, where shelling Ekaterinoslav continually with cannon mounted on their armoured trains. And a Denikinist unit headed by General Slashchev was simultaneously advancing on Ekaterinoslav from the north, from the area around Kremenchug.

At the time, the following daily newspapers were appearing in Ekaterinoslav, thanks to freedom of speech: the Makhnovist organ 'Putsk Svobodey' (Road To Freedom), the Right Social Revolutionaries' 'Narodovlastiye' (Peoples' Power), the Ukrainian Left Social Revolutionaries' 'Borotba' (Struggle), and the Bolshevik's organ 'Zvezda' (Star). Only the Cadets, then spiritual leaders of the Denikinist movement, were without their newspaper. Well now! Say the Cadets would have wanted to publish in Ekaterinoslav their own newspaper which without any doubt would have been an accessory to Denikin's operations, would the revolutionary workers and insurgents have had to grant the Cadets the right to their newspaper, even at a time when its primarily military role in events would have been apparent? We think not.

In a civil war context, such cases may arise more than once. In these cases, the workers and peasants will have to be guided not by the broad principle of freedom of press and free speech, but by the role that enemy mouthpieces will be undertaking in relation to the ongoing military struggle.

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Introduction

The following should be considered a discussion document and not the collective position of either the Sheffield group or the national federation as a whole. The ideas presented here have been developed through much formal and informal internal debate and discussion within the federation. It is intended as a contribution to a wider debate concerning the current composition of the international anarchist movement. Many thanks to all those who assisted in its development.

There has perhaps never been such a controversial contribution to the theory and practice of the anarchist movement than those ideas forwarded by the Dielo Truda (“Workers’ Cause”) group in the ‘Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)’. The document has been both praised as a “valuable historical reference” for class-struggle anarchists seeking “greater effectiveness and a way out of political isolation, stagnation and confusion” (Heath, 1989), while also been denounced outright as an attempt to “Bolshevise” anarchism (Voline et al., 1927). Yet “Platformism”, as contemporary adherence to the principles of the Platform is generally referred to, continues to be a vibrant tradition within the global anarchist movement. The Anarkismo Statement, for example, which is widely considered to be the most contemporary expression of Platformist principles, has signatories spanning the globe. *Especifismo*, an organisational programme emerging out of Latin American anarchism, although not directly linked to the Platform, also shares many of the priorities of Platformist groups -theoretical and tactical unity, collective responsibility and federalism - and has gained greater influence in recent years within the global anarchist community. Platformism also continues to be a divisive issue for our movement. Anarchists will typically position themselves on either side of the divide, as against or in favour of the positions outlined by the Platform. Since its publication there has been a great deal of suspicion and sectarianism between the two parties. Platformists will be denounced as “authoritarian” or “Leninist”, while Platformists will routinely accuse other anarchists of being “ineffective” or “disorganised”. It is the purpose of this paper to attempt to cut across this divide and to reconcile these two images of Platformism. To, at the same time as appraising the theory and practice of contemporary Platformist groups, emphasise that which should be considered and valuable and useful within the perspectives of Platformism to all social anarchists. This, I hope, will be part of a broader, more constructive dialogue within

on various events; that constitutes one of its inalienable rights. However, in the endeavour to spread their ideas, anarchists will have to be in strict agreement, both with one and other as well as with the endeavours of the anarchist umbrella organisation to which they belong and in the name of which they will be carrying out ideological and organisational work inside the trade unions. Conducting libertarian endeavours inside the trade unions in an organised manner and ensuring that anarchist efforts coincide have nothing to do with authoritarian procedure.

4. The author’s voiced objection to the program’s thesis regarding DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION is, more than any other, rooted in a misunderstanding.

Having stressed the necessity and inevitability, in the civil war context, of the toilers’ creating their revolutionary army, the Platform asserts also that this army will have to be subordinated to the overall direction of the workers’ and peasants’ production and consumption organisations.

Subordination of the army to these organisations does not at all imply the idea of an elected civil authority. Absolutely not. An army, even should it be the most revolutionary and most popular of armies in terms of its mentality and title, cannot, however, exist and operate off its own initiative, but has to be answerable to someone. Being an organ for the defence of the toilers’ rights and revolutionary positions, the army must, for that very reason, be wholly subordinate to the toilers and piloted by them, politically speaking; we stress politically, for, when it comes to its military and strategic direction, that could only be handled by military bodies within the ranks of the army itself and answerable to the workers’ and peasants’ leadership organisations.

But to whom might the army be directly answerable, politically? The toilers do not constitute a single body. They will be represented by manifold economic organisations. It is to these very same organisations, in the shape of their federal umbrella agencies, that the army will be subordinated. The character and social functions of these agencies are spelled out at the outset of the present answers.

The notion of a toilers’ revolutionary army must be either accepted or rejected. But should the army be countenanced, then the principle of that army’s being subordinated to the workers’ and peasants’ organisations likewise has to be accepted. We can see no other possible solution to the matter.

5. PRESS FREEDOM, FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OF ORGANISATION, ETC. The victorious proletariat should not tamper either with freedom of speech, nor of the press, not even those of its erstwhile enemies and oppressors now defeated by the revolution. It is even less acceptable that there be tampering with press freedom and freedom of speech in the context of the revolutionary socialist and anarchist groupings in the ranks of the victorious proletariat.

Free speech and press freedom are essential for the toilers, not simply so that they may illuminate and better grasp the tasks involved in their constructive economic and social

mune, but it will be the first showing, the first practical essay of that commune, and it will usher in the age of free, non-statist creativity of the toilers.

We are of the opinion that, with regard to their decisions relating to the various realms of economic and social life, the soviets of the workers' and peasants' organisations or the factory committees will see to those, not through violence or decrees but rather through common accord with the toiling masses who will be taking a direct hand in the making of those decisions. Those decisions, though, will have to be binding upon all who vote for and endorse them.

3. ANARCHISTS WILL STEER THE MASSES AND EVENTS IN TERMS OF THEORY. The action of steering revolutionary elements and the revolutionary movement of the masses in terms of ideas should not and cannot ever be considered as an aspiration on the part of anarchists that they should take the construction of the new society into their own hands. That construction cannot be carried out except by the whole labouring society, for that task devolves upon it alone, and any attempt to strip it of that right must be deemed anti-anarchist. The question of the ideological piloting is not a matter of socialist construction, but rather of a theoretical and political influence brought to bear upon the revolutionary march of political events. We would be neither revolutionaries nor fighters were we not to take an interest in the character and tenor of the masses' revolutionary struggle. And since the character and tenor of that struggle are determined not just by objective factors, but also by subjective factors, that is to say by the influence of a variety of political groups, we have a duty to do all in our power to see that anarchism's ideological influence upon the march of revolution is maximised.

The current „age of wars and revolutions“ poses a chief dilemma with exceptional acuteness: revolutionary events will evolve either under the sway of statist ideas (even should these be socialist), or else under the sway of anti-statist ideas (anarchism). And, since we are unshakeable in our conviction that the statist trend will bring the revolution to defeat and the masses to a renewed slavery, our task follows from that with implacable logic: it is to do all we can to see that the revolution is shaped by the anarchist tendency. Now, our old way of operating, a primitive approach relying on tiny, scattered groups, will not only fail to carry off the task but will, indeed, hinder it. So we have to proceed by a new method. We have to orchestrate the force of anarchism's theoretical influence upon the march of events. Instead of being an intermittent influence felt through disparate petty actions, it has to be made a powerful, ongoing factor. That, as we see it, can scarcely be possible unless anarchism's finest militants, in matters theoretical and practical alike, organise themselves into a body capable of vigorous action and well-grounded in terms of theory and tactics: a General Union of Anarchists. It is in this same sense that the drive to pilot revolutionary syndicalism in theoretical terms should be understood. Entering trade unions in an organised manner meant entering as the carriers of a certain theory, a prescribed work plan, work that will have to be strictly compatible in the case of every anarchist operating within the trade unions. The Anarchist Union is hardly going to trouble itself to prescribe tactics for the labour movement or draw up plans for strikes or demonstrations. But it is going to have to disseminate within the unions its ideas regarding the revolutionary tactics of the working class and

our movement and instigate some open and honest appraisal of our own values regardless of the labels that we may attach to ourselves.

Notes on this enquiry: Unfortunately this paper is restricted to documents that exist in, or have been translated into, the English language only. I realise that some of the groups I will be discussing do not speak English as a first language and this may restrict my understanding of them. I have, given the materials available to me, endeavoured to represent them in the most accurate way possible. I welcome criticism and additional sources on any of these points. My analysis will also largely be framed by the British experience and the British and Irish anarchist movement, given that this is the context in which I am politically active as a member of the Anarchist Federation. The discussion will also be largely limited to contemporary Platformist groups only. This decision was made due to obvious limitations on space and time in terms of the scale of this work but also on the basis that there are already well researched histories of the Platform and Platformist groups available[1].

Contemporary Platformism: Its basis and its aims

To understand contemporary Platformism it is important to first understand the context in which those ideas have developed as an independent tradition within the anarchist movement. Following counter-revolution in Russian in the wake of the October revolution, two strains of thought emerged from Russian and Ukrainian exiles on the perceived failures of the anarchist movement in those countries. For the Dielo Truda group it was the lack of organisational principles that had led to the general weakness and lack of influence of anarchist ideas. The seminal contribution of the Platform document was, therefore, to stress the importance of tactical and theoretical unity and a shared understanding of theory and goals across any future anarchist organisation. The Platform also argued for the primacy of class-struggle anarchism, indeed, that anarchism as a political philosophy owed its origins in the struggle of working people. Platformists, consequently, argue that anything other than this is a recipe for disunity and organisational paralysis as different tendencies struggle to reconcile their own values into the common practice of the organisation.

These ideas were in opposition to those ideas emerging from another group of Russian exiles around Voline and those of the “synthesist” position. For Voline and his comrades, the Dielo Truda group over-stated the influence of organisation in the failures of the anarchists and attributed the problems more to the difficulty of propagating anarchist ideas within the population and to Bolshevik-led, state repression (although they also did acknowledge a lack of theoretical coherence within the Russian movement at the time). They rejected the notion that anarchist communism was the only valid expression of anarchism and were keen to emphasise the holistic character of the philosophy as represented in its different traditions – communism, syndicalism, mutualism, individualism etc. Voline, accordingly, advocated the development of synthesist federations which aimed to unite all self-identifying anarchists – individualist, syndicalist, mutualist, collectivist, religious etc. – under one banner on the basis of their shared opposition to the state and their desire for human freedom. The central idea was that unity and non-sectarian co-operation were the best means to strengthen the existing anarchist movement. Although it should also be noted that many synthesist groups were much

As a rule, we reckon that the Union, as a body, should have a single tactical and political line. Indeed, the Union is designed for the purpose of bringing an end to the anarchist movement’s dissipation and disorganisation, the intention being to lay down, in place of a multiplicity of tactical lines giving rise to intestinal friction’s, an overall policy line that will enable all libertarian elements to pursue a common direction and be all the more successful in achieving their goal. In the absence of which the Union would have lost one of its main *raison d’être*.

However, there may be times when the opinions of the Union’s membership on such and such an issue would be split, which would give rise to the emergence of a majority and a minority view. Such instances are commonplace in the life of all organisations and all parties. Usually, a resolution of such a situation is worked out.

We reckon, first of all, that for the sake of unity of the Union, the minority should, in such cases, make concessions to the majority. This would be readily achievable, in cases of insignificant differences of opinion between the minority and majority. If, though, the minority were to consider sacrificing its viewpoint an impossibility, then there would be the prospect of having two divergent opinions and tactics within the Union; a majority view and tactic, and a minority view and tactic.

In which case, the position will have to come under scrutiny by the Union as a whole. If, after discussion, the existence of two divergent views on the same issue were to be adjudged feasible, the co-existence of those two opinions will be accepted as an accomplished fact.

Finally, in the event of agreement between majority and minority on the tactical and political matters separating them proving impossible, there would be a split with the minority breaking away from the majority to found a separate organisation.

Those are the three possible outcomes in the event of disagreement between the minority and majority. In all cases, the question will be resolved, not by the Executive Committee which, let us repeat, is to be merely an executive organ of the Union, but by the entire Union as a body: by a Union Conference or Congress.

2. THE FREE REGIME OF SOVIETS. We repudiate the current (Bolshevik) soviet arrangement, for it represents only a certain political form of the State. The soviets of workers’ and peasants’ deputies are a State political organisation run by a political party. Against which we offer soviets of the workers’ and peasants’ production and consumption organisations. That is the meaning of the slogan „free regime of soviets and factory committees“. We take such a regime to mean an economic and social arrangement wherein all of the branches and functions of economic and social life would be concentrated in the hands of the toilers’ production and consumption organisations, which would perform those functions with an eye to meeting the needs of the whole labouring society. A Federation of these organisations and their soviets would dispense with the State and the capitalist system, and would be the chief pivot of the free soviets regime. To be sure, this regime will not instantly represent the full-blooded ideal of the anarchist com-

It is in relation to this problem that they key to the whole anarchist conception of social organisation lies. If one were to make concessions on this point, one would quickly be hounded into jettisoning all the other anarchist ideas, for your approach to the problem makes any anti-statist social organisation an impossibility.

It may be that I have to write to the press about the Platform. But I should prefer to put that off until all these grey areas have been elucidated.

