

## **Introduction to the Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)**

This pamphlet groups together the most recent translation of the Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft) and the debates between its authors, Malatesta and other anarchists that followed in the immediate years after its publication. The platform has always been a controversial document within anarchism, we introduce some of the history of the early controversies.

With the rapid growth of anarchism in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin wall the platform has again become an important document for groups and individuals seeking to overcome the anti-organisational tendencies of parts of the new anarchism. So these texts are introduced by an article from the North Eastern Anarchist, the publication of one of the youngest of these new groups, NEFAC.

Today (March 2007) the influence of the Platform is wider than it has ever been with translations into Turkish, Polish, Swedish, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Czech, Greek, Hungarian, Russian, Turkish and Italian on the internet. Many of these translations are archived at <http://www.nestormakhno.info/>. New groups have emerged in Eastern Europe and South America quite often with the core ideas of the platform being 're-invented' before these groups discovered the historic text. There are anarchist groups in France, Italy, Uruguay, Lebanon, Switzerland, Britain, Ireland, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, USA, Canada, Turkey, Southern Africa, Mexico, Greece, Peru and the Czech republic that source their current organisational methods on some of the ideas in the Platform.

In May of 2005 a very significant step towards international co-operation between 'platformist' groups was made with the launching of Anarkismo.net by a network of individual members from some of these organizations. By late 2005 Anarkismo.net was run by delegates of a number of anarchist communist organizations helped by individuals from many other places. By March of 2007 Anarkismo.net had published over 5,000 articles in over 20 languages, the version of the pamphlet and the debate around it closes with the Editorial Guidelines of Anarkismo.net.

***[www.anarchism.ws](http://www.anarchism.ws)***

# **Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)**



## **The new translation, the debate, the history & the platform today**

**Texts by** Nestor Makhno, Ida Mett, Piotr Archinov, Valevsky, Linsky, Workers Cause (Dielo Truda) Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, Maria Isidine, Errico Malatesta, Pieter Archinov, Jeff Shantz & P.J. Lilley, Alan MacSimoin, Nick Heath, Nestor McNab and the Anarkismo editorial group.



2. Facilitate fraternal debate and discussion between anarchists of this tradition.
3. Provide a space where other anarchists, socialists and anybody else can learn about the activities and views of this anarchist tradition and engage in constructive dialogue with them.

### **Why we think this is important:**

Capitalism is today, more than ever, organised as a global system. Anarchism too needs to be global. The Internet can be a powerful tool to help us organise globally. Although, this is a small step, we believe that an international anarchist-communist news site can play an important part in this task, by:

1. Improving communication between “platformist” organizations and individuals, which is a vital step on the road to achieving greater unity on an international level.
2. Winning people to anarchism, in particular in areas of the world where the movement is weak or non-existent
3. Convincing people who desire social change that the sort of approach outlined in the ‘Anarchist Platform’ is the best one.
4. Aiding the formation of new anarchist-communist groups and collectives and encouraging people to join the existing ones.

*<http://anarkismo.net>*

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# The Platform: It's Not Just For Platformists Anymore

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by Jeff Shantz & P.J. Lilley (NEFAC-Toronto), NEA 3, 2002

*"It is high time that anarchism emerged from the swamp of disorganization, 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 organized collective practice."*

**- Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft), 1926**

**Much has been made over the last few years of renewed activity by anarchists inspired by the 1926 platform. Rather than engaged debate on the issue, discussion has tended to be polarized between defenders of the platform and unwavering opponents of platformism (and so-called organizational anarchism generally). Lost in this polarization is the fact that platformism offers some important insights into contemporary anarchist activity, insights that may be especially useful for non-platformists.**

We should begin this discussion by saying that we are not platformists. We have never been platformists and, who knows, we may never be platformists. In fact, over the years we've had our own share of problems with the platform and many arguments with proponents of the platform.

Still, we support the recent emergence of platformist organizations in North America generally, and the activities of a specific platformist federation, NEFAC. We also think that platformist actions and ideas have much to offer anarchists in North America, both in terms of their critique of North American anarchist movements and in terms of their positive contributions to the struggle for an anarchist society.

Thus we write this short piece not as boosterism for those who agree with the platform, nor as a rebuttal to those who are opposed to the platform. Instead we write it as anarchists still grappling with the questions and challenges posed by the platform. We are encouraged by the possibilities raised by platformist organizing which builds anarchism outside of our limited circles and in connection with people's everyday lives and struggles under capitalism.

In our view, the burden is on critics of platformism to explain what is wrong with the emergence of anarchist organizations that through their ideas and activities might serve as a pole of attraction for anarchists. Non-platformists have many questions to answer.

Why not draw anarchists together to actively hash out common positions, strategies and tactics? Why not prefer that active engagement to the comfort of spinning out personal utopias, criticizing from the sidelines or conversely setting aside political

ideas or, as it is sometimes expressed, to become a "leadership of ideas".

A major focus of our activity is our work within the economic organizations of the working class (labour organizations, trade unions, syndicates) where this is a possibility. We therefore reject views that dismiss activity in the unions because as members of the working class it is only natural that we should also be members of these mass organizations. Within them we fight for the democratic structures typical of anarcho-syndicalist unions like the 1930's CNT. However, the unions no matter how revolutionary cannot replace the need for anarchist political organisation(s).

We also see it as vital to work in struggles that happen outside the unions and the workplace. These include struggles against particular oppressions, imperialism and indeed the struggles of the working class for a decent place and environment in which to live. Our general approach to these, like our approach to the unions, is to involve ourselves with mass movements and within these movements, in order to promote anarchist methods of organisation involving direct democracy and direct action.

We actively oppose all manifestations of prejudice within the workers' movement and society in general and we work alongside those struggling against racism, sexism, [religious] sectarianism and homophobia as a priority. We see the success of a revolution and the successful elimination of these oppressions after the revolution being determined by the building of such struggles in the pre-revolutionary period. The methods of struggle that we promote are a preparation for the running of society along anarchist and communist lines after the revolution.

We oppose imperialism but put forward anarchism as an alternative goal to nationalism. We defend grassroots anti-imperialist movements while arguing for an anarchist rather than nationalist strategy.

We recognise a need for anarchist organisations who agree with these principles to federate on an international basis. However, we believe the degree of federation possible and the amount of effort put into it must be determined by success at building national or regional organisations capable of making such international work a reality, rather than a matter of slogans.

## The Goals of Anarkismo.net

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### Why we run this site

Anarkismo.net is a international anarchist-communist news service. These are our aims for this project.

### The purpose of the site is to:

1. Collect and distribute the news and analysis produced by anarchist groups and individuals all over the world who are influenced by the "platformist", anarchist-communist or especifista tradition of anarchism.



## About Anarkismo.net

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### Who we are and why we do it

Anarkismo.net is the product of international co-operation between anarchist groups and individuals who agree with our editorial statement (see below). It is intended to further communication, discussion and debate within the global anarchist movement.

Our intention is to build this site into a resource that is truly global and multilingual. We intend to work closely with the anarchist movement that exist. All of the editors are either members of anarchist organisations or part of collectives that are seeking to form organisations.

### Editorial statement

We identify ourselves as anarchists and with the “platformist”, anarchist-communist or especifista tradition of anarchism. We broadly identify with the theoretical base of this tradition and the organisational practice it argues for, but not necessarily everything else it has done or said, so it is a starting point for our politics and not an end point.

The core ideas of this tradition that we identify with are the need for anarchist political organisations that seek to develop:

- \* Theoretical Unity
- \* Tactical Unity
- \* Collective Action and Discipline
- \* Federalism

Anarchism will be created by the class struggle between the vast majority of society (the working class) and the tiny minority that currently rule. A successful revolution will require that anarchist ideas become the leading ideas within the working class. This will not happen spontaneously. Our role is to make anarchist ideas the leading

differences altogether? What is there to oppose in efforts “to rally all the militants of the organised anarchist movement?” Why oppose attempts to attract working class militants to anarchism?

The goal of developing anarchist perspectives within unions and other working class organizations is one that anarchists have neglected for far too long. And then many anarchists have the nerve to complain about the un-anarchistic character of the working class.

That some non-platformists have responded to platformist organizing dogmatically and reactively, criticizing a document to dismiss a movement, referring to broad generalizations about “organization” rather than specific organizational practices, suggests that some habits are tough to shake. Still it’s exactly the habits nurtured during times of lethargy, insularity and marginality that must be shaken off as people are beginning to seek alternatives to capitalist social relations. Not only thoughts of future societies but of real strategies for making it happen are needed.

To begin with, it seems obvious that the original Dielo Trouda concern with overcoming “the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates” is one that must be shared by North American anarchists today, despite the encouraging upswing in anarchist activity recently (of which platformists have played a good part).

As anarchist movements grow the questions of organization and the relations of various anarchist activities to each other and to broader strategies and tactics for social change will only become more significant and pressing. If anarchists are to seize the opportunities presented by recent upsurges in anarchist activity and build anarchism in movements that have resonance in wider struggles, then we must face seriously the challenges of organization, of combining and coordinating our efforts effectively. We will be aided in this by drawing upon the lessons of past experiences and avoiding, as much as possible, past errors.

One of the glaring errors has been to avoid questions of organization and unity, leaving us woefully unprepared when struggles erupt. When movements are in low ebb and goals are less ambitious, such questions may appear less immediate and the impetus to break out of the protective shell of the subculture less pressing. This has been the situation in North America until very recently.

The changed circumstances in a time of growth for anarchism, and anti-capitalist activities more generally, require new practices suited to the changed dynamics of struggle. As struggles expand and develop, the question is not so much whether people will form organizations or not, but rather the types of organizations that will emerge. People trying to beat capitalism will certainly try to join forces with others to share resources, coordinate efforts and build strength. To stand on the sidelines in such matters is to leave the terrain open to authoritarian and/or reformist organizations to fill the breach.



When one looks at the history of anarchism, organizational perspectives and activities, far from being marginal elements, represent the core of anarchist endeavour. Attempts to suggest that organizational approaches represent some deviation from anarchism or the intrusion of un-anarchist ideas into anarchism are a strange attempt at historical revisionism. Of course, most anarchists are involved in some type of organization or another, whether an infoshop collective, publication team or affinity group.

Much of anarchist activity in North America, unfortunately, still corresponds with the Dielo Trouda description from 1926: *“local organizations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them.”* Absence of durable anarchist organizations still contributes to a drift into passivity, demoralization, disinterest or a retreat into subculturalism.

Many of these short lived organizations are built on the synthesist basis that platformists have been and remain so critical of. While we’re not convinced that synthesist approaches must fail, in my experiences they do exhibit a tendency to be the *“mechanical assembly of individuals”* which the platformists suggested. Such groupings work relatively well as long as their level of activity doesn’t rise above running a bookstore, infoshop or free school. Unfortunately, even in those cases disastrous rifts emerge when meaningful political questions are broached. A consensus based on not wanting to offend other members or declining controversial work because it threatens collective harmony are too often the default positions of synthesist type groups.

Platformists seek a substantial unity based on shared action and reflection. Platformism encourages a political and theoretical honesty. One can take a stand without having to compromise or soft peddle one’s positions in order to keep the peace.