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Thus, the Organisational Platform spawns a series of substantive questions set out in the letter just quoted, notably: (1) the question of majority and minority in the anarchist movement; (2) that of the structure and essential features of the free regime of the soviets; (3) that of the ideological steering of events and of the masses; (4) that of defence of the revolution; (5) that of press freedom and the freedom of speech; and (6) the construction to be placed upon the anarchist principle of „to each according to needs“.

Let us tackle them in order:

1. THE QUESTION OF MAJORITY AND MINORITY IN THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT. The author broaches this by linking it to our idea of an Executive Committee of the Union. If the Union's Executive Committee has, besides other functions of an executive nature, also that of „steering the activity of isolated groups from a theoretical and organisational point of view,“ must that steering not be coercive? Then, are groups affiliated to the Union to be free to proscribe their own tactics and determine their own stance with regard to each given matter? Or are they to be obliged to abide by the overall tactic and the overall positions to be laid down by the Union's majority?

Let it be said, first of all, that in our view, the Union's Executive Committee cannot be a body endowed with any powers of a coercive nature, as is the case with the centralist political parties. The General Anarchist Union's Executive Committee is a body performing functions of a general nature in the Union. Instead of „Executive Committee,“ this body might carry the title of „Union Secretariat“. However, the name „Executive Committee“ is to be preferred, for it better encapsulates the idea of the executive function and that of initiative. Without in any way restricting the rights of isolated groups, the Executive Committee will be able to steer their activity in the theoretical and organisational sense. For there will always be groups inside the Union that will feel burdened by various tactical issues, so that ideological or organisational assistance will always be necessary for certain groups. It goes without saying that the Executive Committee will be well placed to lend such assistance, for it will be, by virtue of its situation and its functions, imbued with the tactical or organisational line adopted by the Union on a variety of matters.

But if, nevertheless, some organisations or others should indicate a wish to pursue their own tactical line, will the Executive Committee or the Union as a body be in a position to prevent them? In other words, is the Union's tactical and policy line to be laid down by the majority, or will every group be entitled to operate as it deems fit, and, will the Union have several lines to start with?

more limited in scope, for example, advocating the unity of all “social” anarchists (-syndicalist, -communist, -collectivist), potentially providing greater common ground and space for co-operation than there would be with those activists simply opposed to the state.

Disputes over who, Voline and the syntheists or Makhno and the Dielo Truda Group, had taken the greater lesson from the Bolshevik experience were, and continue to be, a source of bitter division for anarchists in both continental Europe and the Americas over the greater part of the last Century. In this respect both Platformism and Synthesism are clearly identifiable and well-established traditions within these respective movements. In Britain, however, the situation has been slightly different. Synthesism, for example, is a school of anarchist thought that has traditionally developed within the context of great factional disputes within strong, established anarchist movements. The early contributions of the Cuban-born anarchists Fernando Tarrida del Mármol and Ricardo Mella, of *anarquismo sin adjetivos* (an “anarchism without adjectives”) to the Spanish anarchist movement were meant to repair the divide between the warring factions of collectivist and communist anarchists. Likewise, Malatesta would advocate a “wait and see” attitude to questions on post-revolutionary economic organisation as a means of advocating greater tolerance between the various strands of social anarchism he encountered throughout his lifetime. Voltairine de Cleyre would also emphasise post-revolutionary experimentation with different forms of social organisation as a means of finding common ground between groups of individualist and communist anarchists in North America. Britain has, however, never really enjoyed a comparatively large or diverse anarchist movement. The individualist philosophy of Max Stirner, in particular, while gaining great influence in the early French, Spanish and German anarchist movements, was never as widely read or as influential in Britain, aside from in the writings of a few noteworthy artists and intellectuals[2]. Similarly, despite a number of native socialist movements sharing similar goals to that of the anarchist traditions of collectivism and mutualism neither really enjoyed a sustained influence as a philosophy in its own right. Early proponents of anarchism in Britain - Charles Mowbray, Fred Charles, Guy Aldred - emerged largely out of the communist movement and were, therefore, largely drawn towards anarchist communism or anarcho-syndicalism as the best organisational expression of anarchist ideals. Where British groups have incorporated anarchists from a variety of traditions it was largely the result of geographical isolation as opposed to any formal ideological commitment[3].

The key assertion of the Platform, therefore - that anarchism is a political philosophy foremost associated with the struggles of working people for free communism - has been a strong and lasting tradition within the organised British anarchist movement. Accordingly, in the British context, Platformism has not been foremost a critique of synthesism or other economic theories of post-revolutionary organisation (as it has been in Europe and in the Americas), but a reference point for the need for greater coherence and tactical unity to an already fairly ideologically coherent social anarchist movement. We can see this, for example, in Heath's (1996) account of the formation of Britain's first Platformist group - the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists (ORA);

ORA's objections to the traditional anarchist movement then, were more on the level of organisation than of theory. Their advocacy of collective responsibility, the use of a Chair and voting to take decisions at meetings, formal membership and a paper under the control of its "writers, sellers and readers" (Heath, 1996)

Likewise where oppositional currents have existed it has not been on points of principle, i.e. for non-sectarianism or anarchist unity, but over tactics, for example, local over national organisation or, more recently, the influence of insurrectionalist ideas. The question, therefore, has been largely one of tactics and organisation than theoretical commitment[4]. Accordingly, the rest of this enquiry will largely focus on the "Organisational Section" of the Platform, also the most commonly cited section, and the organisational principles of tactical and theoretical unity, collective responsibility and ideological leadership. While debates over Synthesism and non-sectarian practice are important, this is not an issue of particular relevance to the experience of the majority of British anarchists (having unlikely ever encountered a collectivist/individualist/mutualist anarchist).

It is all the more important then, in order to come to a true understanding of the existing Platformist tradition to also avoid the often quite crude, but quite frequent, divisions presented in many contemporary accounts of the British anarchist movement. Depending on the authors' sympathies, all non-Platformist strains of anarchism will be presented as inherently disorganised and/or a failing to appreciate the necessity of organisational coherence and unity. Or Platformism will be presented as a rigidly enforced revolutionary doctrine and Platformists as needlessly preoccupied with questions of organisational form[5]. Both positions are not only over-simplifications but obvious misrepresentations. The picture of the "Bolshevised" Platformists on one hand and the disorganised "small-a anarchists" on the other in the end does justice to neither party. *All* anarchists will, to some degree, address the important issue of revolutionary organisation. Similarly, *all* strains of anarchism, even insurrectional ones, acknowledge the benefits and necessity of some principled unity in practice. To argue that the Platform stands alone on this point is to in fact sell it far short of its true value as a guide for organisational praxis. What Platformists *do* argue for, and what makes the tradition unique, is the necessity of a certain method of reaching this organisational coherence - namely the process of theoretical and tactical unity. That is, of course, also not to acknowledge how contentious this particular idea has been.

Franks (2006) in his history of the contemporary British anarchist movement disparagingly compares theoretical and tactical unity with Leninism arguing that it leads to "centralisation", a "paternalistic attitude" and, ultimately, the "formation of revolutionary cadre"[6]. This is not a particularly new criticism, the process has also often been characterised as a desire for "mono-think", a point that Malatesta first touches on in his exchange with Makhno;

the authors of the Platform say that it is the 'Union' that wills and disposes.

the Platform rejects the idea of the „transitional period“? And if it is a definitive form, what makes the Platform anarchist?

5. There are some questions which, while not dealt with in the Platform, nevertheless play an important part in the disagreements between comrades. Let me quote one of these questions:

Let us suppose that a region finds itself effectively under the influence of the anarchists. What will their attitude be towards the other parties? Do the authors of the Platform countenance the possibility of violence against an enemy who has not had recourse to arms? Or do they, in keeping with the anarchist idea, proclaim undiluted freedom of speech, of the press, of organisation, etc., for all? (Some years ago, a similar question would have seemed out of place. But at present certain views of which I am aware prevent me of being sure of that answer.)

And, broadly speaking, is it acceptable to have one's decisions implemented by force? Do the authors of the Platform countenance the exercise of power, even if only for an instant?

Whatever the group's answers to all these questions, I cannot keep silent about one idea in the Platform which is openly at odds with the anarchist communism that it professes.

You speculate that once the wage system and exploitation have been abolished, there will nevertheless remain some sort of non-labouring elements, and these you exclude from the common fellowship union of toilers; they will have no title to their share of the common product. Now this was always the principle at the very basis of anarchism - „To each according to needs“ - and it was in that principle that anarchism always saw the best guarantee of social solidarity. When faced with the question: „What will you do with the idlers?“, they answered: „Better to feed a few idlers for nothing than to introduce, merely on account of their being there, a false and harmful principle into the life of society.“

Now, you create, for political reasons, a sort of idler category and, by way of repression, you would have them perish of hunger. But apart from the moral aspect, have you stopped to consider where that would lead? In the case of every person not working, we will have to establish the grounds on which they do not work: we will have to become mind readers and probe their beliefs. Should somebody refuse to perform a given task, we will have to inquire into the grounds for their refusal. We will have to see if it is not sabotage or counter-revolution. Upshot? Spying, forced labour, „labour mobilisation“ and, to cap it all, the products vital to life are to be the gift of authorities which will be able to starve the opposition to death! Rations as a weapon of political struggle! Can it be that what you have seen in Russia has not persuaded you of the abominable nature of such an arrangement! And I am not talking about the damage that it would do to the destiny of the revolution; such a blatant breach of social solidarity could not help but spawn dangerous enemies.

1. The central point of the Platform is rallying the bulk of the anarchist movement's militants on the basis of a common tactical and policy line: the formation of a General Union. Since you are federalists, you apparently have in mind the existence of an Executive Committee that will be in charge of the „ideological and organisational conduct of the activity of the isolated groups“. That type of organisation is to be found in all parties, but it is possible only if one accepts the majority principle. In your organisation, will each group be free to prescribe its own tactics and establish its own stance vis-à-vis each given issue? If the answer is yes, then your unity will be of a purely moral character (as has been and still is the case inside the anarchist movement). If, on the other hand, you seek organisational unity, that unity will of necessity be coerced. And then if you accept the majority principle inside your organisation, on what grounds would you repudiate it in social construction?

It would be desirable that you further clarify your conception of federalist liaison, the role of Congresses and the majority principle.

2. Speaking of the „free regime of the soviets,“ what functions do you see these soviets having to perform in order to become „the first steps in the direction of constructive non-statist activity“? What is to be their remit? Will their decisions be binding?

3. „Anarchists should steer events from a theoretical point of view,“ says the Platform. This notion is insufficiently clear. Does it mean simply that anarchists will do their utmost to see that (trade union, local, co-operative, etc.) organisations which are to build the new order are imbued with libertarian ideas? Or does it mean that anarchists will themselves take charge of this construction? In the latter case, in what way would that state of affairs differ from a „party dictatorship“?

It is very important that this matter be clarified. Especially as the same question arises regarding the role of anarchists in the trade unions. What is the meaning of the expression: „enter the unions in an organised manner“? Does it mean merely that the comrades working in the unions should come to some agreement in order to establish a policy line? Or does it mean that the anarchist Executive Committee will prescribe the tactic of the labour movement, rule on strikes, demonstrations, etc., and that those anarchists active in the unions will strive to capture positions of leadership there and, using their authority, foist these decisions on the ordinary membership of the unions? The mention in the Platform that the activity of the anarchist groupings active in trade union circles is to be „steered by an anarchist umbrella organisation“ raises all sorts of misgivings on this score.

4. In the section on defending the revolution, it is stated that the army is to be subordinated „to the workers' and peasants' organisations throughout the land, hoisted by the masses into positions overseeing the economic and social life of the country“. In everyday parlance, that is called 'civil authority' of the elected. What does it mean to you? It is obvious that an organisation that in fact directs the whole of life and can call upon an army is nothing other than a State power. This point is so important that the authors of the Platform have a duty to dwell longer upon it. If it is a „transitional form,“ how come

But when mention is made of the will of the Union, does this perhaps mean the will of all its members? In that case, for the Union to be able to operate it would be necessary for everyone, always and on every subject, to have the same opinion. (Malatesta, 1927)

Clarity on this issue is not aided by the fact that the Organisational Section of the Platform, the bit which deals with theoretical and tactical unity, is quite short and not particularly detailed in its exposition of these key ideas; it was, after all, originally only intended as a discussion document. Contemporary groups, however, have been pretty unequivocal on this issue. The North American-based North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC), for example, state that;

Theoretical Unity meant simply that if you don't agree with someone, don't be in a political group with them! This doesn't mean that everyone has to agree all the time (they won't) but there does need to be a certain amount of ideological unity. Everyone being 'anarchists' or 'libertarian' isn't enough. (NEFAC, 2003)

Moreover they also explicitly reject a “majoritarian” approach to the development of the theory and tactics of the organisation. A commitment which is designed to encourage criticism of established positions and, subsequently, avoid a stagnant and conservative political culture. In other words, they argue that dissident and minority positions are to be considered to be as valuable as, and not necessarily in conflict with, the overarching aims of an organisation that strives for unity;

Anarchists are fully aware that the presence of a minority and a majority does not mean at all that the majority is inherently right. That's why any anarchist organization needs to have mechanisms that enable a minority, while still bound by the decisions taken by the organization, to defend its point of view inside the organization, even if it was beaten at a conference or in the federation council. In any case, an anarchist organization must be an environment where sectarianism is discouraged and dialogue promoted, and where an atmosphere of camaraderie reigns. (NEFAC, 2002)

In other words, a Platformist organisation needs to find an appropriate balance between both respecting the collective decision of the majority and the right to dissent of the minority.

Accusations of theoretical and tactical unity as “mono-think” generally derive from an understanding of theoretical and tactical unity as static, as a goal to be achieved and not, as should be the case with healthy Platformist groups, a continuing process during the course of activity. It is also, as NEFAC argue, not necessary to reach unanimous agreement on every single issue. Rather the aim should be to always aim for common understanding and interpretation on those issues most central to organisational praxis. This has to happen within the context of a dialogue existing between all members on both the most valuable ideas that each holds and on the best common course of action

for the future. This process should be participative and dissent actively encouraged as both a means to achieve better consensus and as a valuable personal capacity in itself. Even agreed positions should be open to renewed debate and re-evaluation. An organisation that attempts to set all of its analysis in stone is ultimately inflexible, out-of-touch and highly vulnerable to the entrenchment of hierarchies of experience.

Moreover, formal and established channels of decision-making should not be perceived as bureaucratic or lacking dynamism. They are actually a powerful tool to undermine the kind of informal hierarchies that frequently crop up in other activist groups where there aren't such clear-cut channels of accountability and communication. As Thomas (2010) argues;

Societal influences, from oppressive socialisation such as racism and sexism, to personality differences such as being shy or being talkative are likely to create informal hierarchies that reintroduce domination and hierarchy within the group if clear, explicit, collectively- established democratic practices are not established and followed. (Thomas, 2010)

Platformists encourage, or at least should encourage, deep and critical re-appraisal of the actions that their organisations take. An organisation should exist to enable those within it to carry out activity, share ideas and experience and inspire confidence within each member

The importance of these principles is also underlined by the context (the British anarchist movement) in which they are being encouraged, where there is a general absence of sustained, critical reflection within the movement as a whole. Many anarchist initiatives are sporadic and dependent on the admirable efforts of dedicated individuals for their longevity. In the very worst instances this can and has led to ghettoising tendencies, of anarchists shrinking back into the comfort zones of organising inside small groups of like-minded and approving individuals. Platformism puts forward a credible alternative to the repertoire of localised activist "scenes" which too often exhibit a short-lived, under-theorised and, often uncritical, approach to political action - a practice that easily degenerates into an endless cycle of self-referential activity justified as an end unto itself.

Undoubtedly related to this, Platformists also take far more seriously the challenge that working class activists face in terms of the authoritarian and reformist tendencies faced in everyday organising. Often anarchists will retreat into a scene either out of a desire for organisational purity, in order to better embody the ideals and practices they advocate, or simply through lack of an alternative. In reality, until there is a revolutionary reconstruction of our current society, there can be no space untouched by the influence of capitalism, patriarchy, hetero-normativity and the State. These things permeate every aspect of our lives, at work, in the homes, even amongst partners and within friendship groups. The response should not be to retreat, but to strengthen our ideals through action towards the society we hope to create. The reality is that there is no perfect or pure struggle. Everywhere anarchists will face reformists and authoritarians (from the

Appendix 2: SUPPLEMENT TO THE ORGANISATIONAL PLATFORM (QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS)

by Dielo Truda Group
November 1926

As was to be expected, the *Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists* has sparked very lively interest among several militants of the Russian libertarian movement. While some wholeheartedly subscribe to the overall idea and fundamental theses of the Platform, others frame criticisms and express misgivings about certain of its theses.

We welcome equally the positive reception of the Platform and the genuine criticism of it. For, in the endeavour to create an overall anarchist program as well as an overall libertarian organisation, honest, serious and substantial criticism is as important and positive creative initiatives.

The questions we reprint below emanate from just the sort of serious and necessary criticism, and it is with some satisfaction that we welcome it. In forwarding them to us, the author, Maria Isidine – a militant of many year's standing, and well respected in our movement – encloses a letter in which she says: „Obviously, the organisational platform is designed to be discussed by all anarchists. Before formulating any final opinion of this 'platform' and, perhaps, speaking of it in the press, I should like to have an explanation of certain matters which are insufficiently explicit to it. It may well be that other readers will find in the 'platform' a fair degree of precision and that certain objections may only be based on misunderstandings. It is for that reason that I should like to put a series of questions to you first of all. It would be very important that you reply to these in a clear manner, for it will be your replies that will afford a grasp of the general spirit of the Platform. Perhaps you will see a need to reply in your review.“

In closing her letter, the comrade adds that she wishes to avert controversy in the columns of the review 'Dielo Trouda'. This is why she seeks above all elucidation of certain essential points from the Platform. This sort of approach is very fair. It is all too easy to launch into polemic in order to come out against a view with which one thinks one is in disagreement. It is even easier to trouble oneself solely with polemicising without bothering to frame any alternative positive suggestion, in place of the targeted view. What is infinitely harder is to analyse the new proposition properly, to understand it, so that one may go on to arrive at a well-founded opinion of it. It is exactly this last, most difficult course that the author of the questions below has chosen.

Here are those questions:

working-class revolutionary trade unions, it must attempt to develop a network of revolutionary peasant economic organisations, and furthermore, a specific Peasant Union built on anti-authoritarian principles.

Born out of the mass of the workers, the General Union of Anarchists must take part in all aspects of their life, always and everywhere bringing the spirit of organisation, perseverance, militancy and the will to go on the offensive.

Only thus will it be able to fulfil its role, to carry out its theoretical and historical mission in the social revolution of the workers and become the organised cutting edge in their process of emancipation.

Left and Right) who will attempt to control or subdue struggles. Individuals involved in these struggles will also often exhibit contradictory ideas, or have ideas that may seem to conflict with those we wish to advocate (many people are nationalist, or religious, for example). Against this, Platformists argue that we need to be well organised, we need to have confidence in our own ideas and we need to act on a common programme. Being an organised anarchist means having trust in your comrades, being able to put forward a coherent strategy and embodying a common set of ideals that inspires others to do the same.

The strategy by which this is achieved is, to bring in two more important concepts from the original document, is by principles of collective responsibility and through ideological leadership. These, again, have been controversial propositions. For example, to return to Franks' (2006) criticisms, collective responsibility is described as a "contractual obligation" that is "contrary to the aims of anarchism" (p.223). It is clear from the document, however, that this was far from the Dielo Truda group's interpretation. Instead, I would argue, the notion of collective responsibility develops from their understanding of "the areas of revolutionary life" as "above all profoundly collective by nature". That is, that while the organisation should recognise "each member's rights to independence, free opinion, individual liberty and initiative", it is also not merely an accumulation of individuals but, just like a revolutionary society, communal in nature. As such a degree of collective thinking, acting and, ultimately, responsibility is an important component of organisational praxis. As Thomas explains;

Holding each other accountable also means getting used to letting each other know - in a comradely way - when commitments and obligations aren't being fulfilled. This is a practice that must be built through an organisational culture where comradely honesty and constructive criticism replaces competitive and individualistic passive-aggressiveness or talking behind people's backs. The flip side of giving comradely feedback is learning how to receive it, using it to help you and your organisation grow and becoming more self-disciplined. This is difficult sometimes since the vast majority of the times we're being called to task for something, it is coming from top-down relations; but the practice of holding others accountable and being held accountable is fundamental to learn, practice and promote if we want to destroy and replace these top-down relations with horizontal and egalitarian relations. (Thomas, 2006)

Put more simply, and applied more practically, in essence this is the very basic idea that if a group of people come to an agreement that something should be done *then they should do it!* Accusations that this implies some form of contractual obligation ignores the emphasis on voluntarism and free association, not least the fact that in the Platform itself there is no mention of any kind of disciplinary mechanism or system of coercion. Of course, many of these disagreements may ultimately boil down to language and a matter of interpretation[7]. Malatesta, for example, was happy to concede comradeship as essential to anarchist organisation while also feeling that "collective responsibility" was too vague a concept invoking anything from strict military discipline to voluntary association.

Anarchists have always considered “leadership” to some degree synonymous with the exercise of authority. Accordingly a “leadership of ideas” or ideological leadership needs to be carefully articulated. The Platform document, for its part, is pretty clear in its criticism of the “revolutionary leadership” of the Leninist organisations which considered the masses backward and incapable of social change alone;

While Bolshevism and its related tendencies consider that the masses possess only destructionary revolutionary instincts, being incapable of creative and constructive activity - the principle reason why the latter activity should be concentrated in the hands of the men forming the government of the State of the Central Committee of the party - anarchists on the contrary think that the labouring masses have inherent creative and constructive possibilities which are enormous, and anarchists aspire to suppress the obstacles impeding the manifestation of these possibilities. (Dielo Truda, 1926)

The need for “ideological leadership” derives from an understanding that social struggle does not represent a vacuum of ideas and the presence of a clear, revolutionary perspective is the anarchist’s responsibility. Likewise, the absence of such a perspective can be disastrous for social struggle, a position that Arshinov states more clearly in his ‘Reply to Anarchism’s Confusionists’;

Direction of the masses from the “ideas” point of view simply means the existence of a guiding idea in their movement. In the world of socialist struggle and socialist demands, such ideas are not numerous. But it is natural that we anarchists wanted the toilers’ guiding idea to be the anarchist idea and not that of the social democrats for example, of those who have only recently betrayed the Viennese workers’ revolutionary movement. (Arshinov, 1927)

Looking at a more contemporary example within the British context, Heath (2006), when outlining the history of the movement throughout the 1960s, emphasises that anarchist failings, in terms of both organisation and ideological leadership, were quickly translated into the Left’s gains;

It was no surprise that many who had been initially attracted to anarchism were deterred by its chronic disorganisation and lack of effectiveness. Some of these turned to groups like International Socialism (precursor of the Socialist Workers Party) and the International Marxist Group. Digger Walsh, active in the Black Flag group of the period, was to be quoted in a national paper as lamenting the fact that 800 militants had gone over to the Trotskyists. (Heath, 2006)

This example also serves to neatly illustrate the inter-connected nature of all of the components of the Organisational Section. That without a *combination* of ideological leadership, tactical and theoretical responsibility and collective responsibility the anar-

no rights without responsibilities, just as there cannot be decisions without these being implemented. That is all the more unacceptable in an anarchist organisation that takes only obligations upon itself with regard to the workers and their social revolution.

As a result, the federalist type of anarchist organisation, while acknowledging the right of every member of the organisation to independence, freedom of opinion, personal initiative and individual liberty, entrusts each member with specific organisational duties, requiring that these be duly performed and that decisions jointly made also be put into effect.

Only in this way will the federalist principle come to life and the anarchist organisation function properly and move towards the goal it has set.

The idea of the General Union of Anarchists raises the issue of the co-ordination of the activities of all the forces of the anarchist movement.

Each organisation affiliated to the Union represents a living cell that is part of the overall organism. Each cell will have its own secretariat to facilitate its activities and provide theoretical and political guidance.

In order to co-ordinate the activity of all of the Union’s affiliated organisations, a special body is to be established in the form of an *Executive Committee of the Union*. The following functions will be ascribed to that Committee: implementation of decisions made by the Union, as entrusted; overseeing the activity and theoretical development of the individual organisations, in keeping with the overall theoretical and tactical line of the Union; monitoring the general state of the movement; maintaining functional organisational ties between all the member organisations of the Union, as well as with other organisations.

The rights, responsibilities and practical tasks of the Executive Committee are laid down by the Congress of the General Union.

The General Union of Anarchists has a specific and well-defined goal. For the sake of the success of the social revolution, it must above all choose the most critical and revolutionary elements from among the workers and peasants to join it.

As an organisation promoting social revolution (and also an anti-authoritarian organisation) which seeks the immediate destruction of class society, the General Union of Anarchists likewise relies upon the two fundamental classes of the present society – the workers and the peasants – and it equally facilitates the quest of both for emancipation.

As regards the urban workers’ revolutionary labour organisations, the General Union of Anarchists must make every effort to become their pioneer and theoretical mentor.

The General Union of Anarchists sets itself the same tasks where the exploited peasant masses are concerned, and to serve as a basis, playing the same role as the urban

The practice of operating on one's individual responsibility must be strictly condemned and rejected within the ranks of the anarchist movement.

The areas of revolutionary, social and political life are profoundly collective in nature. Revolutionary public activity in those areas cannot be based upon the individual responsibility of single militants.

The general anarchist movement's executive body – the Anarchist Union – takes a decisive stand against the tactic of unaccountable individualism and introduces the principle of *collective responsibility* into its ranks: the union as a whole is answerable for the revolutionary and political activity of each member of the union; likewise, each of its members is answerable for the revolutionary and political activity of the union as a whole.

4. Federalism

Anarchism has always rejected centralist organisation both where the social life of the masses is concerned as well as in the area of its political activity. The system of centralization relies upon the stifling of the spirit of criticism, initiative and independence of every individual and upon the masses' blind obedience to the "centre". The natural and inevitable upshot of this system is slavishness and mechanization, both in public life and in the life of parties.

Contrary to centralism, anarchism has always advocated and defended the principle of *federalism*, which combines the independence of the individual or organisation with their initiative and service to the common cause.

By combining the idea of the independence and fullness of each individual's rights with service of social requirements and instincts, federalism paves the way to every wholesome manifestation of the faculties of each individual.

But very often the federalist principle has been warped in anarchist ranks; too often has it been taken to mean primarily the right to display one's ego and neglect one's duties towards the organisation.

This distortion has caused a great deal of disorganisation within our movement in the past and it is time to put an end to it once and for all.

Federalism means the free agreement of individuals and entire organisations upon collective endeavour, in order to achieve a common objective.