Discussion of unity perhaps requires some clarification. When platformists talk of theoretical or tactical unity they are not saying that everyone has to read the same things or agree on all points. Surely, however, there has to be some agreement on basic ideas. And these positions are only determined collectively, through open debate and discussion rooted in actual experience. Unity speaks to a focused sharing of resources and energies that brings currently limited anarchist forces together rather than dissipating and diluting our efforts.

Of course it’s always easier to avoid the collective work, the lengthy debate and discussion, the development and revision of ideas through practice and finally the leg-work of organizing that platformists take on. It’s also easier to develop pure schemes in the comfort of one’s apartment, rarely worrying oneself whether or not such beautiful fantasies *“would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality.”* Platformists, on the other hand, accept the shared responsibilities of building anarchist movements in connection with those who suffer the assaults of capitalism.

The anarchist organization is a place to come together and reflect on work being

lacks knowledge, cohesion or agreement, its problem is this, and nothing will be remedied by proclaiming *“collective responsibility”* which, unless it means the blind submission of all to the will of some, is a moral absurdity in theory and general irresponsibility in practice.

But all this is perhaps only a question of words.

In my reply to Makhno I already said: *“It may be that, by the term collective responsibility, you mean the agreement and solidarity that must exist among the members of an association. And if that is so, your expression would, in my opinion, amount to an improper use of language, and therefore, being only a question of words, we would be closer to understanding each other.”*

And now, reading what the comrades of the 18e say, **I find myself more or less in agreement with their way of conceiving the anarchist organisation** (being very far from the authoritarian spirit which the “Platform” seemed to reveal) and I confirm my belief that **behind the linguistic differences really lie identical positions.**

But if this is the case, why persist in an expression which serves only to defy clarification of what was one of the causes of the misunderstanding provoked by the “Platform”? Why not speak as all do in such a way as to be understood and not create confusion?

Moral responsibility (and in our case we can talk of nothing but moral responsibility) is individual by its very nature. Only the spirit of domination, in its various political, military, ecclesiastical (etc.) guises, has been able to hold men responsible for what they have not done voluntarily.

If a number of men agree to do something and one of them allows the initiative to fail through not carrying out what he had promised, everyone will say that it was his fault and that therefore it is he who is responsible, not those who did what they were supposed to right up to the last.

Once again, let us talk as everyone talks. Let us try to be understood by everyone. We may perhaps find ourselves in less difficulty with our propaganda.

Errico Malatesta  
March / April 1930

1. Studi sociali was an Italian-language anarchist journal based in Montevideo, Uruguay and founded by the expatriate Luigi Fabbri
2. Union Anarchiste Communiste Révolutionnaire

Source: The Nestor Makhno Archive

I thank you for the attention you have given to my letter and, in the hope of hearing from you further, send you my cordial greetings.

Risveglio (Geneva),  
December 1929

Source: International Anarchism, part of the Struggle collection

## On Collective Responsibility

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Errico Malatesta  
(from Studi Sociali (1), 10th July 1930)

*This is a letter from Errico Malatesta to the anarchist group of the 18e Arrondissement in Paris, written in March or April 1930 and published in Paris in “Le Libertaire” No.252 on 19th April 1930. The letter confirms Malatesta’s opinion on the concept of the “collective responsibility” of the organization. Both at the last congress of organized French anarchists and in the pages of “Le Libertaire” the issue was being hotly debated.*

I have seen a statement by the Group of the 18e where, in agreement with the Russians’ “Platform” and with comrade Makhno, it is held that the “*principle of collective responsibility*” is the basis of every serious organization.

I have already, in my criticism of the “Platform” and in my reply to the open letter directed to me by Makhno, indicated my opinion on this supposed principle. But as there is some insistence on an idea or at least an expression which would seem to me to be more at home in a military barracks than among anarchist groups, I hope I will be permitted to say another few words on the question.

The comrades of the 18e say that “*communist anarchists must work in such a way that their influence has the greatest probabilities for success and that this result will not come about unless their propaganda can develop collectively, permanently and homogeneously*”. I agree! But it seems that that is not the case; since those comrades complain that “*in the name of the same organization, in every corner of France, the most diverse, and even contrary theories are spreading*”. That is most deplorable, but it simply means that that organization has no clear and precise programme which is understood and accepted by all its members, and that within the party, confused by a common label, are men who do not have the same ideas and who should group together in separate organizations or remain unattached if they are unable to find others who think as they do.

If, as the comrades of the 18e say, the UACR (2) does nothing to establish a programme which can be accepted by all its members and permit it to be able to act together in such situations as may present themselves, if, in other words, the UACR

done. It offers the opportunity to examine and refine one’s practices and explore alternatives and options given the resources and experiences at hand.

It seems to us that the important thing about platformism isn’t found in the specifics of a 1926 document but in the challenge that it puts before us to come together openly and seriously to develop anarchist strategies and practices in a way that is engaged in real class struggles against actually existing bosses, landlords and bureaucrats. Platformists have taken up the challenge of moving anarchism from its current status as social conscience or cultural critique. This is exhibited in the work being done by platformist groups in tenants’ unions, workplaces, anti-poverty actions and fighting deportations to name only a few.

These actions, based upon serious debate and an estimation of the capacities to do the work properly, have moved the discussion of organization out of the clouds of speculation and brought it to the ground of everyday practice.

They have taken it from comfortable abstraction to practical reality based on the experiences of people living under actually existing capitalism.

Of course, the platform is simply a “*tactical and theoretical orientation*” and platformist organization is the bringing together of those who would develop that orientation through their practice. Thus it is always open to re-appraisal as circumstances suggest.

It’s important to keep in mind that the platform was only ever intended as a beginning, “*as the first step towards rallying libertarian forces.*” Far from being a fully fleshed out program of action it provides only “*the outlines, the skeleton of such a programme.*” Its authors recognized its many gaps, oversights and inadequate treatments.

Part of anarchism’s growth must include a commitment to developing visions and practices that can build anarchist movements rather than just “scenes” or cliques. If platformism offers a starting point for this process then it makes a welcome and necessary contribution to anarchism in North America.

Anarchist hobbyism is not much better than the hobbyism of stamp collecting or bird watching. Hobbies offer their practitioners moments of freedom, self-expression and relief from the daily grind but they don’t do much to keep the shit from piling up. Anarchism can do better than that and must do better than that. This is what platformism recognizes and it attempts to take anarchism out of esoteric hobbyism.

Anarchism must move from the realm of speculation to the terrain of possibility. In giving a serious impetus to this movement, platformist organizations offer much to anarchist efforts in North America.

### NOTES

(1) As well this will not be an exposition of the platform’s positions. Those accounts can be found else-

## Preface to 1989 translation

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**In 1926 a group of exiled Russian anarchists in France, the Dielo Trouda (Workers' Cause) group, published this pamphlet. It arose not from some academic study but from their experiences in the 1917 Russian revolution. They had taken part in the overthrow of the old ruling class, had been part of the blossoming of workers' and peasants' self-management, had shared the widespread optimism about a new world of socialism and freedom . . . and had seen its bloody replacement by State Capitalism and the Bolshevik Party dictatorship.**

The Russian anarchist movement had played a far from negligible part in the revolution. At the time there were about 10,000 active anarchists in Russia, not including the movement in the Ukraine led by Nestor Makhno. There were at least four anarchists on the Bolshevik dominated Military Revolutionary Committee which engineered the seizure of power in October. More importantly, anarchists were involved in the factory committees which had sprung up after the February revolution. These were based in workplaces, elected by mass assemblies of the workers and given the role of overseeing the running of the factory and co-ordinating with other workplaces in the same industry or region. Anarchists were particularly influential among the miners, dockers, postal workers, bakers and played an important role in the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees which met in Petrograd on the eve of the revolution. It was to these committees that the anarchists looked as a basis for a new self-management which would be ushered in after the revolution.

However the revolutionary spirit and unity of October 1917 did not last long. The Bolsheviks were eager to suppress all those forces on the left that they saw as obstacles blocking their way to "*one party*" power. The anarchists and some others on the left believed that the working class were capable of exercising power through their own committees and soviets (councils of elected delegates). The Bolsheviks did not. They put forward the proposition that the workers were not yet able to take control of their destiny and therefore the Bolsheviks would take power themselves as an "*interim measure*" during the "*transitional period*". This lack of confidence in the abilities of ordinary people and the authoritarian seizure of power was to lead to the betrayal of the interests of the working class, and all its hopes and dreams.

In April 1918 the anarchist centres in Moscow were attacked, 600 anarchists jailed and dozens killed. The excuse was that the anarchists were "uncontrollable", whatever that may have meant unless it was simply that they refused to obey the Bolshevik leaders. The real reason was the formation of the Black Guards which had been set up to fight the brutal provocation's and abuses of the Cheka (the forerunners of today's KGB).

the workers to take possession of the means of production (land, mines, factories and workshops, means of transport, etc.) and of stocks of manufactured goods; to organise immediately, on their own, an equitable distribution of consumer goods, and at the same time supply products for trade between communes and regions and for the continuation and intensification of production and all services useful to the public. We must, in all ways possible and according to local circumstances and opportunities, promote action by the workers' associations, the cooperatives, the voluntary groups - to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian powers, new governments, opposing them with violence if necessary, but above all rendering them useless. And where we do not find sufficient consensus among the people and cannot prevent the re-establishment of the State with its authoritarian institutions and its coercive bodies, we must refuse to take part or to recognise it, rebelling against its impositions and demanding full autonomy for ourselves and for all the dissident minorities. In other words, we must remain in an actual or potential state of rebellion and, unable to win in the present, must at least prepare for the future.

Is this what you too mean by the part the anarchists should take in the preparation and carrying out of the revolution?

From what I know of you and your work I am inclined to believe that you do.

But, when I see that in the Union that you support there is an Executive Committee to give ideological and organisational direction to the association I am assailed by the doubt that you would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme of the revolution.

If this is so we are poles apart.

Your organisation, or your managerial organs, may be composed of anarchists but they would only become nothing other than a government. Believing, in completely good faith, that they are necessary to the triumph of the revolution, they would, as a priority, make sure that they were well placed enough and strong enough to impose their will. They would therefore create armed corps for material defence and a bureaucracy for carrying out their commands and in the process they would paralyse the popular movement and kill the revolution.

That is what, I believe, has happened to the Bolsheviks.

There it is. I believe that the important thing is not the victory of our plans, our projects, our utopias, which in any case need the confirmation of experience and can be modified by experience, developed and adapted to the real moral and material conditions of the age and place. What matters most is that the people. men and women lose the sheeplike instincts and habits which thousands of years of slavery have instilled in them, and learn to think and act freely. And it is to this great work of moral liberation that the anarchists must specially dedicate themselves.



themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries.

Your question leaves me perplexed, because it lacks precision. It is possible to direct through advice and example, leaving the people - provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves - to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods.

In which way would you want to direct?

We are anarchists because we believe that government (any government) is an evil, and that it is not possible to gain liberty, solidarity and justice without liberty. We cannot therefore aspire to government and we must do everything possible to prevent others - classes, parties or individuals - from taking power and becoming governments.