Now, any such agreement and any federative union based thereon can only become a reality (rather than exist only on paper) if the essential condition is fulfilled that all parties to the agreement and to the union fully honour the obligations they take on and abide by the decisions reached jointly.

In any social project, however great the federalist basis on which it is built, there can be

chist organisation is rendered less effective than its competitors. That a revolutionary strategy and a unified tactical response go hand in hand with building credibility for anarchist ideas. Yet, regardless of these qualifications over the nature of "ideological leadership" there have been lingering and legitimate concerns over whether this is a "leadership from within" or a "leadership from without". In other words, whether these ideas emerge in the course and through dialogue with instances of social struggle or whether they develop from external and independent study and deliberation, a form of Marxian "proletarian science". This is a key issue and one which I will explore in greater detail in the critical section.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that many contemporary Platformist groups do not hold to all the organisational prescriptions of the original document. For example, many contemporary Platformists have distanced themselves from the idea of "one" General Union, effectively conceding Malatesta's point, out of practicality if anything, in his exchange with Makhno over the preference for many vs. one anarchist organisation. The Dielo Truda Group's position is unclear in the original document as to what will become of the "unhealthy elements" (as Malatesta puts it) of the anarchist movement, i.e. those not convinced of the wisdom of the ideas of the Platform. The practice of the modern Platformist movement would suggest, however, that those "disorganised" and "chaotic" elements would continue to be just that. Rather than attempting to "excommunicate them from the anarchist movement", as Malatesta suggested would be the case, the preferred outcome would be that these disparate elements would become eventually superseded in both size and reputation by the successes of a well organised libertarian communist organisation (or amalgamation of organisations).

An underlying idea here, and a point that all Platformists are keen to emphasise, is Platformism as a tradition embodying shared organisational goals, not simply the prescriptions of a single document. The "Friends of Durruti" Group are, for example, often cited by Platformists as an inspiration for the tradition in spite of making no reference to the Platform or the Dielo Truda Group in their revolutionary programme. After all, the Platform itself never claimed to be definitive and made clear that it was up to the movement to enrich the tradition and principles associated with it through practice. As is stated in the original document;

We have no doubts that there are gaps in the present platform. It has such gaps, as do all new, practical steps of any importance. It is possible that certain important positions have been missed, or that others are inadequately treated, or that still others are too detailed or repetitive. All this is possible, but not of vital importance. What is important is to lay the foundations of a general organisation, and it is this end which is attained, to a necessary degree, by the present platform. It is up to the entire collective, the General Union of Anarchists, to enlarge it, to later give it depth, to make of it a definite platform for the whole anarchist movement. (Dielo Truda, 1926)

And the "gaps" are all too obvious to a modern reader. Issues concerning race, gender and sexuality are absent from the document - a weakness that shouldn't be attributed

to the document's age alone given the activity and analysis of anarchists present on these subjects at the time. Thankfully this is not an absence that has been replicated in the practice of contemporary groups, with many publishing theory and analysis on, and involving themselves in, the struggle of women, homosexuals, Trans and Genderqueer people and people of colour. In addition, it would also be fair to say that most existing groups would place greater emphasis than in the original document on building and strengthening localised struggle as much as national organisation, a point which Malatesta also makes. An example would be Zabalaza's involvement in the Landless and Shack dwellers movement.

The fact that the original document overlooks such important issues should not, however, be perceived as a weakness but embraced as a positive strength. Anarchists reject the rigid formulations and insistence on adherence to orthodoxy common within Marxism. They embrace an open-ended, libertarian practice that places far less importance on "heroic figures" and "great texts" and more on the lessons derived and developed from practical struggle. While it is always important to look back at historic debates and what they can tell us about our current practice it also important to acknowledge the "living" qualities of any anarchist tradition. Accordingly Platformism, like all anarchist traditions, will undoubtedly richen and shape itself anew as it is confronted with new struggles and new possibilities over the coming decades. This is not, however, to go so far as to say that the contemporary Platformist movement is in any way undeserving of criticism. There have been persistent problems and controversies surrounding this tradition that it would be equally remiss to ignore.

NB: While the revolutionary army must of necessity be structured in accordance with specifically anarchist principles, it should not be regarded as a point of principle. It is merely the consequence of military strategy in the revolution, a strategic measure that the process of civil war will inevitably force the workers to take. But this measure should be the focus of attention even now. It must be thoroughly studied even now so as to avoid any fatal delays in protecting and defending the revolution, for in times of civil war, delays can prove fatal to the outcome of the whole social revolution.

ORGANISATIONAL PART

The Principles of Anarchist Organisation

The general constructive positions set out above represent the organisational platform of the revolutionary forces of anarchism.

This platform is built around a specific theoretical and tactical outlook. This is the minimum around which all the militants of the organised anarchist movement must be rallied.

The platform's task is to assemble all of the healthy elements of the anarchist movement into a single active and continually operating organisation, the General Union of Anarchists. All of anarchism's active militants must direct their resources into the creation of this organisation.

The basic organisational principles of a General Union of Anarchists are as follows:

1. Unity of Theory

Theory is the force that guides the activity of individual people and individual organisations along a specific route towards a specific goal. Naturally, it must be shared by all persons and all organisations that join the General Union. The activity of the general anarchist Union, both in general and in detail, must be perfectly consistent with the theoretical principles professed by the Union.

2. Unity of Tactics or the Collective Method of Action

The tactical methods employed by the individual members or groups within the Union must likewise be united, strictly consistent with one another as well as with the overall theory and tactics of the Union.

Sharing a general (common) tactical line within the movement is of crucial importance for the existence of the organisation and of the entire movement: it rids the movement of the confusion arising from the existence of multiple mutually antagonistic tactics and focuses all the movement's forces on a common direction leading to a specific objective.

3. Collective Responsibility

safeguarded.

The nature of that offensive, the weaponry used and the course of the civil war will require that the workers create specific military revolutionary bodies. The nature and underlying principles of these units must be laid down in advance. In rejecting statist and authoritarian methods of controlling the masses, we consequently reject the statist manner of organising the workers' military forces, i.e. we reject the principle of an army based on compulsory military service. It is the volunteer principle, in accordance with the basic tenets of anarchism, which should provide the basis for the workers' military bodies. The revolutionary partisan detachments of workers and peasants during the Russian revolution might be cited as examples of such structures.

Yet voluntary revolutionary service and partisan activity should not be construed in the narrow sense, i.e. as a struggle waged by worker and peasant forces against a local enemy, without co-ordination in the shape of an overall operational plan, each unit acting on its own initiative. When they are fully developed, partisan action and tactics in the revolution should be guided by a common military and revolutionary strategy.

Like any war, civil war can only be waged successfully by the workers if two principles fundamental to all military activity are observed: unity of operational planning and unity of common command. The most critical time for the revolution will be when the bourgeoisie marches as an organised force against the revolution and will require the workers to have recourse to these principles of military strategy.

Thus, given the requirements of military strategy and the strategy of the counter-revolution, the armed forces of the revolution will inevitably have to amalgamate into a common revolutionary army with a common command and a common operational plan.

That army will be founded on the following basic principles:

1. the class nature of the army;
2. voluntary military service (all coercion is excluded in the matter of the defence of the revolution);
3. revolutionary self-discipline (voluntary military service and revolutionary self-discipline are mutually complementary in every way, and serve to make the revolutionary army psychologically stronger than any state army);
4. total subordination of the revolutionary army to the worker and peasant masses as represented by the general worker and peasant bodies throughout the land, which will be created by the masses at the moment of revolution and given the task of overseeing the country's economic and social life.

In other words, the organ for the defence of the revolution, which is charged with combating the counter-revolution both on the open military fronts as well as on the covert fronts of the civil war (plots by the bourgeoisie, the preparation of rebellions, etc.), will be under the complete control of the highest workers' and peasants' productive organisations – it will be answerable to them and under their political direction.

Contemporary Platformism: Criticisms

There has been, and continues to be, a tension within many contemporary Platformist groups between what I would call an (anti)political and a representationalist model of activity. I believe there are a number of potential causes for this, but before delving into this further it may be necessary to clarify what these terms mean.

By (anti)political, I mean practices that subvert, and eventually render unnecessary, the hierarchical and authoritarian means of communication and social organisation existing in statist, capitalist, patriarchal, racist and hetero-normative society. (Anti)political activity will, therefore, be typically constructed via direct, face-to-face communication, participatory decision-making structures and, of course, the organisation of tasks without the need for hierarchy. Expressions of (anti)political behaviour have been a continuing inspiration for the libertarian communist tradition from the soviets and factory councils of Russia, through the anarcho-syndicalist unions of Spain to the grassroots movements emerging out of the contemporary, global justice movement. These methods are also considered to be consistent with what is termed the anarchist “prefigurative ethic”, described by Goldman in the following terms;

All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical. (Goldman, 1923: 260)

The insistence on such an inseparability of ends and means, a “prefigurative” practice, is a key and defining characteristic of anarchist political thought and practice.

By representationalism, I refer to the many facets of capitalist democracy that bar active participation in the processes that govern our lives and reinforce social hierarchy. In capitalism this process is multi-faceted and can be anything from the election of representatives who will make decisions for us, to the strict social control of the prison and criminal justice system right through to the manipulation of the very language and information we use to interpret our social reality. It is experienced through our condi-

tion of alienation in capitalist society. It aims to foster in the social mass a psychological state that continually reinforces the dividing lines between the “governors” and the “governed”, “rulers” and “ruled”, “producer” and “consumer”, even “author” and “reader”. It serves to obscure the fundamentally communal and holistic qualities of human community and ensure that the working class is reduced to looking everywhere but to itself and its own capabilities for alleviation of our social condition. Representationalism has, unfortunately, its counterparts in “revolutionary” practice. The concern of anarchists has traditionally been with the vanguardist practice of the authoritarian Left who will downplay or deny the constructive capacities of working class communities. Leftist groups attempt to appropriate this constructive potential by assuming the power to represent others, judging themselves to have abilities that “their” constituencies are supposed to lack. This is justified by varying means, for example, having a privileged, “scientific” understanding of objective forces, the “correct” formula for revolutionary struggle or even just a willingness “to go further” than the “docile” masses. Representatives, most importantly, cannot be social revolutionaries. Representationalism necessarily depends on a passive and institutionalised social mass that the representative can reflect (and hope to mediate in any ensuing conflicts). It denies the constructive part the working class has to play in forming its own future and as such is antithetical to self-organisation and the practice of social revolution.

Both representationalism and the (anti)political have been a constant concern for libertarians when debating the issue of revolutionary organisation and it is between these two poles that we often see political organisations oscillate – between revolutionary and reformist methods and goals. (Anti)political action is obviously the best embodiment of anarchist values, but holding oneself to all but the purest expression of “pre-figurative” ideals clearly leads to very little in terms of available practical action that can be taken. Truly (anti)political actions only tend to develop at high-points of social struggle, in the meantime they will often be small and/or isolated from the condition of the majority of people, e.g. small communal experiments, minority groups of revolutionaries. This is while there is still a pressing need for propaganda and activism outside of these periods of social upheaval. Revolutionary upsurges owe as much of their origin to the diligent and long-standing work of revolutionaries as they do to periodic crises. This does imply that a degree of pragmatism, when it comes to decisions over engagement at least, is required.

The rationale runs close to the following; that given the frequent impossibility of organising an (anti)political alternative to, for example, an election or a union it makes more sense to critically intervene in these processes and push individuals towards anarchist ideas. The fact that a great number of people will already be invested in these institutions of capitalist democracy means it makes more sense to opt for engagement than elect to exclude oneself from them completely. Contemporary Platformists have commonly advocated this approach, especially given the emphasis in the original document on pushing ideological leadership within popular sections of the worker and peasant movement. A controversial, but obvious, contemporary example of this would be the Worker’s Solidarity Movement (WSM) campaign for a “No” vote in the Irish national referendum on the Lisbon treaty.

In this regard, technical advances will have enormous significance in facilitating the development of agriculture and likewise the achievement of communism in the towns, above all in industry. If, in their dealings with the peasants, the workers operate not as separate groups, but rather as a huge communist collective embracing every branch of production, if they give consideration to the essential needs of the countryside and supply each village, not just with everyday necessities, but also with tools and machinery for the collective cultivation of the land, this will undoubtedly incline the peasants towards communism in agriculture.

Defence of the Revolution

The defence of the revolution is also one of the problems of “day one“. Essentially, the revolution’s mightiest defence is the successful resolution of the challenges facing it: the problems of production and consumption, and the land question. Once these matters have been correctly resolved, no counter-revolutionary force will be able to change or shake the workers’ free society. However, the workers will nonetheless have to face a bitter struggle against the enemies of the revolution in order to defend its physical existence.

The social revolution, which threatens the privileges and the very existence of the non-working classes of the present society, will inevitably provoke the desperate resistance of these classes that will take the form of a vicious civil war.

As the Russian experience has shown, such a civil war will not be a matter of a few months, but rather of several years.

As successful as the workers’ first steps may be at the outset of the revolution, the ruling classes will nonetheless retain a huge capacity for resistance for quite some time, and over a period of several years they will unleash attacks on the revolution, trying to snatch back the power and privileges that have been taken from them.

A sizeable and well-equipped army, supported by military strategists and backed by capital – all this will be pitted against the victorious workers.

If the workers are to preserve the gains of the revolution, they will have to set up organs for defence of the revolution, in order to field a fighting force that is equal to the task, against the onslaught of the reaction. In the earliest days of the revolution, that fighting force will be made up of all the workers and peasants in arms. But that makeshift armed force will only be viable in the earliest days, when the civil war has not yet reached its peak and the two opposing sides have not yet established regular military organisations.

The most critical juncture in the social revolution is not the moment when authority is overthrown, but the time thereafter when the forces of the ousted regime unleash a general offensive against the workers, when the gains that have been achieved must be

The Land

In the solution of the agrarian question, we consider the peasant workers – those who exploit no one else’s labour – and the wage-earning rural proletariat as the main revolutionary creative forces. Their mission will be to carry through the new re-division of lands, so that the land may be put to use and cultivated along communist lines.

Just like industry, the land, tilled and cultivated by generations of workers, is the product of the efforts of these workers. It also belongs to the working people as a whole, and to no one in particular. As the common and inalienable property of the workers, the land cannot be subject to purchase or sale. Neither can it be leased by one to another, nor serve as the means to exploit the labour of another.

The land is also a sort of common public workshop where the working people produce the means of sustenance. But it is a type of workshop where, as a result of particular historical circumstances, every worker (peasant) has become accustomed to working alone, selling their produce independent of other producers. While in industry the collective (communist) mode of labour is vitally necessary and the only feasible one, in agriculture in our day it is not the only feasible method. The majority of peasants work the land using individual methods.

As a result, when the land and the means to work it pass into the hands of the peasants, with no possibility of sale or lease, the issue of how it should be used and what should be cultivated (on the level of commune or family) will not be wholly and definitively resolved right away, as will be the case with industry. To begin with, we will probably resort to both of these methods.

The ultimate pattern of land tenure and land use will be determined by the revolutionary peasantry itself. There can be no external pressure in this matter.

However, since we consider that only a communist society, in whose name the social revolution will be made, can free the workers from slavery and exploitation and endow them with full freedom and equality; since the peasants account for the overwhelming majority of the population (nearly 85% in Russia) and since, as a result, the agrarian system adopted by the peasants will be the crucial factor in determining the fate of the revolution; and finally, since private enterprise in agriculture, just like private enterprise in industry, leads to commerce, accumulation of private property and the restoration of capital, it is our responsibility right now to do all in our power to ensure that the agrarian question be resolved along collective lines.

To this end we should begin now to conduct intensive propaganda among the peasants on behalf of communist land tenure and communist cultivation of the soil.

The creation of a specific peasant union with an anarchist outlook will be of considerable assistance in this undertaking.

Suspending, for the moment, any judgement on what kind of “ideological leadership” a “No” vote in a national referendum represents, the justification behind this strategy - of the need for popular, political engagement - is in itself not completely out-of-touch with many other examples of anarchist practice outside of the Platformist tradition. Malatesta, for example, would argue along very similar lines in favour of anarchist participation in the reformist unions over building specifically (anti)political, anarchist ones. Similarly Aldred argued in favour of taking a platform during elections, but refusing to take office, as a vehicle to better spread libertarian ideals. There is nothing distinctly Platformist about this position. The success of past anarchist organisations has always depended on a commitment to a diversity of tactics. Moreover, the question as to whether an individual or a group begins the creep into representationalism and Leftism should not be judged by the use of these methods alone. Such questions are related to far deeper issues concerning a complex interplay of the content, form and level of social struggle; issues that cannot possibly be de-contextualised or so easily formed into clear-cut points of principle. The success of revolutionary struggle can depend as much upon the vigilance of struggling workers as much as it does the correct position of revolutionaries (if, indeed, it is even possible to separate these two categories). There are simply no easy answers here. However, it would also be equally fair to say that the common perception of Platformism as a “Bolshevised” anarchist practice has, unfortunately, been bolstered by the fact that a disproportionate number of these groups have degenerated into representationalist and counter-revolutionary theory and activity. There are numerous examples to support this from the Anarchist Worker Group’s support for the Iraqi state during the first Gulf War, to Alternative Libertaire’s (France) statement in favour of Kosovan nationalism and United Nations military intervention, to even the highly manipulative internal practices of the French Platformists in vying for influential positions within their national Anarchist Federation. So, why Platformism? Why has this creep into Leftism been persistently the case with these groups?

As I have tried to make clear in the first section, I do not believe there is any validity to the claim that Platformism is an attempt to “Bolshevise” anarchism. I do believe, however, that there are a number of aspects of Platformist praxis that can, but don’t necessarily have to, lend themselves to representationalism and Leftism. However, that is also not to say that these are problems exclusive to Platformism but that all revolutionary organisations are potentially vulnerable in some way to these tendencies; all the more important, then, to have a clear-sight of one’s weaknesses to build upon one’s strengths.

One aspect of contemporary Platformist strategy that I have only lightly touched upon so far is the emphasis that is often placed on the need for “strategic thinking”. That is, it is assumed that when the organisation is attempting to form tactical unity on the best course of action, it will aim to take full account of its resources and aim to apply them most effectively. There are a number of potential problems leading from this proposition. First off, it is probably important to make clear that a stress on capabilities and prioritisation when it comes to resources is a valuable exercise for any organisation. The drive for efficiency and expediency is, however, a double-edged sword. While there may be better ways of allocating one’s resources there are, to put it simply, no short-

cuts when it comes to revolutionary change. The Platform itself, despite having been written following a great period of revolutionary defeat (the Bolshevik consolidation of power in Russia and the defeat and dissolution of the Makhnovtchina in the Ukraine) is surprisingly optimistic, and as a result perhaps overly naive, in its recommendations for revolutionary activity. Becoming the “pioneer and theoretical mentor” of the trade unions, as the Platform advocates, was a drastically different task in revolutionary Ukraine or Russia, even in France in the 1920s, than it is in Britain in 2010. As a result, the type of expediency and efficiency that can be expected from revolutionary organisations now, especially in Britain where the working class has been ravaged from almost thirty years of Neo-Liberal economic policy, has changed.

It is tempting, therefore, but ultimately misguided, to be drawn to the lingering expressions of working class militancy, or maybe just the collective organisation of the working class full stop, that exist in the trade union movement or perhaps in the struggle of nationalities in search for real, meaningful influence. Unfortunately this has indeed been the practice of many, old and contemporary, Platformist groups. Although Platformists have successfully plugged the “gaps” in the original document when it comes to gender and race, they have largely failed to deal with its weaknesses and ambiguities when it comes to the trade unions. Alternative interpretations of “the ‘anarchization’ of the trade union movement”, as is recommended in the original Platform, can be made; Whether that means arguing for participation or simply agitation within, transformation of the union structure or breaking away from the trade unions altogether. In this regard, it is unfortunate that Platformists have largely failed to engage with the other important tradition emerging out of the Bolshevik experience and clarified this very issue – the Dutch and German Left. Their analysis, emerging out of the practical experience of mass revolutionary engagement with the trade unions, is invaluable to any communist today. Such an unequivocal perspective, as if the the experience of the TUC in Britain was not enough, should put an end to all doubts concerning the mediating, and ultimately bourgeois, role of trade unions and the tasks of revolutionaries within them. Undoubtedly related to this issue is the question of where revolutionary strategy, and from this ideological leadership, is being formulated. Platformist methods have, above all, to be framed by the experience of class struggle. An “ideological leadership” isolated from working class resistance will quickly degenerate into representationalism - an assumed, or de facto, position of leadership over the class. Theoretical debate and development must be rooted in the experience of the class, developing out of the actual needs and issues emerging from struggle. There is, of course, a responsibility to look beyond these struggles also, as well as a need to combat reformism, Leninism and the multitude of sins inflicted upon any workers movement. However, this should come in the form, not of dictat, but of a continuing and evolving dialogue existing between revolutionaries rooted in the class and the class as a whole. Most importantly, it should be acknowledged that, although combating Leftist and authoritarian ideas is important, the “war of ideas” with the Left should not supplant the class war between worker and boss. To shift the organisations focus too far in the direction of “ideological leadership”, is to move closer to the standard operating practice of the various Trotskyist grouplets. Aping them will only replicate their over-concentration on the current composition of the Left and neglect of the shop-floor. In practical terms, and over the long-term, as

As far as the distribution of food supplies is concerned, the solution to this question will hinge primarily upon the quantity of goods available, the principle of expediency, etc.

In tackling the reconstruction of the entire established social order, the social revolution thereby assumes an obligation to look to everyone’s essential needs. The sole exception will be those who do not work, who refuse to play their part in the new system of production on counter-revolutionary grounds. But, broadly speaking, and with the exception of this last category of people, all the needs of the entire population in the region where the social revolution has taken place will be met out of the revolution’s general stock of food supplies. Should the quantity of goods prove insufficient, they will be allocated according to need, with priority being given to children, the infirm and workers’ families.

A more difficult problem will be that of organising the revolution’s general stock of food supplies.

Without a doubt, in the early days of the revolution, the towns will be affected by shortages of some of the basic essentials required by the population. At the same time, the peasants will have an abundance of the produce in short supply in the towns. For anarchists, there can be no doubt as to the mutuality of relations between workers in the towns and workers in the countryside. Anarchists believe that the social revolution cannot be accomplished except through the concerted efforts of the workers and the peasants. Consequently, the solution to the problem of consumption in the revolution will be possible only through close revolutionary co-operation between these two classes of workers.

In order to establish this co-operation, the urban working class, having assumed control of production, must immediately consider the basic needs of those in the countryside and endeavour to supply them with everyday consumer goods as well as the means and instruments for collective cultivation of the land. Gestures of solidarity from the urban workers in fulfilling the needs of the peasants will elicit a like response, and in return the peasants will collectively supply the towns with the produce of rural production, in particular foodstuffs.

General worker-peasant co-operatives will be the primary organs for satisfying the food requirements and economic needs of town and countryside. Later, given the responsibility to handle a wider and more regular range of tasks, most notably for supplying everything necessary to support and develop the economic and social life of the workers and peasants, these co-operatives can be converted into permanent supply agencies for town and country.

This solution to the food-supply problem will enable the urban proletariat to establish a permanent fund of provisions which will have a favourable and crucial impact on the fate of the the new system of production.

Production

Bearing in mind that a country's industry is the result of the efforts of many generations of workers and that the various branches of industry are closely interconnected, we look upon production in its entirety as one big workshop of the producers, completely belonging to the workers as a whole and to no one in particular.

The country's productive machinery is a whole and belongs to the entire working class. This determines the character and form of the new system of production. It too is to be a united whole, common in the sense that the products, manufactured by the producers, will belong to everybody. Those products, of whatever type they may be, will represent the general supply fund for the workers, from which every participant in the new system of production will receive everything that they may need, on an equal footing with everyone else.

The new system of production will utterly dispense with wage slavery and exploitation in all their forms and will in their place establish the principle of comradely co-operation between workers.

The intermediary class, which in modern capitalist society performs intermediary functions (commerce, etc.), as well as the bourgeoisie, will have to play its part in the new system of production on the very same footing as everyone else. Otherwise, these classes will be placing themselves outside working society.

There will be no bosses, neither entrepreneur, proprietor nor proprietor-State (as one finds today in the Bolshevik State). In the new system of production, the functions of organisation will devolve upon specially created agencies, purpose-built by the working masses: workers' councils, workplace committees or workers' administrations of factories and plants. These agencies, liaising with one another at the level of municipality, province and then country, will make up the municipal, provincial and thereafter general (federal) institutions for the management and administration of production. Appointed by the masses and continually subject to their supervision and control, these bodies are to be constantly renewed, thereby achieving the idea of genuine self-management of the masses.

Unified production, in which the means of production and their output belong to all, with wage slavery replaced by the principle of comradely co-operation and equality of rights for all producers an established fact, production overseen by workers' administration bodies elected by the masses: these are the practical first steps along the road to the realisation of anarchist communism.

Consumption

The problem of consumption will arise during the revolution as a dual issue. Firstly, the principle of establishing sources of food supplies. Secondly, the principle of the distribution of these supplies.

Doyle (1991) argues, such a singular focus will lead to an eventual, "drift away from a day-to-day understanding of where real class politics are at".

National liberation and trade unionism, for example, derive from positions of representation, ideologies that attempt to manage the condition of the working class. It has been extensively documented how common culprits for Leftist support, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (see, for example, Aufheben, 2001) and the early Trade Unions (see, Wildcat) for example, were not only derived from the political machinations of the bourgeoisie but had working class defeat as their goal from the offset. These movements, and the ideas emerging from them, tell us little about neither the experience of class struggle nor our real potentialities as a class – not for greater workers "rights", or independent nationhood, or a greater slice of the pie but for the creation of a free, international communist society. If sections of the class invested in these movements appear militant it is only a testament to the extent that these structures have been successful in co-opting genuine class struggle. All the more imperative, therefore, that those anarchists within them push a clear and unwavering internationalist, communist analysis.

There has often been an undue emphasis in Platformist literature on the final two-pages of the Platform (the Organisational Section) in a document that deals extensively with the principles of anarchist communism (what the Anarchist Workers Association appropriately called the "missing bits"). Effective anarchist praxis must be based on sound libertarian communist principles and this, in turn, has to arise from a self-educating and participatory process within the organisation itself (one that is simultaneously engaged with the class). Playing fast and loose with theoretical principles is a recipe for disaster. In the very worst cases it has led to the kind of analysis put forward by groups such as Liberty and Solidarity which have removed politics from the equation completely, looking to managerial theory (of all things!) as a guide to a more "effective" organisational praxis, completely ignoring the highly alienating capitalist practice that such theory embodies (and undoubtedly perpetuates). Engagement with representationalist institutions should not mean the adoption of representationalist practice.