The responsibility of the leaders, a notion by which it seems to me that you want to guarantee that the public are protected from their abuses and errors, means nothing to me. Those in power are not truly responsible except when faced with a revolution, and we cannot make the revolution every day, and generally it is only made after the government has already done all the evil it can.

You will understand that I am far from thinking that the anarchists should be satisfied with being the simple auxiliaries of other revolutionaries who, not being anarchists, naturally aspire to become the government.

On the contrary, I believe that we, anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideals. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will only be useful if won in that way.

Today we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and coordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system; and we must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised, and perhaps unorganisable, masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in short, prepare, and prepare ourselves, morally and materially, for the revolutionary act which will open the way to the future.

And then, in the revolution, we must take an energetic part (if possible before and more effectively than the others) in the essential material struggle and drive it to the utmost limit in destroying all the repressive forces of the State. We must encourage

Anarchists had to decide where they stood. One section worked with the Bolsheviks, and went on to join them, though a concern for efficiency and unity against reaction - Another section fought hard to defend the gains of the revolution against what they correctly saw would develop into a new ruling class. The Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine and the Kronstadt uprising were the last important battles. By 1921 the anti-authoritarian revolution was dead. This defeat has had deep and lasting effects on the international workers' movement.

It was the hope of the authors that such a disaster would not happen again. As a contribution they wrote what has become known as "The Platform". It looks at the lessons of the Russian anarchist movement, its failure to build up a presence within the working class movement big enough and effective enough to counteract the tendency of the Bolsheviks and other political groups to substitute themselves for the working class. It sets out a rough guide suggesting how anarchists should organise, in short how we can be effective.

It stated very simple truths such as it being ludicrous to have an organisation which contains groups that have mutually antagonistic and contradictory definitions of anarchism. It pointed out that we need formal agreed structures covering written policies, the role of officers, the need for membership dues and so on; the sort of structures that allow for large and effective democratic organisation.

When first published it came under attack from some of the best known anarchist personalities of the time such as Errico Malatesta and Alexander Berkman. They accused it of being "*Just one step away from Bolshevism*" and an attempt to "*Bolshevise anarchism*". This reaction was over the top but may have partly resulted from the proposal for a General Union of Anarchists. The authors did not spell out clearly what the relationship would be between this organisation and other groups of anarchists outside it. It goes without saying that there should be no problem about separate anarchist organisations working together on issues where they share a common outlook and strategy.

Neither, as has been said by both its detractors and some of its latter day supporters, is it a programme for "*moving away from anarchism towards libertarian communism*". The two terms are completely interchangeable. It was written to pinpoint the failure of the Russian anarchists in their theoretical confusion; and thus lack of national co-ordination, disorganisation and political uncertainty. In other words, ineffectiveness. It was written to open a debate within the anarchist movement. It points, not towards any compromise with authoritarian politics, but to the vital necessity to create an organisation that will combine effective revolutionary activity with fundamental anarchist principles.

It is not a perfect programme now, and neither was it back in 1926. It has its weaknesses. It does not explain some of its ideas in enough depth, it may be argued that it does not cover some important issues at all. But remember that it is a small pamphlet

and not a 26 volume encyclopaedia. The authors make it very clear in their own introduction that it is not any kind of 'bible'. It is not a completed analysis or programme, it is a contribution to necessary debate - a good starting point.

Lest anyone doubt its relevance today, it must be said that the basic ideas of "The Platform" are still in advance of the prevailing ideas in the anarchist movement internationally. Anarchists seek to change the world for the better, this pamphlet points us in the direction of some of the tools we need for that task.

Alan MacSimoin, 1989

## Historical Introduction

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**Nester Makhno and Piotr Arshinov with other exiled Russian and Ukrainian anarchists in Paris, launched the excellent bimonthly Dielo Trouda in 1925. It was an anarchist communist theoretical review of a high quality. Years before, when they had both been imprisoned in the Butirky prison in Moscow, they had hatched the idea of such a review. Now it was to be put into practice. Makhno wrote an article for nearly every issue during the course of three years. In 1926 the group was joined by Ida Mett (author of the expose of Bolshevism, "The Kronstadt Commune"), who had recently fled from Russia. That year also saw the publication of the 'Organisational Platform'.**

The publication of the 'Platform' was met with ferocity and indignation by many in the international anarchist movement. First to attack it was the Russian anarchist Voline, now also in France, and founder with Sebastian Faure of the 'Synthesis' which sought to justify a mish-mash of anarchist-communism, anarcho-syndicalism and individualist anarchism. Together with Molly Steimer, Fleshin, and others, he wrote a reply stating that to "*maintain that anarchism is only a theory of classes is to limit it to a single viewpoint*".

Not to be deterred, the Dielo Trouda group issued, on 5 February 1927 an invitation to an 'international conference' before which a preliminary meeting was to be held on the 12th of the same month. Present at this meeting, apart from the Dielo Trouda group, was a delegate from the French Anarchist Youth, Odeon; a Bulgarian, Pavel, in an individual capacity; a delegate of the Polish anarchist group, Ranko, and another Pole in an individual capacity; several Spanish militants, among them Orobon Fernandez, Carbo, and Gibanel; an Italian, Ugo Fedeli; a Chinese, Chen; and a Frenchman, Dauphin-Meunier; all in individual capacities. This first meeting was held in the small backroom of a Parisian cafe.

A provisional Commission was set up, composed of Makhno, Chen and Ranko. A circular was sent out to all anarchist groups on 22 February. An international conference was called and took place on 20 April 1927, at Hay-les-Roses near Paris, in the cinema Les Roses.

If, for example, in a conflict with an armed enemy force the man beside me acts as a coward, he may do harm to me and to everyone, but the shame can only be his for lacking the courage to sustain the role he took upon himself. If in a conspiracy a co-conspirator betrays and sends his companions to prison, are the betrayed the ones responsible for the betrayal?

The 'Platform' said: *'The whole Union is responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.'*

Can this be reconciled with the principles of autonomy and free initiative which the anarchists profess? I answered then: *'If the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they see fit? How can it be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Thus, the Union and through it the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything before having obtained the go-ahead, permission from the committee. And then, can an individual accept responsibility for the action of a collectivity before knowing what the latter will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves?'*

Certainly I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and cooperates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to coordinate his actions with those of his fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others and, thus, the common cause; and respect the agreements that have been made - except when wishing sincerely to leave the association when emerging differences of opinion or changed circumstances or conflict over preferred methods make cooperation impossible or inappropriate. Just as I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.

Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among the members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts, in my view, to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached.

The really important question that you raise in your letter concerns the function (\*le role\*) of the anarchists in the social movement and the way they mean to carry it out. This is a matter of basics, of the *raison d'être* of anarchism and one needs to be quite clear as to what one means.

You ask if the anarchists should (in the revolutionary movement and communistic organisation of society) assume a directional and therefore responsible role, or limit

# Reply to Nestor Makhno

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Errico Malatesta

Dear Comrade

I have finally seen the letter you sent me more than a year ago, about my criticism of the Project for organising a General Union of anarchists, published by a group of Russian anarchists abroad and known in our movement by the name of 'Platform'.

Knowing my situation as you do, you will certainly have understood why I did not reply.

I cannot take part as I would like in discussion of the questions which interest us most, because censorship prevents me from receiving either the publications that are considered subversive or the letters which deal with political and social topics, and only after long intervals and by fortunate chance do I hear the dying echo of what the comrades say and do. Thus, I knew that the 'Platform' and my criticism of it had been widely discussed, but I knew little or nothing about what had been said; and your letter is the first written document on the subject that I have managed to see.

If we could correspond freely, I would ask you, before entering into the discussion, to clarify your views which, perhaps owing to an imperfect translation of the Russian into French, seem to me to be in part somewhat obscure. But things being as they are, I will reply to what I have understood, and hope that I shall then be able to see your response.

You are surprised that I do not accept the principle of collective responsibility, which you believe to be a fundamental principle that guides, and must guide the revolutionaries of the past, present and future.

For my part, I wonder what that notion of collective responsibility can ever mean from the lips of an anarchist.

I know that the military are in the habit of decimating corps of rebellious soldiers or soldiers who have behaved badly in the face of the enemy by shooting at them indiscriminately. I know that the army chiefs have no scruples about destroying villages or cities and massacring an entire population, including children, because someone attempted to put up a resistance to invasion. I know that throughout the ages governments have in various ways threatened with and applied the system of collective responsibility to put a brake on the rebels, demand taxes, etc. And I understand that this could be an effective means of intimidation and oppression.

But how can people who fight for liberty and justice talk of collective responsibility when they can only be concerned with moral responsibility, whether or not material sanctions follow?!!!

As well as those who attended the first meeting was one Italian delegate who supported the 'Platform', Bifulchi, and another Italian delegation from the magazine 'Pensiero e Volontà', Luigi Fabbri, Camillo Berneri, and Ugo Fedeli. The French had two delegations, one of Odeon, favourable to the 'Platform' and another with Severin Ferandel.

A proposal was put forward to:

- 1 Recognise the class struggle as the most important facet of the anarchist idea;
- 2 Recognise Anarchist-Communism as the basis of the movement;
- 3 Recognise syndicalism as a principal method of struggle;
- 4 Recognise the need for a 'General Union of Anarchists' based on ideological and tactical unity and collective responsibility;
- 5 Recognise the need for a positive programme to realise the social revolution.

After a long discussion some modifications of the original proposal were put forward. However nothing was achieved as the police broke up the meeting and arrested all those present. Makhno risked being deported and only a campaign led by the French anarchists stopped this. But the proposal to set up an 'International Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Communists' had been thwarted, and some of those who had participated in the conference refused to sanction it any further.

Other attacks on the 'Platform' from Fabbri, Berneri, the anarchist historian Max Nettlau, and the famed Italian anarchist Malatesta followed. The Dielo Trouda group replied with 'A Reply to the Confusionists of Anarchism' and then a further statement by Arshnirov on the 'Platform' in 1929. Arshinov was soured by the reaction to the 'Platform' and returned to the USSR in 1933. He was charged with 'attempting to restore Anarchism in Russia' and executed in 1937, during Stalin's purges.

The 'Platform' failed to establish itself on an international level, but it did have an effect on several movements. In France, the situation was marked by a series of splits and fusion's, the 'Platformists' sometimes controlling the main anarchist organisation, at other times forced to leave and set up their own groupings. In Italy the supporters of the 'Platform' set up a small 'Unione Anarco Comunista Italiana' which soon collapsed. In Bulgaria, the discussion over organisation caused the reconstitution of the Anarchist Communist Federation of Bulgaria (F.A.C.B.) on a "*concrete platform*" "*for a permanent and structured anarchist specific organisation*" "*built on the principles and tactics of libertarian communism*". However, the hard-line 'Platformists' refused to recognise the new organisation and denounced it in their weekly 'Prouboujdane', before collapsing shortly afterwards.

Similarly in Poland, the Anarchist Federation of Poland (AFP) recognised the overthrow of capitalism and the state through class struggle and social revolution, and the creation of a new society based on workers and peasants councils and a specific organisation built on theoretical unity but rejected the 'Platform' saying it had authoritarian tendencies. In Spain, as Juan Gomez Casas in his 'Anarchist Organisation - The History of the F.A.I.' says "*Spanish anarchism was concerned with how to*

*retain and increase the influence that it had since the International first arrived in Spain". The Spanish anarchists did not at that time have to worry about breaking out of isolation, and of competing with the Bolsheviks. In Spain the Bolshevik influence was still small. The 'Platform' hardly affected the Spanish movement. When the anarchist organisation the 'Federacion Anarquista Iberica' was set up in 1927, the 'Platform' could not be discussed, though it was on the agenda, because it had not yet been translated. As J. Manuel Molinas, Secretary at the time of the Spanish- language Anarchist Groups in France - later wrote to Casas 'The platform of Arshinov and other Russian anarchists had very little influence on the movement in exile or within the country... 'The Platform' was an attempt to renew, to give greater character and capacity to the international anarchist movement in light of the Russian Revolution . Today, after our own experience, it seems to me that their effort was not fully appreciated."*

The World War interrupted the development of the anarchist organisations, but the controversy over the 'Platform' re-emerged with the founding of the Federation Comuniste Libertaire in France, and the Gruppi Anarchici di Azione Proletaria in Italy in the early 50's. Both used the 'Platform' as a reference point (there was also a small Federacion Comunista Libertaria of Spanish exiles). This was to be followed in the late 60s - early 70s by the founding of such groups as the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists in Britain and the Organisation Revolutionnaire Anarchiste in France.

The 'Platform' continues to be a valuable historical reference when class-struggle anarchists, seeking greater effectiveness and a way out of political isolation, stagnation and confusion, look around for answers to the problems they face.

Nick Heath, 1989

## Translator's introduction

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Eighty years have passed since the publication in the pages of the Russian anarchist monthly Delo Truda of the Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft), but the question of anarchist organization 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 organizations 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 organization without any serious political unity or strategies.

The Organizational Platform (often known in English-speaking circles as the "Or-

triving the circumstances that allow every militant not merely to demonstrate initiative, but to seize upon and develop it, making it an asset to the entire movement.

Thus far, and for want of an overall organization, our movement has not had such circumstances, thanks to which every authentic militant might find an outlet for their energies. It is common knowledge that certain of the movement's militants have given up the fight and thrown in their lot with the Bolsheviks, simply because they were not able to find an outlet for their efforts in the anarchist ranks. Moreover, it is beyond the question that many revolutionary workers, who find themselves in the ranks of the Communist Party of the USSR, have no illusions left regarding Bolshevik rule and might switch their allegiances to anarchism, but do not do so because there is no overall organization offering precise guidance.

Comrade Isidine stresses one of the merits of the Platform, in that it has broached the principle of collective responsibility in the movement.

However, she thinks of this principle solely in terms of the moral responsibility. Whereas, in a large, organized movement, responsibility can only find expression in the form of an organization's collective responsibility.

A moral responsibility that does not accommodate organizational responsibility is bereft of all value in collective endeavours, and turns into a mere formality devoid of all content.

What we need, comrade Isidine tells us, is not so much an organization as a definite practical policy line and a hard and fast immediate program. But each of those is unthinkable in the absence of prior organization. If only to raise issues of the program and its implementation, there would have to be an organization in place that might undertake to struggle towards their resolution.

At present, the Delo Truda Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad has given that undertaking, and enjoys the support in this of several anarchist toilers' organizations in North America, and by comrades remaining in Russia.

In the pioneering work carried out by these organizations, there may well be certain errors and gaps. These must be pointed out and help given in the repairing of them, but there must be no lingering doubt as to the basis and principle upon which these organizations operate and struggle: the drafting of a definite program, a well-determined policy and tactical line for libertarian communism, creation of an organization representing and spearheading the whole anarchist movement. This is vitally necessary to it.

Delo Trouda No.42-43 November/December 1928 pages 13-17.

Source: NEFAC



Nor do we agree with comrade Isidine when she says that the mouthpiece of an isolated group can work out a policy line of its own, and that, in this way, according to her, the organ of the General Union of Anarchists should mirror all of the views and tendencies existing inside the union. In fact, the mouthpiece of a particular group is not the concern merely of its editorial team, but also of all who lend it material and ideological backing. Since, in spite of this, a well-determined policy line is needed by that, say, local organ, it is all the more essential for the mouthpiece of the Union which carries a lot more responsibilities with regard to the anarchist movement as a whole than that particular organ.

To be sure, the Union mouthpiece must afford the minority a platform for its views, for otherwise the latter would be denied its right of free expression; however, while allowing it to set out its point of view, the Union mouthpiece must simultaneously have its own well-defined policy line and not just mirror the motley views and states of mind arising within the Union. In order to illustrate the example of a decision made by the Union as a body, but not enjoying unanimous backing, comrade Isidine cites the Makhnovist movement, anarchists having been divided in their attitudes towards it. That example, though, rather underlines the argument in favour of the ongoing necessity of a libertarian communist organization. The differing views expressed then are explicable primarily in terms of many libertarians' utter ignorance of that movement during its development; many of them were later powerless to analyze it and adopt a policy line with regard to a movement as huge and original as the Makhnovists. They needed a solid organization. Had they had one at the time, it would have considered itself obliged to scrutinize that movement minutely and then, on the basis of that scrutiny, it would have laid down the stance of to be adopted with regard to it. Which would have served libertarian communism and the Makhnovist movement better than the chaotic, disorganized stance adopted by the anarchists with regard to the latter during its lifetime. The same goes for the problem of war.

It comes to pass that differences arise in organizations over such matters, and in such cases splits are frequently the outcome. However, there is the argument for taking it as a rule that in such situations, the point of departure should be, not the individual conscience and tactics of every single anarchist, but rather the essential import of the theory, policy and tactics of the Union as a body. Only thus will the movement be able to preserve its policy line and its liaison with the masses.

Organization and the principle of delegation are not such impediments to the display of initiative as comrade Isidine believes. Quite the contrary. All wholesome initiative will always enjoy the backing of organization; the principles spelled out are not designed to stifle initiative, but to replace the fitful activity of individuals operating randomly and occasionally with the consistent and organized work of a collective body. It could not be otherwise. A movement that survived only thanks to the initiative and creativity of various groups and individuals, and which had no specific overall activity would run out of steam and go into decline.

For that very reason one of the fundamental tasks of our movement consists of con-

ganizational 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 organizational 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 organizational 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 Organizational 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  
Maintainer, The Nestor Makhno Archive, [www.nestormakhno.info](http://www.nestormakhno.info)

# ORGANIZATIONAL PLATFORM OF THE GENERAL UNION OF ANARCHISTS (DRAFT)

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*20 June 1926*

## INTRODUCTION

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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 organizational principles and organizational relations.

In every country the anarchist movement is represented by local organizations 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 disorganization. This disease of disorganization 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 disorganization 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.

significant organization, it is not going to be possible for us to supply those answers, nor to shoulder those responsibilities. Indeed, the consistently distinctive feature of our movement is that it does not have a unity of views on these fundamental issues. There are as many views as there are persons and groups.

Certain anarchist regard this situation as reflective of the multifariousness of anarchist thinking. Struggling labour has no idea what to make of this mixed bag, which strikes it as absurd. So, in order to rise above the morass of absurdity in which the anarchist movement has got bogged down, by loitering in the first stage of organization despite its numerical expansion, it is vital that a strenuous and decisive effort should be made. It must adopt the organizational formats for which it has long since been ripe; otherwise, it will lose its ability to hold its natural place in the fight for a new world. The urgent necessity of this new step is acknowledged by many comrades, the ones for whom the fate of libertarian communism is bound up with the fate of struggling labour. Comrade Isidine, if we understand her right, is not to be numbered among the anarchists of whom we spoke earlier, but she is not a participant in our movement either; she takes part only in debate, in a critical way, and, to be sure, she helps its progress in doing so.

Let us now tackle the various critical points indicated by comrade Isidine. Everybody knows that any wholesome principle can, once denatured, serve a cause contrary to the one to which it was originally assigned.

In our ranks, this holds true for federalism. Sheltering behind that cover, lots of groups and certain individuals perpetuated acts, the results of which fell on the movement as a whole. All intervention in such cases came to nothing, because the perpetrators of these acts of infamy sought refuge in their autonomy, invoking the federalism that allowed them to do as they saw fit. Obviously, that was merely a crass misrepresentation of federalism. The same might be said of other principles, and especially, of the principle of organizing a General Union of Anarchists, should it fall into the clutches of witless or unscrupulous persons.

Comrade Isidine disagrees profoundly with the principle of majority. We, on the other hand, reckon that on this point debate is scarcely necessary. In practice, this matter has long been resolved. Almost always and almost everywhere, our movement's practical problems are resolved by majority vote. At the same time, the minority can cling to its own views, but does not obstruct the decision; generally, and of its own volition, it makes concessions. This is perfectly understandable as there cannot be any other way of resolving problems for organizations that engage in practical activity. There is, anyway, no alternative if one really wants to act.

In the event of differences of opinion between the majority and the minority being due to factors so important that neither side can give ground, a split comes about, regardless of the principles and positions espoused by the organization prior to that moment.

slowed down or take a new leap forward. By remaining in the stagnation of the past and present our movement will gain nothing. On the contrary, it is vital that in view of the events that loom before us it should have every chance to carry out its functions.

I set great store by your reply.

with revolutionary greetings,  
Nestor Makhno  
1928

Source: International Anarchism, part of the Struggle collection

## Elements Old and New in Anarchism: A Reply to Maria Isidine

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Petr Arshinov

Comrade Isidine counters our conception of a revolutionary anarchist organization with the old conception corresponding to an age when anarchists had no real organization, but, by means of mutual understanding, came to agreement upon goals and the means of achieving them.

In fact, the old party was confined to analogous ideas and was bereft of authentic organizational format; it corresponded above all to the birth of the anarchist movement, when its pioneers were groping their way forward, not having been tempered by the harsh experience of life.

Socialism too, in its day, had a difficult gestation. However, as the masses' social struggle evolved and became acute, all the tendencies that were vying to influence the outcome took on more precise political and organizational forms. Those tendencies which failed to keep in step with this evolution lagged far behind life. We Russian anarchists were especially sensible of this during the two revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Whereas, at their outset, we were in the forefront of the fighting, as soon as the constructive phase began, we found ourselves sidelined beyond recovery and, ultimately, remote from the masses.

This was not the result of chance. Such an attitude flowed inescapably from our impotence, from the organizational point of view as well as from the vantage point of our ideological confusion. The current, of this decisive age, requires of us something more than a "party" devoid of organizational format and erected solely upon the notion of a beautiful idea. These times require that the anarchist movement, as a whole, supply answers to a whole host of issues of the utmost importance, whether relating to the social struggle or to communist construction. They require that we feel a responsibility towards our objectives. However, until such time as we have a real and

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 organization, 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 organization. On the contrary, his aspirations with regard to organization, 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 organization.

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 organization 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 organization 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 organization 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 disorganization, 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 organized collective practice.

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

We reject as theoretically and practically unfounded the idea of creating an organization using the recipe of the "synthesis", that is to say, bringing together the supporters of the various strands of anarchism. Such an organization 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 organizational 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 organization.