Anarchist organisations will, and should, issue manifestos, political statements, theoretical analysis etc. However, these should also be done with the recognition of the real limitations, from a libertarian perspective, of this medium for spreading our ideas. The real struggle, the struggle that we should be engaging with, is not happening in the world of political ideas alone but amongst our friends, our families, in our workplaces and in our communities. To not just gain "support" for a political philosophy or a specific programme but to spread an idea and method that is ultimately self-empowering. It's about communicating the ideas of direct action and self-organisation so it is possible for thousands, maybe even millions, of manifestos to emerge from popular, grassroots bodies. It's also about acknowledging that the class-as-a-whole has as much to tell revolutionaries, perhaps even more, as we do it. Accordingly, our analysis should always be part of a dialogue – one that both speaks to and reflects the wider struggle within our class. The point is that anarchist organisation should be about both substance and form - a factor that Makhno and the Dielo Truda Group, appropriately, recognised by stressing the importance of both tactical and theoretical unity.

And finally, a note on camaraderie. For all the emphasis that Platformists have historically placed on building unity and common action, Platformists organisations have

had an unfortunate habit of being either relatively small, in relation to the rest of the anarchist movement or periodically, and quite spectacularly, falling apart. There is no catch-all answer to the reasons behind this and obviously the internal culture of specific groups and the individuals within them will have their part to play. Doyle's (1991) (of the WSM) account of the AWG's disastrous adoption of the 'Cadre Organisation Document', which effectively formalised a privileged stratum of theoreticians and knowledge specialists within the organisation, is a particularly extreme illustration of this. The confusions of the AWG aside, I believe there may be some weight to the claim that the Platformist conception of "collective responsibility" is perhaps too thin. That an organisation ought to be as supportive and enabling as it is reliant on the acceptance of tasks and duties by the membership. Indeed that a concern for the support and well-being towards other members ought to form a part of this collective responsibility. Again, this is not something particularly exclusive to Platformism and good analysis on comradely behaviour is lacking in much anarchist communist literature.

Interestingly, it is Insurrectionalist authors who have tended to provide the most revealing writings on the subject of comradely behaviour. This may be due to the fact that Insurrectionalism, as a theory of praxis, depends almost entirely on informal, fraternal links between comrades in struggle. Links that should be present but that we also perhaps take for granted inside of a formal, membership organisation. As such, Insurrectionalists tend to have a much better understanding of what these informal relationships should practically entail. The bond that brings us together here, it is argued, is the process of building affinity. Affinity should not be confused with the idea of sentiment, although these things can co-exist as well. There could be comrades, for example, with whom we consider having affinity but whom we do not find sympathetic and vice versa. Rather, to have affinity with a comrade means to know them and to aim to deepen one's knowledge of them. As the knowledge grows, the affinity can increase to the point of making an action together possible. Most importantly, this is understood to be an *infinite* process, a permanent negotiation between each other's values and understanding of the circumstances present. This process can help cement more formal channels of organisational cohesion. If there are, for example, tasks which need doing in the organisation that may be tedious or boring (but are, nonetheless, useful) it is often not, in reality, the abstract relationship one has to the organisational collective that creates a sense of responsibility but a sense of obligation based on affinity with one's comrades. Likewise, internal debates and discussions that aim to build tactical and theoretical unity should be conducted via collective deliberation. For this communication to occur requires efforts towards understanding and trust in other members and attempts to overcome misunderstandings and disagreements should they occur. There is no real "end-game" to this process. In fact, an organisation that does have such a static conception of its own identity is ultimately a stagnant one also. Plurality, difference and disagreement are ultimately features of all human life; as libertarian communists, as those who argue in favour of the best capacities of the human character we should be embracing this also.

Groups of anarchists in the workplace, working to create anarchist syndicalist unions, campaigning within revolutionary syndicalism for the prevalence of anarchist ideas within syndicalism and its theoretical orientation and themselves guided in their activity by the general anarchist organisation to which they belong – this is the significance of the relationship between anarchists and revolutionary syndicalism and the related revolutionary syndicalist movements (and the form it should take).

CONSTRUCTIVE PART

The Problem of day one of the Social Revolution

The essential objective of the labour movement and its struggle is the foundation, through revolution, of a free, egalitarian anarcho-communist society based upon the principle: "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs".

However, such a society in its completed form will not come about of itself, but only by dint of radical social change. Its realisation requires a more or less prolonged social revolutionary process; one steered by the organised forces of victorious labour along a specific path.

Our task is to point out that path here and now, to determine the positive, practical problems that will confront the workers from day one of the social revolution. The very fate of the social revolution will hinge upon proper resolution of these problems.

It goes without saying that the construction of the new society will only be possible after the workers have triumphed over the present bourgeois capitalist system and its representatives. The construction of a new economy and new social relationships cannot be begun until the power of the State defending the rule of slavery has been smashed, until such time as the industrial workers and peasants have taken charge of the country's industrial and agrarian economy by way of revolution.

As a result, the very first task of the social revolution is to destroy the State machine of capitalist society, to strip the bourgeoisie, and more generally, all socially privileged elements of their power, and to universally establish the will of the rebellious workers as articulated in the underlying principles of the social revolution. This destructive and belligerent side of the revolution will merely clear the way for the positive tasks that are the true meaning and essence of the social revolution.

Those tasks are as follows:

1. To find an anarchist solution to the problem of the country's (industrial) production.
2. To resolve the agrarian question in the same manner.
3. To resolve the problem of consumption (food supplies).

tionary syndicalist organisations on day two of the revolution (i.e. are they to be the organisers of the new system of production in its entirety, or will they leave that role to the workers' councils or workplace committees?), it is our view that anarchists must be involved in revolutionary syndicalism as one of the forms of the workers' revolutionary movement.

However, the question now is not whether anarchists should or should not play a part in revolutionary syndicalism, but rather, how and to what end they should play a part.

We regard the whole period up to our own times, when anarchists were part of the revolutionary syndicalist movement as individual workers and propagandists, as a period when relations with the industrial labour movement were amateurish.

Anarcho-syndicalism, which attempts to firmly establish anarchist ideas within the left wing of revolutionary syndicalism through the creation of anarchist-type unions, represents a step forward in this respect, but it has not yet improved on its amateurish methods. This is because anarcho-syndicalism does not link the drive to "anarchise" the syndicalist movement with the organisation of anarchist forces outside of that movement. Only if just such a link is established does it become possible to "anarchise" revolutionary syndicalism to prevent any slide towards opportunism.

We regard revolutionary syndicalism solely as a trade-union movement of the workers with no specific social and political ideology, and thus incapable by itself of resolving the social question; as such it is our opinion that the task of anarchists in the ranks of that movement consists of developing anarchist ideas within it and of steering it in an anarchist direction, so as to turn it into an active army of the social revolution. It is important to remember that if syndicalism is not given the support of anarchist theory in good time, it will be forced to rely on the ideology of some statist political party. A striking example of this is French syndicalism, which once shone out on account of its anarchist slogans and anarchist tactics, before falling under the sway of the communists and, above all, the right-wing opportunist socialists.

But the task of anarchists within the ranks of the revolutionary labour movement can only be performed if their efforts there are closely connected and co-ordinated with the activity of the anarchist organisation outside the syndicalist union. Put differently, we must enter the revolutionary labour movement as an organised force, answerable to the general anarchist organisation for our work inside the syndicalist unions, and receiving guidance from that organisation.

Without limiting ourselves to the establishment of anarchist syndicalist unions, we must seek to exert our theoretical influence on revolutionary syndicalism as a whole in all its forms (the Industrial Workers of the World, the Russian trade unions, etc.). But we can only accomplish this by setting to work as a rigorously organised anarchist collective, and certainly not as tiny amateurish groups, without organisational links or a common theoretical base.

Anti-conclusion

I always felt that there was something very un-libertarian about concluding arguments. As the Anarchist Federation state's in our 'Introduction to Anarchist Communism', when it comes to anarchist communism, there is no real conclusion, it's a necessarily open-ended practice. Accordingly, the arguments I have made here should not be taken to be definitive or final in any sense. Rather, as I stated at the beginning, they are intended to be part of a wider process, and I believe a great tradition within the anarchist movement also, of exercising self-criticism of the way we organise. I will "conclude" this paper, therefore, by instead looking to the reasons as to why I believe these debates are important.

I am a Platformist. I do, however, feel completely unrepresented by many of the organisations that claim to be acting in the spirit of the Organisational Platform. While I feel that many tenets of Platformism – particularly building tactical and theoretical unity and the centrality of class struggle - are the remedy to the localised, short-term and ghettoised activity of large portions of the anarchist movement today, I do also, however, feel a somewhat uncomfortable Platformist as one who greatly values the importance of our core libertarian communist principles for successful praxis. I guess writing this paper was an effort to find that middle-ground, to tease out the useful and interesting ideas from both sides of the Platformist/anti-Platformist divide. Along with this, it was also important, I believe, to explore the notion that we can learn something more valuable about our own traditions by looking to the values of others. That such a process leads to a re-affirming, modification or even outright rejection of our own ideals. This, I believe, is a very healthy activity for a movement that intends to stay true to its revolutionary mission. In this respect, and I hope that this sentiment has also been expressed through my analysis, it is the values and the ideas that are the most important things to me, not the labels that come attached to them.

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lesser abundance of resources is not a matter of principle but a technical issue.

The underlying principle upon which the new society will be built, the precept upon which it will rest, so to speak, and which must not be restricted even to the slightest degree is *the equality of relations, the freedom and the independence of the workers*. This principle encapsulates the prime basic requirement of the masses, in the name of which alone they will rise up in social revolution.

Either the social revolution will end in the defeat of the workers, in which case we have to start all over again to prepare for another struggle, a fresh offensive against the capitalist system; or it will lead to the victory of the workers, in which case, having seized the wherewithal to fend for themselves – the land, production and social functions – they will set about building a free society.

That moment will be the *beginning of the construction* of an anarchist society which, once started, will then develop continuously, gathering strength and constantly being improved upon.

Therefore, the takeover of production and social functions will be the watershed between the statist and the non-statist eras.

In order to become the rallying point of the struggling masses and the social revolutionary epoch, anarchism must not hide its basic principles nor accommodate its programme to assimilate vestiges of the old order, opportunistic tendencies of transitional systems and periods; instead, it must develop its principles and refine them as far as possible.

VIII. Anarchism and Syndicalism

The tendency to contrast anarchist communism with syndicalism, and vice versa, is one that we consider totally artificial and bereft of all basis and meaning.

The ideas of communism and of syndicalism occupy two different planes. Whereas communism, i.e. the free society of equal workers, is the goal of the anarchist struggle, syndicalism, i.e. the revolutionary movement of industrial workers based on trades, is but one of the forms of the revolutionary class struggle.

In uniting the industrial workers on the basis of production, revolutionary syndicalism, like any trade-union movement, has no specific ideology: it has no world view embracing all the complex social and political issues of the current situation. It always reflects the ideologies of a range of political groupings, notably of those most intensively at work within its ranks.

Our standpoint with regard to revolutionary syndicalism follows from what has just been said. Without wanting to resolve in advance the question of the role of revolu-

VII. The Transition Period

Socialist political parties use the term “transition period“ to refer to a specific phase in the life of a people, the essential features of which are a break with the old order and the introduction of a new economic and political system, which does not yet imply, however, the full emancipation of all workers.

In this respect, all the minimum programmes of the socialist political parties, for instance the democratic programme of the opportunistic socialists, or the communist programme of the “dictatorship of the proletariat“, are programmes for the transition period.

The essential feature of these minimum programmes is that they regard the complete realisation of the workers’ ideals – their independence, freedom and equality – as unrealisable in the short term, and as a result they retain a whole series of the capitalist system’s institutions: the principle of State coercion, private ownership of the means and instruments of production, wage-slavery and much else, according to the goals of each political party’s programme.

Anarchists have always been principled opponents of such programmes, taking the view that the construction of transitional systems retaining the principles of exploitation and coercion of the masses unavoidably leads back to slavery.

Instead of political minimum programmes, anarchists have only ever championed social revolution that would strip the capitalist class of political and economic privileges and place the means and instruments of production, and all other functions of social and economic life, in the hands of the workers.

And that is a position that anarchists have stood firm on to this very day.

The idea of the transition period, according to which the social revolution should culminate not in an anarchist society, but in some other form of system retaining elements and relics of the old capitalist system, is anti-anarchist in its essence. It contains in itself the threat of bolstering and developing these elements to their former proportions, thus sending events into reverse.

One clear example of this is the “dictatorship of the proletariat“ regime established by the Bolsheviks in Russia, which according to them was to be only a transitional stage in the march to complete communism, but which in point of fact resulted in the restoration of class society, at the bottom of which, just like before, we find the industrial workers and poorest peasants.

The main focus in the construction of the anarchist society does not consist of guaranteeing every individual, right from day one of the revolution, boundless freedom to seek satisfaction of their needs, but in the conquest of the social basis for that society and in establishing the principles of relations between people. The question of the greater or

[1] Skirda, A. (2001) *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organisation from Proudhon to May 1968*. AK Press: Edinburgh; Maximoff, G.P. (1930) *Constructive Anarchism – The Debate on the Platform*. Monty Miller Press: Sydney, 1988; Anarchism and the Platformist Tradition: An Archive of Writings on the Platformist Tradition Within Anarchism - <http://anarchistplatform.wordpress.com/>

[2] The notable exception is a persistent, and particularly radical, interpretation of Stirnerite thought developed by anarchists in Glasgow who took Stirner’s “Union of Egoists” literally as the basis for their syndicalist and communist organising from the 1940s onwards.