The only approach which can lead to a solution of the general organizational problem is, as we see it, the recruitment of anarchism's active militants on the basis of specific theoretic, tactical and organizational 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 which 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 "Organizational 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 organization, 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.

Only the collective spirit of its militants and their collective responsibility will allow modern anarchism to eliminate from its circles the idea, historically false, that anarchism cannot be a guide - either ideologically or in practice - for the mass of workers in a revolutionary period and therefore could not have overall responsibility.

I will not, in this letter, dwell on the other parts of your article against the "Platform" project, such as the part where you see "*a church and an authority without police*". I will express only my surprise to see you use such an argument in the course of your criticism. I have given much thought to it and cannot accept your opinion.

No, you are not right. And because I am not in agreement with your confutation, using arguments that are too facile, I believe I am entitled to ask you:

1. Should anarchism take some responsibility in the struggle of the workers against their oppressors, capitalism, and its servant the State? If not, can you say why? If yes, must the anarchists work towards allowing their movement to exert influence on the same basis as the existing social order?
2. Can anarchism, in the state of disorganisation in which it finds itself at the moment, exert any influence, ideological and practical, on social affairs and the struggle of the working class?
3. What are the means that anarchism should adopt outside the revolution and what are the means of which it can dispose to prove and affirm its constructive concepts?
4. Does anarchism need its own permanent organisations, closely tied among themselves by unity of goal and action to attain its ends?
5. What do the anarchists mean by institutions to be established with a view to guaranteeing the free development of society?
6. Can anarchism, in the communist society it conceives, do without social institutions? If yes, by what means? If no, which should it recognise and use and with what names bring them into being? Should the anarchists take on a leading function, therefore one of responsibility, or should they limit themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries?

Your reply, dear Malatesta, would be of great importance to me for two reasons. It would allow me better to understand your way of seeing things as regards the questions of organising the anarchist forces and the movement in general. And - let us be frank - your opinion is immediately accepted by most anarchists and sympathisers without any discussion, as that of an experienced militant who has remained all his life firmly faithful to his libertarian ideal. It therefore depends to a certain extent on your attitude whether a full study of the urgent questions which this epoch poses to our movement will be undertaken, and therefore whether its development will be



# About the “Platform”

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Nestor Makhno

Dear Comrade Malatesta,

I have read your response to the project for an “*Organisational Platform of a General Union of Anarchists*”, a project published by the group of Russian anarchists abroad.

My impression is that either you have misunderstood the project for the “Platform” or your refusal to recognise collective responsibility in revolutionary action and the directional function that the anarchist forces must take up, stems from a deep conviction about anarchism that leads you to disregard that principle of responsibility.

Yet, it is a fundamental principle, which guides each one of us in our way of understanding the anarchist idea, in our determination that it should penetrate to the masses, in its spirit of sacrifice. It is thanks to this that a man can choose the revolutionary way and ignore others. Without it no revolutionary could have the necessary strength or will or intelligence to bear the spectacle of social misery, and even less fight against it. It is through the inspiration of collective responsibility that the revolutionaries of all epochs and all schools have united their forces; it is upon this that they based their hope that their partial revolts - revolts which opened the path for the oppressed - were not in vain, that the exploited would understand their aspirations, would extract from them the applications suitable for the time and would use them to find new paths toward their emancipation.

You yourself, dear Malatesta, recognise the individual responsibility of the anarchist revolutionary. And what is more, you have lent your support to it throughout your life as a militant. At least that is how I have understood your writings on anarchism. But you deny the necessity and usefulness of collective responsibility as regards the tendencies and actions of the anarchist movement as a whole. Collective responsibility alarms you; so you reject it.

For myself, who has acquired the habit of fully facing up to the realities of our movement, your denial of collective responsibility strikes me not only as without basis but dangerous for the social revolution, in which you would do well to take account of experience when it comes to fighting a decisive battle against all our enemies at once. Now my experience of the revolutionary battles of the past leads me to believe that no matter what the order of revolutionary events may be, one needs to give out serious directives, both ideological and tactical. This means that only a collective spirit, sound and devoted to anarchism, could express the requirements of the moment, through a collectively responsible will. None of us has the right to dodge that element of responsibility. On the contrary, if it has been until now overlooked among the ranks of the anarchists, it needs now to become, for us, communist anarchists, an article of our theoretical and practical programme.

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 organizational principles in anarchism.

We invite all Russian anarchist organizations, 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 organizational 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 organized 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

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## 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 phi-

night's sleep. The error of Malatesta is that he does not take account of the extremely important circumstances of which the Organisational Platform is the product, not solely of the Russian revolution but equally of the anarchist movement in this revolution. Now, it is impossible not to take account of this circumstance so that one can resolve the problem of anarchist organisation, of its form and its theoretical basis. It is indispensable to look at the place occupied by anarchism in the great social upheaval in 1917. What was the attitude of the insurgent masses with regard to anarchism and the anarchists? What did they appreciate in them? Why, despite this, did anarchism receive a setback in this revolution? What lessons are to be drawn? All these questions, and many others still, must inevitably put themselves to those who tackle the questions raised by the Platform. Comrade Malatesta has not done this. He has taken up the current problem of organisation in dogmatic abstraction. It is pretty incomprehensible for us, who have got used to seeing in him, not an ideologue but a practician of real and active anarchism. He is content to examine in what measure this or that thesis of the Platform is or is not in agreement with traditional points of view of anarchism, then he refutes them, in finding them opposed to those old conceptions. He cannot bring himself to thinking that this might be the opposite, that it is precisely these that could be erroneous, and that this has necessitated the appearance of the Platform. It is thus that can be explained all the series of errors and contradictions raised above.

Let us note in him a grave neglect; he does not deal at all with the theoretical basis, nor with the constructive section of the Platform, but uniquely with the project of organisation. Our text has not solely refuted the idea of the Synthesis, as well as that of anarcho-syndicalism as inapplicable and bankrupt, it has also advanced the project of a grouping of active militants of anarchism on the basis of a more or less homogeneous programme. Comrade Malatesta should have dwelt with precision on this method; however, he has passed over it in silence, as well as the constructive section, although his conclusions apparently apply to the entirety of the Platform. This gives his article a contradictory and unstable character.

Libertarian communism cannot linger in the impasse of the past, it must go beyond it, in combatting and surmounting its faults. The original aspect of the Platform and of the Dielo Trouda group consists precisely in that they are strangers to out of date dogmas, to ready made ideas, and that, quite the contrary, they endeavour to carry on their activity starting from real and present facts. This approach constitutes the first attempt to fuse anarchism with real life and to create an anarchist activity on this basis. It is only thus that libertarian communism can tear itself free of a superannuated dogma and boost the living movement of the masses.

Dielo Trouda No.30 May 1928 pages 4-11.

Translated by Nick Heath (Anarchist Federation)

Source: International Anarchism, part of the Struggle collection

cussion on this subject is superfluous. In practice, it has been resolved a long time ago. Always and everywhere among us, practical problems have been resolved by a majority of votes. It is completely understandable, because there is no other way of resolving these problems inside an organisation that wants to act.

In all the objections raised against the Platform, there is lacking up to the moment the understanding of the most important thesis that it contains; the understanding of our approach to the organisational problem and to the method of its resolution. In effect, an understanding of these is extremely important and possesses a decisive significance with the idea of a precise appreciation of the Platform and all the organisational activity of the Dielo Trouda group.

The only way to move away from chaos and revive the anarchist movement is a theoretical and organisational clarification of our milieu, leading to a differentiation and to the selection of an active core of militants, on the basis of a homogeneous theoretical and practical programme. It is in this that resides one of the principle objectives of our text.

What does our clarification represent and what must it lead to ? The absence of a homogeneous general programme has always been a very noticeable failing in the anarchist movement, and has contributed to making it very often very vulnerable, its propaganda not ever having been coherent and consistent in relation to the ideas professed and the practical principles defended. Very much to the contrary, it often happens that what is propagated by one group is elsewhere denigrated by another group. And that not solely in tactical applications, but also in fundamental theses.

Certain people defend such a state of play in saying that in such a way is explained the variety of anarchist ideas. Well, let us admit it, but what interest can this variety represent to the workers?

They struggle and suffer today and now and immediately need a precise conception of the revolution, which can lead them to their emancipation right away; they don't need an abstract conception, but a living conception, real, elaborated and responding to their demands. Whilst the anarchists often proposed, in practice, numerous contradictory ideas, systems and programmes, where the most important was neighbour to the insignificant, or just as much again, contradicted each other. In such conditions, it is easily understandable that anarchism cannot and will not ever in the future, impregnate the masses and be one with them, so as to inspire its emancipatory movement.

For the masses sense the futility of contradictory notions and avoid them instinctively; in spite of this, in a revolutionary period, they act and live in a libertarian fashion.

To conclude, comrade Malatesta thinks that the success of the Bolsheviks in their country stops Russian anarchists who have edited the Platform from getting a good

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 working 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 realization 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 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.

how, if we do not have a General Union of Anarchists, we cannot furnish common responses on all those vital questions.

At the start of his article, comrade Malatesta appears to salute the idea of the creation of a vast anarchist organisation, however, in categorically repudiating collective responsibility, he renders impossible the realisation of such an organisation. For that will not only not be possible if there exists no theoretical and organisational agreement, constituting a common platform where numerous militants can meet. In the measure to which they accept this platform, that must be obligatory for all. Those who do not recognise these basic principles, cannot become, and besides would themselves not want to, become a member of the organisation.

In this fashion, this organisation will be the union of those who will have a common conception of a theoretical, tactical and political line to be realised.

Consequently, the practical activity of a member of the organisation will be naturally in full harmony with the general activity, and inversely the activity of all the organisation will not know how to be in contradiction with the conscience and activity of each of its members, if they accept the programme on which the organisation is founded.

It is this that characterises collective responsibility: the entire Union is responsible for the activity of each member, knowing that they will accomplish their political and revolutionary work in the political spirit of the Union. At the same time, each member is fully responsible for the entire Union, seeing that his activity will not be contrary to that elaborated by all its members. This does not signify in the least any authoritarianism, as comrade Malatesta wrongly affirms, it is the expression of a conscientious and responsible understanding of militant work.

It is obvious that in calling on anarchists to organise on the basis of a definite programme, we are not taking away as such the right of anarchists of other tendencies to organise as they think fit. However, we are persuaded that, from the moment that anarchists create an important organisation, the hollowness and vanity of the traditional organisations will be revealed.

The principle of responsibility is understood by comrade Malatesta in the sense of a moral responsibility of individuals and of groups. This is why he only grants to conferences and their resolutions the role of a sort of conversation between friends, which in sum pronounce only platonic wishes.

This traditional manner of representing the role of conferences does not stand up to the test of life. In effect, what would be the value of a conference if it only had "opinions" and did not charge itself with realising them in life? None. In a vast movement, a uniquely moral and non-organisational responsibility loses all its value.

Let us come to the question concerning majority and minority. we think that all dis-



springing up here, springing up there, not seeking what they wanted in a firm fashion, and which most often vanished at the end of a little time without leaving a trace. It would be desperately naive and stupid to believe that workers could support and participate in such “organisations”, from the moment of the social struggle and communist construction.

We have taken the habit of attributing the defeat of the anarchist movement of 1917-19 in Russia to the statist repression of the Bolshevik Party; this is a big mistake. The Bolshevik repression impeded the extension of the anarchist movement during the revolution but it wasn't the only obstacle. It's rather the internal impotence of the movement itself which was one of the principal causes of this defeat, an impotence proceeding from the vagueness and indecision which characterised different political affirmations concerning organisation and tactics.

Anarchism had no firm and concrete opinion on the essential problems of the social revolution; an opinion indispensable to satisfy the seeking after of the masses who created the revolution. The anarchists praised the communist principle of: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs” but they never concerned themselves with applying this principle to reality, although they allowed certain suspect elements to transform this great principle into a caricature of anarchism - just remember how many con-men benefitted by seizing for their personal profit the assets of the collectivity. The anarchists talked a lot about revolutionary activity of the workers, but they could not help them, even in indicating approximately the forms that this activity should take; they did not know how to sort out the reciprocal relations between the masses and their centre of ideological inspiration. They pushed the workers to shake off the yoke of Authority, but they did not indicate the means of consolidating and defending the conquests of the Revolution. They lacked clear and precise conceptions, of a programme of action on many other problems. It was this that distanced them from the activity of the masses and condemned them to social and historical impotence. It is in this that we must seek the primordial cause of their defeat in the Russian revolution.

And we do not doubt that, if the revolution broke out in several European countries, anarchists would suffer the same defeat because they are no less-if not even more so-divided on the plan of ideas and organisation.

The present epoch, when, by millions, workers engaged on the battlefield of social struggle, demanded direct and precise responses from the anarchists concerning this struggle and the communist construction which must follow it; it demanded of the same, the , the collective responsibility of the anarchists regarding these responses and anarchist propaganda in general. If they did not assume this responsibility the anarchists like anyone else in this case, do not have the right to propagandise in an inconsequent manner among the working masses, who struggled in agreeing to heavy sacrifices and lost numberless victims.

At this level, it is not a question of a game or the object of an experiment. That is

## **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 organized 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 organizations 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 organization 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

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’ organizations of producers and consumers, unified on a federative basis. This system rules out both the organization 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 organization 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, reorganized 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.

The activity of anarchists is divided into two phases: the pre-revolutionary period

If that appears strange to comrade Malatesta, we strongly affirm that the activity of the most active anarchists-which includes himself-assume, by necessity, an individualist character; even if this activity is distinguished by a high personal responsibility, it concerns only an individual and not an organisation. In the past, when our movement was just being born as a national or international movement, it could not be otherwise; the first stones of the mass anarchist movement had to be laid; an appeal had to be launched to the working masses to invite them to engage in the anarchist way of struggle. That was necessary, even if it was only the work of isolated individuals with limited means. These militants of anarchism fulfilled their mission; they attracted the most active workers towards anarchist ideas. However, that was only half of the job.. At the moment where the number of anarchist elements coming from the working masses increased considerably, it became impossible to restrict oneself to carrying on an isolated propaganda and practice, individually or in scattered groups. To continue this would be like running on the spot. We have to go beyond so as not to be left behind. The general decadence of the anarchist movement is exactly explained thus: we have accomplished the first step without going further.

This second step consisted and still consists in the grouping of anarchist elements, coming from the working masses, in an active collective capable of leading the organised struggle of the workers with the aim of realising the anarchist ideas.

The question for anarchists of all countries is the following: can our movement content itself with subsisting on the base of old forms of organisation, of local groups having no organic link between them, and each acting on their side according to its particular ideology and particular practice? Or, just fancy, must our movement have recourse to new forms of organisation which will help it develop and root it amongst the broad masses of workers?

The experience of the last 20 years, and more particularly that of the two Russian revolutions -1905 and 1917-19 - suggests to us the reply to this question better than all the “theoretical considerations”.

During the Russian Revolution, the working masses were won to anarchist ideas; nevertheless anarchism, as an organised movement suffered a complete setback whilst from the beginning of the revolution, we were at the most advanced positions of struggle, from the beginning of the constructive phase we found ourselves irremediably apart from the said constructive phase, and consequently outside the masses. This was not pure chance: such an attitude inevitably flowed from our own impotence, as much from an organisational point of view as from our ideological confusion.

This setback was caused by the fact that, throughout the revolution, the anarchists did not know how to put over their social and political programme and only approached the masses with a fragmented and contradictory propaganda; we had no stable organisation. Our movement was represented by organisations of encounter,

the notions of duty and constancy. For up to now the favourite principle in which most anarchists are educated can be explained by the following axiom: "I do what I want, I take account of nothing". It is very natural that anarchists of this species, impregnated by such principles, are violently hostile to all ideas of organised anarchism and of collective responsibility.

Comrade Malatesta is foreign to this principle, and it is for this reason that his text provokes this reaction in us. Perplexity, because he is a veteran of international anarchism, and if he has not grasped the spirit of the Platform, its vital character and its topicality, which derives from the requirements of our revolutionary epoch. Regret, because, to be faithful to the dogma inherent in the cult of individuality, he has put himself against (let us hope this is only temporary) the work which appears as an indispensable stage in the extension and external development of the anarchist movement.

Right at the start of his article, Malatesta says that he shares a number of theses of the Platform or even backs them up by the ideas he expounds. He would agree in noting that the anarchists did not and do not have influence on social and political events, because of a lack of serious and active organisation.

The principles taken up by comrade Malatesta correspond to the principal positions of the Platform. One would have expected that he would have as equally examined, understood and accepted a number of other principles developed in our project, because there is a link of coherence and logic between all the theses of the Platform. However, Malatesta goes on to explain in a trenchant manner his difference of opinion with the Platform. He asks whether the General Union of Anarchists projected by the Platform can resolve the problem of the education of the working masses. He replies in the negative. He gives as reason the pretended authoritarian character of the Union, which according to him, would develop the idea of submission to directors and leaders.

On what basis can such a serious accusation repose? It is in the idea of collective responsibility, recommended by the Platform, that he sees the principal reason for formulating such an accusation. He cannot admit the principle that the entire Union would be responsible for every member, and that inversely each member would be responsible for the political line of all the Union. This signifies that Malatesta does not precisely accept the principle of organisation which appears to us to be the most essential, in order that the anarchist movement can continue to develop.

Nowhere up to here has the anarchist movement attained the stage of a popular organised movement as such. Not in the least does the cause of this reside in objective conditions, for example because the working masses do not understand anarchism or are not interested in it outside of revolutionary periods; no, the cause of the weakness of the anarchist movement resides essentially in the anarchists themselves. Not one time yet have they attempted to carry on in an organised manner either the propaganda of their ideas or their practical activity among the working masses.

and the revolutionary period. In each case, anarchists can only carry out their role as an organized 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 organization 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 organizations) 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 organizations, free workers' and peasants' cooperatives, etc.).

The worker and peasant classes, organized 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 organization 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. Organized 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 organizing 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 manoeuvre

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 coordinated 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. Organized anarchist elements and the organized 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 realization.

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.

## VII. The transition period

Socialist political parties use the term “transition period” to refer to a specific phase

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# The Old and New in Anarchism

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## Translators introduction

Malatesta wrote a reply to the Organisational Platform whilst under house arrest in fascist Italy. It appeared in the Swiss anarchist paper *Le Reveil* and then as a pamphlet in Paris. One of the authors of the Platform, Piotr Arshinov, replied to Malatesta's criticisms in the paper set up by him and Nestor Makhno in Paris, *Dielo Trouda*. Equally, Makhno sent a long letter to Malatesta, stating that a misunderstanding of the text by Malatesta must have led to their disagreement. Malatesta did not get this letter for over a year, and replied as soon as he could. He still expressed disagreement with the Platform, opposing moral responsibility to collective responsibility, and criticising the Executive Committee mentioned in the Platform as “*a government in good and due form*”. Makhno replied a second time (see my translation of excerpts of this letter in correspondence in *Freedom* 18 November 1995). Malatesta appears to have conceded that it was a question of words, because if it collective responsibility meant “*the accord and solidarity which must exist between the members of an association... we will be close to understanding each other*”. Isolation due to house arrest and a problem of language may have contributed to these disagreements between Malatesta and the Platformists. Arshinov's reply to Malatesta which I have translated from the French, is its first appearance in the English language.

I have taken the liberty of translating “*masses ouvrières*” as “*working masses*”. In the past this phrase has often been translated as “*toiling masses*”, which I feel to be somewhat passé. Whatever, Russian anarchists meant by this the industrial working class and the majority of the peasantry which they felt must have unity of action and aims.

Nick Heath

## Text of The Old and the New in Anarchism

In the anarchist organ *Le Reveil* of Geneva, in the form of a leaflet, comrade Errico Malatesta has published a critical article on the project of the Organisational Platform edited by the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad.

This article has provoked perplexity and regret in us. We very much expected, and we still expect, that the idea of organised anarchism would meet an obstinate resistance among the partisans of chaos, so numerous in the anarchist milieu, because that idea obliges all anarchists who participate in the movement to be responsible and poses



The administrative bodies which they nominate - Correspondence Commission, etc. - have no executive powers, have no directive powers, unless on behalf of those who ask for and approve such initiatives, and have no authority to impose their own views - which they can certainly maintain and propagate as groups of comrades, but cannot present as the official opinion of the organisation. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals which groups and individuals communicate to them; and they serve - for those who require such a service - to facilitate relations between the groups and cooperation between those who agree on the various initiatives. Whoever wants to is free to correspond with whomsoever he wishes, or to use the services of other committees nominated by special groups.

In an anarchist organisation the individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others. In any case a given organisation lasts for as long as the reasons for union remain greater than the reasons for dissent. When they are no longer so, then the organisation is dissolved and makes way for other, more homogeneous groups.

Clearly, the duration, the permanence of an organisation depends on how successful it has been in the long struggle we must wage, and it is natural that any institution instinctively seeks to last indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the consequence of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continual changes of circumstances. When it is no longer able to accomplish a useful task it is better that it should die.

Those Russian comrades will perhaps find that an organisation like the one I propose and similar to the ones that have existed, more or less satisfactorily at various times, is not very efficient.

I understand. Those comrades are obsessed with the success of the Bolsheviks in their country and, like the Bolsheviks, would like to gather the anarchists together in a sort of disciplined army which, under the ideological and practical direction of a few leaders, would march solidly to the attack of the existing regimes, and after having won a material victory would direct the constitution of a new society. And perhaps it is true that under such a system, were it possible that anarchists would involve themselves in it, and if the leaders were men of imagination, our material effectiveness would be greater. But with what results? Would what happened to socialism and communism in Russia not happen to anarchism?

Those comrades are anxious for success as we are too. But to live and to succeed we don't have to repudiate the reasons for living and alter the character of the victory to come.

We want to fight and win, but as anarchists - for Anarchy.

Malatesta

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 realization of the workers' ideals - their independence, freedom and equality - as un-realizable 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 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 revolutionary syndicalist organizations on day two of the revolution (i.e. are they to be the organizers 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'

principle and statutory norm. This is an ideal which, perhaps, in daily life in general, is difficult to attain in entirety, but it is a fact that in every human grouping anarchy is that much nearer where agreement between majority and minority is free and spontaneous and exempt from any imposition that does not derive from the natural order of things.