[3] The Anarchist Federation of Britain (1963-72), could technically be described as a structurally “synthesist” grouping, bringing together “members” (it had no formal membership list) from a variety of anarchist traditions. This, however, was more by virtue of its lack of commitment to any organisational principles as opposed to any theoretical commitment to synthesism. Christie in his *Edward Heath Made Me Angry* remarks that the Anarchist Federation of Britain “wasn’t really a federation at all, more an ad hoc body convened for a particular purpose then disbanded again”.

[4] Summarised by Doyle (1991) as the following;

- (1) A general lack of organisation in the anarchist movement.
- (2) Its poor quality where it does exist.
- (3) Confusion over the role of the anarchist organisation.

[5] See, for example, Graeber’s description of the US anarchist movement as split between,

“a minority tendency of ‘sectarian’ or ‘capital-A anarchist groups,’” which have developed, dogmatic, political programs, and “a majority tendency of ‘small-a anarchists’...who ‘are the real locus of historical dynamism right now’” and who are much looser programmatically. (quoted in Gordon, 2008: 23-4)

[6] He also states,

The Platform’s other shared characteristics with Leninism are a paternalistic attitude towards subjugated groups, which designates a universal vanguard, and the repressive character of this representative body, the centralised Anarchist union, which is to lead the social revolution. (Franks, 2006: 220)

Although it should also be noted that Franks’ quite hostile reading is likely to also be strongly influenced by the history of the “Anarchist Workers Group” (AWG) and their understanding of the Platform. The AWG was a small Platformist group that existed in Britain from 1988 to 1992, it led a controversial existence and eventually dissolved when a large proportion of its membership joined Trotskyist organisations. Franks acknowledges the criticisms the A(C)F levelled at the AWG at the time but (erroneously) assumes this to be a break with Platformism in favour of George Fontenis’ ‘Manifesto of Libertarian Communism’ (p.224).

[7]Language is an important thing. The use of the term “executive committee”, for example, in the original Platform has been a source of contention for many years. The phrase has obvious resonance with the highly vanguardist practice advocated by Lenin and has made it all too easy for detractors to denounce Platformism as an attempt to “Bolshevise” anarchism. The highly loaded nature of the language obscures the actual context in which the Dielo Truda group were writing. Makhno’s memoirs, for example, mention numerous “executive committees” within the Ukrainian peasant and workers movement -- Makhno, M. (1929) *The Russian Revolution in Ukraine*. Black Cat Press: Edmonton, 2007. These were, however, contrary to the Bolshevik way of organising, largely functional and always filled with recallable delegates directly accountable to the organisations that appointed them. Makhno even, in spite of this limited function, personally declined a place on the executive committee of a peasant soviet on the basis that the tasks should be fulfilled by the peasants themselves (only to relent and join after much lobbying on the part of the soviet). Arshinov, for his part, also attempts to lay rest any doubts that the “executive committee” is Bolshevik-inspired in his reply to the Russian anarchists;

Anybody in the least degree slightest conversant with politics knows well that an executive committee and a central committee are two quite different ideas. The executive committee may very well be an anarchist agency; indeed, such an organ exists in many anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organizations. (Arshinov, 1927)

vre to gain the ideological high ground. More than any other outlook, anarchism must become the leading idea in the social revolution, for it is only thanks to anarchist ideas that the social revolution will achieve the complete emancipation of labour.

The leading position of anarchist ideas in the revolution implies, at the same time, that anarchists and anarchist theory play an influential role in events. However, this influence must not be confused with the political leadership of statist parties, which only culminates in state power.

Anarchism does not aim to seize political power, to create a dictatorship. Its chief aspiration is to assist the masses in choosing the genuine path of social revolution and socialist construction. But it is not enough just for the masses to *embark* on the road to social revolution. It must also be ensured *that the revolution holds true to its path and objective* – the overthrow of capitalist society in the name of the society of free workers. As the experience of the Russian revolution of 1917 has shown us, this is no easy task, mainly on account of the many parties attempting to steer the movement in the opposite direction to that of social revolution.

Although the masses in social upheavals are prompted deep down by anarchist tendencies and slogans, these are not co-ordinated in any way, and as a result they do not have the coherence and appeal to become leading ideas, which is essential if the social revolution is to retain an anarchist orientation and anarchist objectives. This driving force of ideas can only find expression in a specific collective established by the masses for that express purpose. Organised anarchist elements and the organised anarchist movement will constitute that collective.

During the revolution, that collective, i.e. the General Anarchist Union, will bear great theoretical and practical responsibilities.

It will have to display initiative and demonstrate complete commitment in every aspect of the social revolution, encompassing the orientation and character of the revolution, the civil war and defence of the revolution, the positive tasks of the revolution, the new system of production, consumption, the agrarian question, etc.

On all these and many other issues, the masses will demand clear and precise answers from the anarchists. And once anarchists bring the concept of anarchist revolution and of an anarchist structure of society to public attention, they will have to present a precise answer to all such questions, link the resolution of these problems to the general concept of anarchism and commit all their resources to its effective realisation.

Only thus can the General Anarchist Union and the anarchist movement successfully perform their role as a leading force of ideas in the social revolution.

The activity of anarchists is divided into two phases: the pre-revolutionary period and the revolutionary period. In each case, anarchists can only carry out their role as an organised force if they have a clear understanding of the goals of their struggle and the methods leading to their attainment.

In the pre-revolutionary period, the basic task of the General Anarchist Union is to prepare the workers and peasants for the social revolution.

By rejecting formal (bourgeois) democracy and State authority and by proclaiming the full emancipation of labour, anarchism places the utmost emphasis on the rigorous principles of class struggle, awakening and nurturing revolutionary class consciousness and revolutionary class intransigence in the masses.

The anarchist education of the masses must be conducted in the spirit of class intransigence, anti-democratism and anti-statism and in the spirit of the ideals of Anarchist Communism, but education alone is not enough. A degree of anarchist organisation of the masses is also required. If this is to be accomplished, we have to operate along two lines: on the one hand, by the selection and grouping of revolutionary worker and peasant forces on the basis of anarchist theory (explicitly anarchist organisations) and on the other, on the level of grouping revolutionary workers and peasants on the basis of production and consumption (revolutionary workers' and peasants' production organisations, free workers' and peasants' co-operatives, etc.).

The worker and peasant classes, organised on the basis of production and consumption and imbued with the ideology of revolutionary anarchism, will be foremost among the strong points of the social revolution, and the more anarchist consciousness and anarchist organisation is introduced among them now, the more they will demonstrate anarchist purpose, anarchist firmness and anarchist creativity in the hour of revolution.

As far as the working class of Russia is concerned, after eight years of Bolshevik dictatorship, which has bridled the masses' natural appetite for independent activity, and glaringly demonstrated the true nature of all authority, it is clear that the class harbours within itself enormous potential for the formation of a mass anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement. Organised anarchist militants must immediately and with all available resources set about cultivating that appetite and potential, lest it be allowed to degenerate into Menshevism.

Anarchists must therefore, without delay, dedicate all their efforts to organising the poor peasantry, which is oppressed by the authorities, but is searching for emancipation, and harbours enormous revolutionary potential.

The anarchists' role in the revolutionary period cannot be confined to merely preaching anarchist slogans and ideas.

Life can be seen as an arena not just for the preaching of this or that idea, but also and equally as an arena for struggle, where forces aspiring to influence society manoeu-

Appendix 1: Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)

Translator's Introduction

Eighty years have passed since the publication in the pages of the Russian anarchist monthly *Delo Truda* of the Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft), but the question of anarchist organisation remains an open one even today, a question which sparks off ferocious debates with frightening ease.

Yet in reality it is a question which has long been solved: either we accept the need for anarchists to come together in their own specific organisations so as to allow greater unity and strength with which to face the struggles; or we don't accept it, and are happy to remain part of the world of "chaotic" anarchism which rejects such a need for one reason or another, considering it pointless or dangerous, or which accepts it, but choose anarchist unity in name, where the various hues of anarchism come together under an umbrella organisation without any serious political unity or strategies.

The Organisational Platform (often known in English-speaking circles as the "Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists") was the first attempt since the days of Bakunin to formulate a theoretical and practical platform of the positions and tasks of anarchists, which could provide anarchism with the necessary political and organisational unity to increase the influence of anarchist ideas within society in general and the workers' movements in particular, after the defeat of anarchism in the Russian Revolution made the grave faults of (what had by then become) "traditional" anarchism all too evident. The Platform not only deals with organisational questions. It tackles a whole range of problems: it clearly sets out the class nature of anarchism; it defines the role of anarchists in the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods; it establishes the role of

syndicalism as an instrument of struggle; it sets out the basic tenets of anarchist theory such as anti-capitalism, the rejection of bourgeois democracy, the State and authority, and more.

For all these reasons, the Organisational Platform, though not exhaustive in its treatment of various questions, and requiring further development in some areas, is a document of great value, not only historical but also practical. It merits the serious consideration of all those who fight, or who want to fight, for a new world, a new society, a new humanity.

Previous English translations of the Platform have suffered from the fact that they were translated, not directly from the Russian, but via French. So, in order to commemorate the 80th anniversary of its publication, we set about preparing a new translation directly from Russian. However, in order to save time, this new translation is based on the existing translations, but we have made a detailed comparison with the Russian original in order to bring it as close as possible to the original. We have also observed the original paragraphs and replaced emphatic italics with bold type, for clarity.

As translations of the Platform into other languages (such as Dutch, Greek and Spanish) have generally been made from the existing English translations, we take this opportunity to suggest that translators revise their work on the basis of this new translation or, if possible, of the Russian original, available on the Archive.

Finally we wish to thank Will Firth and Mikhail Tsovma for their invaluable assistance (and patience!) with this new translation.

*Nestor McNab,
2006.
Maintainer,
The Nestor Makhno Archive
www.nestormakhno.info*

privileged social castes upon which it relies, and it forcibly subjugates the masses to its needs and those of the privileged castes, thus restoring the basis of capitalist authority and the capitalist State: the enslavement and the exploitation of the masses by violence (an example being the “workers’ and peasants’ State” of the Bolsheviks).

VI. The Masses and the Anarchists: the Role of each in the Social Struggle and the Social Revolution

The principal forces of social revolution are the urban working class, the peasantry and, partly, the working intelligentsia.

NB: While being, like the urban and rural proletariat, an oppressed and exploited class, the working intelligentsia is comparatively more stratified than the workers and the peasants, thanks to the economic privileges which the bourgeoisie awards to certain of its members. That is why, in the early days of the social revolution, only the less well-off strata of the intelligentsia will take an active part in the revolution.

The role of the masses in the social revolution and the construction of socialism is noticeably different from that foreseen for them by the statist parties. While bolshevism and its kindred currents take the line that the working mass possesses only destructive revolutionary instincts, and is incapable of creative and constructive revolutionary activity – the main reason why the latter should be placed in the hands of the people making up the government or the Party Central Committee – anarchists think instead that the working masses carry within themselves vast creative and constructive potential, and they aspire to sweep aside the obstacles preventing its manifestation.

Anarchists, in fact, look upon the State as the chief obstacle, since it usurps all the rights of the masses and divests them of all their functions in social and economic life. The State must wither away, but not one fine day in the society of the future. It must be destroyed by the workers on day one of their victory and must not be restored in any other guise whatsoever. Its place will be taken by a system of self-managed workers’ organisations of producers and consumers, unified on a federative basis. This system rules out both the organisation of State power and the dictatorship of any party whatsoever.

The Russian revolution of 1917 exemplifies this approach to the process of social emancipation through the creation of the system of workers’ and peasants’ soviets and workplace committees. Its sad error was not to have liquidated the state organisation of power at an early stage – at first the authority of the provisional government, then that of the Bolsheviks. The latter, exploiting the trust of the workers and peasants, reorganised the bourgeois State in accordance with the circumstances of the time and then, with the aid of that State, killed off the creative activity of the revolutionary masses by strangling the free system of soviets and workplace committees that represented the first steps towards constructing a stateless society.

V. The Negation of the State and Authority

Bourgeois ideologues define the State as the organ regulating the complex socio-political, civil and social relations of people within contemporary society, protecting the law and order of this society. Anarchists are in perfect agreement with that definition but add that the law and order on which this society is founded hides the enslavement of the vast majority of the people by an insignificant minority, and that the modern State serves to maintain this enslavement.

The State is both the organised violence of the bourgeoisie against the workers and the system of its executive organs.

The left socialists and in particular the Bolsheviks also look upon bourgeois power and the bourgeois State as the tools of capital. But they believe that, in the hands of the socialist parties, State power can become a powerful weapon in the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat. They are therefore in favour of socialist power and the proletarian State. Some of them (the Social Democrats) seek to reach a position of authority by peaceful, parliamentary means, while others (the Communists, the Left Social Revolutionaries) seek to seize power by revolutionary means.

Anarchism considers both these positions fundamentally wrong and detrimental to the emancipation of labour.

State power always goes hand in glove with exploitation and enslavement of the masses. It arises out of that exploitation, or is created for it. State power without violence and exploitation loses all reason to exist.

The State and authority rob the masses of their initiative and kill their spirit of independent activity, nurturing in them the slavish mentality of submission, expectation and a belief in rulers and bosses. Thus, the emancipation of the workers is only possible through the process of direct revolutionary struggle by the working masses and their class organisations against the capitalist system.

The conquest of power by the social democratic parties through parliamentary methods in the framework of the present system will not further the emancipation of labour one little bit for the simple reason that real power, and thus real authority, will remain with the bourgeoisie, which has full control of the country's economy and politics. The role of the socialist authorities will in that case be confined to reforms, to improving that same bourgeois system (see the example of MacDonald, the Social Democratic parties of Germany, Sweden and Belgium which have attained state power under a capitalist system).

Neither can the seizure of power by way of social revolution and the organisation of a so-called proletarian State further the cause of the genuine emancipation of labour. The State, supposedly created initially for the purposes of defending the revolution, inevitably accumulates its own specific needs and becomes an end in itself, spawning

INTRODUCTION

Anarchists!

Despite the force and unquestionably positive character of anarchist ideas, despite the clarity and completeness of anarchist positions with regard to the social revolution, and despite the heroism and countless sacrifices of anarchists in the struggle for Anarchist Communism, it is very telling that in spite of all this, the anarchist movement has always remained weak and has most often featured in the history of working-class struggles, not as a determining factor, but rather as a fringe phenomenon.

This contrast between the positive substance and incontestable validity of anarchist ideas and the miserable state of the anarchist movement can be explained by a number of factors, the chief one being the absence in the anarchist world of organisational principles and organisational relations.

In every country the anarchist movement is represented by local organisations with contradictory theory and tactics with no forward planning or continuity in their work. They usually fold after a time, leaving little or no trace.

Such a condition in revolutionary anarchism, if we take it as a whole, can only be described as chronic general disorganisation. This disease of disorganisation has invaded the organism of the anarchist movement like yellow fever and has plagued it for decades.

There can be no doubt, however, that this disorganisation has its roots in a number of defects of theory, notably in the distorted interpretation of the principle of individuality in anarchism, that principle being too often mistaken for the absence of all accountability. Those enamoured of *self-expression with an eye to personal pleasure* cling stubbornly to the chaotic condition of the anarchist movement and, in defence thereof, invoke the immutable principles of anarchism and its teachers.

However, the immutable principles and teachers show the very opposite.

Dispersion spells ruination; cohesion guarantees life and development. This law of social struggle is equally applicable to classes and parties.

Anarchism is no beautiful fantasy, no abstract notion of philosophy, but a social movement of the working masses; for that reason alone it must gather its forces into one organisation, constantly agitating, as demanded by the reality and strategy of the social class struggle.

As Kropotkin said:

“We are convinced that the formation of an anarchist party in Russia, far from

being prejudicial to the general revolutionary endeavour, is instead desirable and useful in the highest degree.“ (Foreword to Bakunin’s Paris Commune, [Russian edition], 1892)

Nor did Bakunin ever oppose the idea of a general anarchist organisation. On the contrary, his aspirations with regard to organisation, as well as his activities within the first workingmen’s International, give us every right to view him as an active advocate of precisely such a mode of organisation.

Broadly speaking, nearly all of the active militants of anarchism were against dissipated action and dreamed of an anarchist movement united by a common purpose and common tactics.

It was during the Russian revolution of 1917 that the need for a general organisation was felt most acutely, since it was during the course of that revolution that the anarchist movement displayed the greatest degree of fragmentation and confusion. The absence of a general organisation induced many anarchist militants to defect to the ranks of the Bolsheviks. It is also the reason why many other militants find themselves today in a condition of passivity that thwarts any utilization of their often immense capacities.

We have vital need of an organisation which, having attracted most of the participants in the anarchist movement, would establish a common tactical and political line for anarchism and thereby serve as a guide for the whole movement.

It is high time that anarchism emerged from the swamp of disorganisation, to put an end to the interminable vacillations on the most important questions of theory and tactics, and resolutely move towards its clearly understood purpose and an organised collective practice.

It is not enough, though, to simply state the vital need for such an organisation. It is also necessary to establish a means for creating it.

We reject as theoretically and practically unfounded the idea of creating an organisation using the recipe of the “synthesis”, that is to say, bringing together the supporters of the various strands of anarchism. Such an organisation embracing a pot-pourri of elements (in terms of their theory and practice) would be nothing more than a mechanical assemblage of persons with varying views on all issues affecting the anarchist movement, and would inevitably break up on encountering reality.

The anarcho-syndicalist approach does not solve anarchism’s organisational difficulty, since anarcho-syndicalism fails to give it priority and is mostly interested in the idea of penetrating and making headway into the world of labour. However, even with a foothold there, there is nothing much to be accomplished in the world of labour if we do not have a general anarchist organisation.

The only approach which can lead to a solution of the general organisational problem

whole and guarantees every individual parity with everyone else and affords the maximum well being to all. This basis is common ownership in the form of the socialization of all of the means and instruments of production (industry, transport, land, raw materials, etc.) and the construction of national economic agencies on the basis of equality and the self-management of the working classes.

Within the parameters of this self-managing workers’ society, Anarchist Communism lays down the principle of the equal worth and equal rights of every individual (not of “abstract” individuality, or “mystic individuality”, or the concept of “individuality as an idea”).

It is from this principle of the equal worth and equal rights of every individual, and also the fact that the value of the labour supplied by each individual person cannot be measured or established, that the underlying economic, social and juridical principle of Anarchist Communism follows: “From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs“.

IV. The Negation of Democracy

Democracy is one of the forms of bourgeois capitalist society.

The basis of democracy is the retention of the two antagonistic classes of contemporary society – labour and capital – and of their collaboration on the basis of capitalist private property. Parliament and national representative government are the expressions of this collaboration .

Formally, democracy proclaims freedom of speech, of the press, of association, as well as universal equality before the law.

In reality, all these freedoms are of a very relative nature: they are tolerated as long as they do not contradict the interests of the ruling class, i.e. the bourgeoisie.

Democracy preserves intact the principle of capitalist private property. In so doing, it reserves the right of the bourgeoisie to control the entire economy of the country, as well as the press, education, science and art, which in practice makes the bourgeoisie the absolute master of the country. As it enjoys a monopoly in the realm of the country’s economic affairs, the bourgeoisie is free to establish its complete and unlimited authority in the political realm too. Indeed, parliament and representative government are, in democracies, merely executive organs of the bourgeoisie.

As a result, democracy is merely one variety of bourgeois dictatorship, its fictitious political freedoms and democratic guarantees are a smokescreen designed to conceal its true identity.

ing masses' life and struggle.

Anarchism's outstanding thinkers – Bakunin, Kropotkin, and others – did not invent the idea of anarchism, but, having discovered it among the masses, merely helped develop and propagate it through the power of their thought and knowledge.

Anarchism is not the product of individual creation, nor the object of individual experiments.

Likewise, anarchism is in no way the product of general humanitarian aspirations. There is no “single” humanity. Any attempt to make anarchism an attribute of the whole of humanity, as it presently stands, or to credit it with a generally humanitarian character, would be a historical and social falsehood that would inevitably result in justification of the current order and fresh exploitation.

Anarchism is broadly humanitarian only in the sense that the ideals of the working masses improve the lives of all people, and that the fate of humanity today or tomorrow is bound up with the fate of enslaved labour. Should the working masses prove victorious, the whole of humankind will be reborn. If they should fail, then violence, exploitation, slavery and oppression will prevail in the world as before.

The inception, unfolding and realisation of anarchist ideals have their roots in the life and struggle of the working masses and are indissolubly bound up with the general fate of the latter.

Anarchism aims to turn today's bourgeois capitalist society into a society that will guarantee working people the fruits of their labour, freedom, independence and social and political equality. This society is Anarchist Communism. It is in Anarchist Communism that there will be the fullest expression not only of social solidarity, but also the idea of free individuality, and these two notions will develop together closely, in perfect harmony.

Anarchist communism believes that the sole creator of all social assets is labour – physical and intellectual – and, as a result, that only labour has any entitlement to manage the whole of economic and public life. That is why Anarchist Communism in no way justifies or countenances the existence of non-working classes.

If these classes survive and co-exist with Anarchist Communism, the latter will recognize no responsibility towards them. Only when the non-working classes decide to become productive and wish to live within the social system of Anarchist Communism on the same footing as everyone else will they occupy a position in it, i.e. the position of free members of society equal to everyone else, enjoying the same rights of this society and having the same general responsibilities.

Anarchist Communism seeks the eradication of all exploitation and violence, whether against the individual or against the working masses. To that end it creates an economic and social basis that fuses the country's economic and social life into a harmonious

is, as we see it, the recruitment of anarchism's active militants on the basis of specific theoretic, tactical and organisational positions, which is to say on the basis of a more or less perfected, *homogeneous programme*.

Drawing up such a programme is one of the primary tasks that the social struggle of recent decades demands of anarchists. And it is to this task that the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad has dedicated a substantial part of its efforts.

The “Organisational Platform” published below represents the outline, the skeleton of such a programme and must serve as the first step towards gathering anarchist forces into a single active, revolutionary anarchist collective capable of struggle: the General Union of Anarchists.

We have no illusions about the various deficiencies in the platform. As in any new, practical and, at the same time, critical departure, there are undoubtedly gaps in the platform. It may be that certain essential positions have been left out of the platform, or that certain others have not been developed adequately, or that still others may be too detailed or repetitive. All of this is possible, but that is not the issue. What is important is that the groundwork be laid for a general organisation, and that aim is achieved, to the necessary extent, by this platform. It is the task of the general collective – the General Anarchist Union – to further elaborate and improve the platform so as to turn it into a complete programme for the whole anarchist movement.

We also have no illusions on another score.

We anticipate that a great many representatives of so-called individualism and “chaotic” anarchism will attack us, foaming at the mouth and accusing us of infringing anarchist principles. Yet we know that these individualist and chaotic elements take “anarchist principles” to mean the cavalier attitude, disorderliness and irresponsibility that have inflicted all but incurable injuries upon our movement and against which we struggle with all our energy and passion. That is why we can calmly parry any attacks from that quarter.

Our hopes are vested in others – in those who have remained true to anarchism, the workers, who have lived out the tragedy of the anarchist movement and who are painfully searching for a way out.

And we have high hopes of the anarchist youth, those young comrades born on the winds of the Russian revolution and absorbed from the outset by the whole gamut of constructive problems, who will undoubtedly insist on the implementation of positive organisational principles in anarchism.

We invite all Russian anarchist organisations, scattered throughout the various countries of the world, as well as individual anarchist militants, to come together into a single revolutionary collective, on the basis of a general organisational platform. May this platform be a revolutionary watchword and rallying point for all the militants

of the Russian anarchist movement and may it mark the birth of the General Union of Anarchists!

Long Live the Organised Anarchist Movement!

Long Live the General Anarchist Union!

Long Live the Social Revolution of the World's Workers!

The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad

Petr Arshinov, Group Secretary

20 June 1926

GENERAL PART

I. Class Struggle, its Role and its Value

“There is no ONE humanity.

There is the humanity made up of classes: slaves and masters.”

Like all the societies that preceded it, contemporary bourgeois capitalist society is not united. It is split into two distinct camps, differing sharply in their social position and social function: the proletariat (in the broadest sense of the word) and the bourgeoisie.

The lot of the proletariat has for centuries been to bear the burden of hard physical labour, the fruits of which, however, devolve not to itself but to another, privileged class that enjoys property, authority and the products of spiritual culture (science, education, art) – the bourgeoisie.

The social enslavement and exploitation of the working masses form the basis upon which modern society stands and without which it could not exist.

This fact has given rise to a centuries-long class struggle sometimes assuming an open, tempestuous form, sometimes undetectable and slow, but always fundamentally directed towards transforming the existing society into a society that would satisfy the workers' needs, requirements and conception of justice.

In social terms, the whole of human history represents a continuous chain of struggles waged by the working masses in pursuit of their rights, freedom and a better life. At all times throughout the history of human societies, this class struggle has been the principal factor determining the form and structure of those societies.

The socio-political system of any country is primarily the product of the class struggle. The structure of any society is an indication of what stage the class struggle has reached. The slightest change in the tide of the class struggle and the relative strengths of the antagonistic classes immediately produces changes in the fabric and structure of class society.

This is the general, universal significance of the class struggle in the life of class societies.

II. The Necessity of Violent Social Revolution

The principle of the enslavement and exploitation of the masses through force lies at the root of modern society. All areas of society – economics, politics, social relations – rely on class violence, whose official organs are state bodies, the police, the army and the courts. Everything in this society, from each individual factory right up to the entire political system of the state, is nothing but a *fortress of capital*, where the workers are forever being monitored, and where special forces are on constant alert to crush any movement of the workers that may threaten the foundations of the present society or as much as disturb its tranquillity.

At the same time, the structure of present society automatically keeps the working masses in a state of ignorance and mental stagnation; it forcibly prevents their education and enlightenment so that they will be easier to control.

The advances of contemporary society – the technological development of Capital and the perfecting of its political system – reinforce the might of the ruling classes and make the struggle against them increasingly difficult, thereby postponing the crucial moment when labour achieves its emancipation.

Analysis of contemporary society shows that there is no other way to achieve a transformation of capitalist society into a society of free workers except through violent social revolution.

III. Anarchism and Anarchist Communism

The class struggle, born in violence out of the age-old desire of working people for freedom, gave rise among the oppressed to the idea of anarchism – the idea of the complete negation of the social system based on classes and the State, and of the replacement of this by a free, stateless society of self-governing workers.

Anarchism thus developed, not from the abstract reflections of some scientist or philosopher, but out of the direct struggle waged by the working people against capital, out of their needs and requirements, out of their psychology, their desire for freedom and equality, aspirations that become especially vivid in the most heroic stages of the work-