So if anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern human society in general - in which individuals are nonetheless constrained to accept certain restrictions, since they cannot isolate themselves without renouncing the conditions of human life - and if they want everything to be done by the free agreement of all, how is it possible for them to adopt the idea of government by majority in their essentially free and voluntary associations and begin to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?

It is understandable that non-anarchists would find Anarchy, defined as a free organisation without the rule of the majority over the minority, or vice versa, an unrealisable utopia, or one realisable only in a distant future; but it is inconceivable that anyone who professes to anarchist ideas and wants to make Anarchy, or at least seriously approach its realisation - today rather than tomorrow - should disown the basic principles of anarchism in the very act of proposing to fight for its victory.

In my view, an anarchist organisation must be founded on a very different basis from the one proposed by those Russian comrades.

Full autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord between those who believe it useful to unite in cooperating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be built and designed. Then the groups, the federations of groups, the federations of federations, the meetings, the congresses, the correspondence committees and so forth. But all this must be done freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed, and with the sole view of giving greater effect to efforts which, in isolation, would be either impossible or ineffective. Thus congresses of an anarchist organisation, though suffering as representative bodies from all the above-mentioned imperfections, are free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal relationships among the most active comrades, to coordinate and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means of taking action, to acquaint all on the situation in the various regions and the action most urgently needed in each; to formulate the various opinions current among the anarchists and draw up some kind of statistics from them - and their decisions are not obligatory rules but suggestions, recommendations, proposals to be submitted to all involved, and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them, and for as long as they accept them.

different circumstance and on the choice of persons to whom to entrust executive and directional responsibilities.

In reality - as it emerges from the text of the Project itself- the will of the Union can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the Executive Committee and decide on all the important questions. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups, and these representatives would decide on what to do, as ever by a majority of votes. So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by the majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority.

Furthermore it should be pointed out that, given the conditions in which anarchists live and struggle, their congresses are even less truly representative than the bourgeois parliaments. And their control over the executive bodies, if these have authoritarian powers, is rarely opportune and effective. In practice anarchist congresses are attended by whoever wishes and can, whoever has enough money and who has not been prevented by police measures. There are as many present who represent only themselves or a small number of friends as there are those truly representing the opinions and desires of a large collective. And unless precautions are taken against possible traitors and spies - indeed, because of the need for those very precautions - it is impossible to make a serious check on the representatives and the value of their mandate.

In any case this all comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism .

It is well known that anarchists do not accept majority government (democracy), any more than they accept government by the few (aristocracy, oligarchy, or dictatorship by one class or party) nor that of one individual (autocracy, monarchy or personal dictatorship).

Thousands of times anarchists have criticised so-called majority government, which anyway in practise always leads to domination by a small minority.

Do we need to repeat all this yet again for our Russian comrades?

Certainly anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need to adapt to the wishes of the many. And usually, in the interests of living peacefully together and under conditions of equality, it is necessary for everyone to be motivated by a spirit of concord, tolerance and compromise. But such adaptation on the one hand by one group must on the other be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a

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 “anarchize” the syndicalist movement with the organization of anarchist forces outside of that movement. Only if just such a link is established does it become possible to “anarchize” 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 coordinated with the activity of the anarchist organization outside the syndicalist union. Put differently, we must enter the revolutionary labour movement as an organized force, answerable to the general anarchist organization for our work inside the syndicalist unions, and receiving guidance from that organization.

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 organized anarchist collective, and certainly not as tiny amateurish groups, without organizational links or a common theoretical base.

Groups of anarchists in the workplace, working to create anarchist syndicalist un-

ions, 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 organization 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

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### 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 realization requires a more or less prolonged social revolutionary process, one steered by the organized 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).

### 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,

In fact, their General Union appears to consist of so many partial organisations with secretariats which ideologically direct the political and technical work; and to co-ordinate the activities of all the member organisations there is a Union Executive Committee whose task is to carry out the decisions of the Union and to oversee the *“ideological and organisational conduct of the organisations in conformity with the ideology and general strategy of the Union.”*

Is this anarchist? This, in my view, is a government and a church. True, there are no police or bayonets, no faithful flock to accept the dictated ideology; but this only means that their government would be an impotent and impossible government and their church a nursery for heresies and schisms. The spirit, the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist.

Listen if this is not true.

*“The executive organ of the general libertarian movement - the anarchist Union - will introduce into its ranks the principle of collective responsibility; the whole Union will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member; and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.”*

And following this, which is the absolute negation of any individual independence and freedom of initiative and action, the proponents, remembering that they are anarchists, call themselves federalists and thunder against centralisation, *“the inevitable results of which”*, they say, *“are the enslavement and mechanisation of the life of society and of the parties.”*

But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?

Moreover, the authors of the Project say that it is the “Union” which proposes and disposes. But when they refer to the wishes of the Union do they perhaps also refer to the wishes of all the members? If so, for the Union to function it would need everyone always to have the same opinion on all questions. So if it is normal that everyone should be in agreement on the general and fundamental principles, because otherwise they would not be and remain united, it cannot be assumed that thinking beings will all and always be of the same opinion on what needs to be done in the



reasons, do not get on with; and respect one another and could never be equally good and useful militants for anarchism?

Besides, even the authors of the Project (Plateforme) declare as “inept” any idea of creating an organisation which gathers together the representatives of the different tendencies in anarchism. Such an organisation, they say, *“incorporating heterogeneous elements, both on a theoretical and practical level, would be no more than a mechanical collection (assemblage) of individuals who conceive all questions concerning the anarchist movement from a different point of view and would inevitably break up as soon as they were put to the test of events and real life.”*

That’s fine. But then, if they recognise the existence of different tendencies they will surely have to leave them the right to organise in their own fashion and work for anarchy in the way that seems best to them. Or will they claim the right to expel, to excommunicate from anarchism all those who do not accept their programme? Certainly they say they *“want to assemble in a single organisation”* all the sound elements of the libertarian movement; and naturally they will tend to judge as sound only those who think as they do. But what will they do with the elements that are not sound?

Of course, among those who describe themselves as anarchists there are, as in any human groupings, elements of varying worth; and what is worse, there are some who spread ideas in the name of anarchism which have very little to do with anarchism. But how to avoid the problem? Anarchist truth cannot and must not become the monopoly of one individual or committee; nor can it depend on the decisions of real or fictitious majorities. All that is necessary - and sufficient - is for everyone to have and to exercise the widest freedom of criticism and for each one of us to maintain their own ideas and choose for themselves their own comrades. In the last resort the facts will decide who was right.

Let us therefore put aside the idea of bringing together all anarchists into a single organisation and look at this General Union which the Russians propose to us for what it really is - namely the Union of a particular fraction of anarchists; and let us see whether the organisational method proposed conforms with anarchist methods and principles and if it could thereby help to bring about the triumph of anarchism.

Once again, it seems to me that it cannot.

I am not doubting the sincerity of the anarchist proposals of those Russian comrades. They want to bring about anarchist communism and are seeking the means of doing so as quickly as possible. But it is not enough to want something; one also has to adopt suitable means; to get to a certain place one must take the right path or end up somewhere else. Their organisation, being typically authoritarian, far from helping to bring about the victory of anarchist communism, to which they aspire, could only falsify the anarchist spirit and lead to consequences that go against their intentions.

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 cooperation 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 organization 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 cooperation 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 realization 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.

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 organizing 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 cooperation between these two classes of workers.

In order to establish this cooperation, 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 cooperatives 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 cooperatives 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.

### **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 revo-

Hence there is an impelling need for specifically anarchist organisations which, both from within and outside the unions, struggle for the achievement of anarchism and seek to sterilise all the germs of degeneration and reaction.

But it is obvious that in order to achieve their ends, anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, remain in harmony with the principles of anarchism; that is, they must know how to blend the free action of individuals with the necessity and the joy of cooperation which serve to develop the awareness and initiative of their members and a means of education for the environment in which they operate and of a moral and material preparation for the future we desire.

Does the project under discussion satisfy these demands?

It seems to me that it does not. Instead of arousing in anarchists a greater desire for organisation, it seems deliberately designed to reinforce the prejudice of those comrades who believe that to organise means to submit to leaders and belong to an authoritarian, centralising body that suffocates any attempt at free initiative. And in fact it contains precisely those proposals that some, in the face of evident truths and despite our protests, insist on attributing to all anarchists who are described as organisers. Let us examine the Project.

First of all, it seems to me a mistake - and in any case impossible to realise - to believe that all anarchists can be grouped together in one "General Union" - that is, in the words of the Project, In a single, active revolutionary body.

We anarchists can all say that we are of the same party, if by the word "party" we mean all who are on the same side, that is, who share the same general aspirations and who, in one way or another, struggle for the same ends against common adversaries and enemies. But this does not mean it is possible - or even desirable - for all of us to be gathered into one specific association. There are too many differences of environment and conditions of struggle; too many possible ways of action to choose among, and also too many differences of temperament and personal incompatibilities for a General Union, if taken seriously, not to become, instead of a means for coordinating and reviewing the efforts of all, an obstacle to individual activity and perhaps also a cause of more bitter internal strife.

As an example, how could one organise in the same way and with the same group a public association set up to make propaganda and agitation, publicly and a secret society restricted by the political conditions of the country in which it operates to conceal from the enemy its plans, methods and members? How could the education-ists, who believe that propaganda and example suffice for the gradual transformation of individuals and thus of society, adopt the same tactics as the revolutionaries, who are convinced of the need to destroy by violence a status quo that is maintained by violence and to create, in the face of the violence of the oppressors, the necessary conditions for the free dissemination of propaganda and the practical application of the conquered ideals? And how to keep together some people who, for particular

of human society should be based.

Judging by certain polemics it would seem that there are anarchists who spurn any form of organisation; but in fact the many, too many, discussions on this subject, even when obscured by questions of language or poisoned by personal issues, are concerned with the means and not the actual principle of organisation. Thus it happens that when those comrades who sound the most hostile to organisation want to really do something they organise just like the rest of us and often more effectively. The problem, I repeat, is entirely one of means.

Therefore I can only view with sympathy the initiative that our Russian comrades have taken, convinced as I am that a more general, more united, more enduring organisation than any that have so far been set up by anarchists - even if it did not manage to do away with all the mistakes and weaknesses that are perhaps inevitable in a movement like ours - which struggles on in the midst of the incomprehension, indifference and even the hostility of the majority - would undoubtedly be an important element of strength and success, a powerful means of gaining support for our ideas.

I believe it is necessary above all and urgent for anarchists to come to terms with one another and organise as much and as well as possible in order to be able to influence the direction the mass of the people take in their struggle for change and emancipation.

Today the major force for social transformation is the labour movement (union movement) and on its direction will largely depend the course events take and the objectives of the next revolution. Through the organisations set up for the defence of their interests the workers develop an awareness of the oppression they suffer and the antagonism that divides them from the bosses and as a result begin to aspire to a better life, become accustomed to collective struggle and solidarity and win those improvements that are possible within the capitalist and state regime. Then, when the conflict goes beyond compromise, revolution or reaction follows. The anarchists must recognise the usefulness and importance of the union movement; they must support its development and make it one of the levers in their action, doing all they can to ensure that, by cooperating with other forces for progress, it will open the way to a social revolution that brings to an end the class system, and to complete freedom, equality, peace and solidarity for everybody.

But it would be a great and a fatal mistake to believe, as many do, that the labour movement can and should, of its own volition, and by its very nature, lead to such a revolution. On the contrary, all movements based on material and immediate interests (and a big labour movement can do nothing else) if they lack the stimulus, the drive, the concerted effort of people of ideas, tend inevitably to adapt to circumstances, they foster a spirit of conservatism and fear of change in those who manage to obtain better working conditions, and often end up creating new and privileged classes, and serving to uphold and consolidate the system we would seek to destroy.

lutionary 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.

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 organizations.

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 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

## **A Project of Anarchist Organisation**

Errico Malatesta

I recently happened to come across a French pamphlet (in Italy today [1927], as is known, the non-fascist press cannot freely circulate), with the title “*Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Project)*”.

This is a project for anarchist organisation published under the name of a “*Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad*” and it seems to be directed particularly at Russian comrades. But it deals with questions of equal interest to all anarchists; and it is, clear, including the language in which it is written, that it seeks the support of comrades worldwide. In any case it is worth examining, for the Russians as for everyone, whether the proposal put forward is in keeping with anarchist principles and whether implementation would truly serve the cause of anarchism.

The intentions of the comrades are excellent. They rightly lament the fact that until now the anarchists have not had an influence on political and social events in proportion to the theoretical and practical value of their doctrines, nor to their numbers, courage and spirit of self-sacrifice - and believe that the main reason for this relative failure is the lack of a large, serious and active organisation.

And thus far I could more or less agree.

Organisation, which after all only means cooperation and solidarity in practice, is a natural condition, necessary to the running of society; and it is an unavoidable fact which involves everyone, whether in human society in general or in any grouping of people joined by a common aim.

As human beings cannot live in isolation, indeed could not really become human beings and satisfy their moral and material needs unless they were part of society and cooperated with their fellows, it is inevitable that those who lack the means, or a sufficiently developed awareness, to organise freely with those with whom they share common interests and sentiments, must submit to the organisations set up by others, who generally form the ruling class or group and whose aim is to exploit the labour of others to their own advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small number of the privileged has always been the outcome of the inability of the greater number of individuals to agree and to organise with other workers on production and enjoyment of rights and benefits and for defence against those who seek to exploit and oppress them.

Anarchism emerged as a response to this state of affairs, its basic principle being free organisation, set up and run according to the free agreement of its members without any kind of authority; that is, without anyone having the right to impose their will on others. And it is therefore obvious that anarchists should seek to apply to their personal and political lives this same principle upon which, they believe, the whole



workers and peasants. The Platform contains a whole constructive section dealing with the role of the workers and peasants in the wake of the revolution. By contrast, it says nothing about the specific role at that juncture of the World Union of Anarchists. And this is no accident, but rather a deliberate omission. Because all political and economic activity will then be concentrated, as we see it, in the toilers' organs of self-administration: in the trade unions, the factory committees, the councils, etc.

But, to credit the authors of the "Reply", it is only then that the Anarchist Communist Party comes into its own; positioned somewhere up above, it is to direct the "*higher*" and "*lower*" toilers' organizations, the army, etc. That is their way of dealing with a document of which they propose to offer a critique, their way of treating the reader to whom they promised truth. The irresponsibility of these methods will surely startle any reader capable of reflection on matters political.

In scrutinizing the other reasons for the anarchist movement's weakness, the authors of the "Reply" point to this one: "*The current state of mind of the masses who have neither the wherewithal nor the desire to investigate, analyze and make comparisons and who, consequently still and always plump for the easiest option, the course of the least resistance according to the "ready-made" recipes on offer from demagogues of every hue.*"

Let us conclude our examination of the "Reply" by these remarkable utterances from its authors. Remarkable words in that they demonstrate the futility and hypocrisy of their speechifying about the creative potential "*of the masses, their autonomous activity, the dire threat that ideological direction poses to that potential, etc. If the Platform is to be believed, one gets the impression that the masses are not only incapable of finding the paths to their liberation, but also have not the slightest desire to do so, and prefer to follow the line of least resistance.*"

If that is how things really stand, things are going badly for anarchism, since it is by force that it has to draw the masses to its side. In setting themselves the target of rebutting the Platform, regardless of cost, even should they have to fly in the face of reason, the facts of life itself, in order to achieve that, the authors of the "Reply" have been reduced to declarations like those.

We hope that we have proved, in the foregoing exposition, that the program of the authors of the "Reply" was quite without foundation and that they are typical specimens of the political incoherence in our movement. As for the ethical side of the "Reply", that cannot be described as anything other than an object lesson in calumny.

Paris, 18th August 1927

the statist manner of organizing 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 coordination 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 organized 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 organizations - it will be answerable to them and under their political direction.

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

which 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.

## ORGANIZATIONAL PART

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### The principles of anarchist organization

The general constructive positions set out above represent the organizational 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 organized 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 organization, the General Union of Anarchists. All of anarchism's active militants must direct their resources into the creation of this organization.

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

#### 1. Unity of theory

Theory is the force which guides the activity of individual people and individual organizations along a specific route towards a specific goal. Naturally, it must be shared by all persons and all organizations who 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 organization 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

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 na-

newspaper in every country which would discuss and examine all controversial issues, from every angle, and thus bring about an entente between anarchists.

We have already spelled out our position regarding this notion of synthesis and we shall not rehearse our reasoning here. We shall confine ourselves simply to adding that the existence of discrepancies between the opinions of anarchists is due more to the lack of a periodical to act as a forum for discussion (there were some once). A forum for discussion will never manage to bring the divergent currents together, but it will assuredly clutter up the minds of the labouring masses. Furthermore, a whole swathe of individuals claiming to be anarchists has nothing in common with anarchism. Gathering these people (on the basis of what?) into "*one family*" and describing that gathering as "*anarchist organization*" would not only be nonsense, it would be positively harmful. If that were to happen by some mischance, all prospects for anarchism's developing into a revolutionary social movement of toilers would be banished.

It is not an indiscriminating mix, but rather a selection from the wholesome anarchist forces and the organization thereof into an anarchist-communist party that is vital to the movement; not a hotchpotch synthesis, but differentiation and exploration of the anarchist idea so as to bring them to a homogeneous movement program. That is the only way to rebuild and strengthen the movement in the labouring masses.

To conclude, a few words on the ethical features of the "Reply". In reality, it is not to the Platform that this "Reply" is addressed, but to a whole series of positions duly misrepresented in advance by the authors of the "Reply". There is not a single paragraph to which they reply without preamble. They always start off ferreting out the Jesuitical recesses of the position and, after having concocted those, they put their objections to them. In their hands, the Platform has been turned into a fiendish conspiracy against the anarchist movement and against the working class. This is how they represent the thinking of the Platform: "*On top, the leading party (the General Union of Anarchists); down below, the higher peasant and worker organizations directed by the Union; lower still, the inferior organizations, the organs of struggle against the counter-revolution, the army, etc.*" Elsewhere, they talk about "*investigatory and political violence*" institutions. A whole picture is painted there, a portrait of a police state, directed by the General Union of Anarchists.

One might well ask: why this recourse to all these lies? The authors of the "Reply" have read the Platform. So they ought to know that the thinking behind the Platform boils down to the organization of the anarchist forces for the period of struggle against the capitalist class society; its object is simply to spread anarchism among the masses and ideological direction of their struggle. The moment that the toilers have defeated the capitalist society, a new era in their history will be ushered in, an era when all social and political functions are transferred to the hands of the workers and peasants who will set about the creation of the new life. At that point, the anarchist organizations and, with them, the General Union, will lose all their significance and they should, in our view, gradually melt away into the productive organizations of the

lutionary army has no further *raison d'être* and will fade away. To tell the truth, the whole chapter in the Platform that deals with defence of the revolution stressed only the need that workers will have to utilize the methodology of a common operational plan and common command. The Platform also labours the point that these methods as well as the idea of the revolutionary army are to be regarded only as a stratagem necessitated by civil war and as no way as anarchist principles. It strikes us that no sane and honest mind could find grounds there of accusing the Platform with pushing the idea of a standing, centralized army. But the authors of the "Reply" manage it nonetheless. They charge us with nothing more nor less than aspiring to create a centralized army placed at the disposal of the overall productive organizations directed, in their turn, by the Union/Party. We believe that anarchist circles are clear-sighted enough to grasp for themselves that this view is absurd and incoherent. The "Reply" proposes no hard and fast solution to the problem of defence of the revolution. After having proffered the most motley shower of insults against the Platform, the authors of the "Reply" start to mumble something about union of the armed forces in the revolution, thereby aping the idea of the Platform, albeit misrepresenting it as usual.

But it is by examining the necessity, announced by the Platform, of the revolutionary army's being subordinated to the toilers' higher productive organizations that the authors of the "Reply" display a true penetrating mind, a real masterpiece of farsightedness. How dare you, they exclaim, argue that is not a transitional period? Precisely how subordination of the revolutionary army to the workers' and peasants' productive organizations constitutes a transitional period -- that is the inscrutable enigma. The toilers' military forces will not in any way become an end in themselves; they will have only one way of implementing the formalities of the worker and peasant revolution. As a result, it is to the workers and peasants that the army should be answerable and by them alone that it should be directed politically. According to the authors of the "Reply" the revolutionary army, or indeed the armed groupings, should not be answerable to those organizations; they will lead an independent existence and fight as they deem fit. Thus are folk who have the effrontery to speak of things upon which they have never reflected hoist on their own petard!

#### **(7) Anarchist organization**

On this score too, the authors of the "Reply" are primarily concerned with misrepresenting the meaning of the Platform. First of all they turn the idea of an Executive Committee into that of a Party Central Committee, a committee that issues orders, makes laws and commands. 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.

While rejecting the idea of a broad anarchist organization based on a homogeneous ideology, the authors of the "Reply" peddle the idea of a synthesizing organization wherein all stands of anarchism are gathered together into "*one single family*". To pave the way for the establishment of that organization, they propose to set up a

ture. 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 organization 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 organization 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 organization.

This distortion has caused a great deal of disorganization 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 organizations 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 no rights without responsibilities, just as there cannot be decisions without these being implemented. That is all the more unacceptable in an anarchist organization which takes only obligations upon itself with regard to the workers and their social revolution.

As a result, the federalist type of anarchist organization, while acknowledging the right of every member of the organization to independence, freedom of opinion, personal initiative and individual liberty, entrusts each member with specific organizational 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 organization function properly and move towards the goal it has set.

The idea of the General Union of Anarchists raises the issue of the coordination of the activities of all the forces of the anarchist movement.

Each organization 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 coordinate the activity of all of the Union's affiliated organizations, 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 organizations, in keeping with the overall theoretical and tactical line of the Union; monitoring the general state of the movement; maintaining functional organizational ties between all the member organizations of the Union, as well as with other organizations.

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 organization promoting social revolution (and also an anti-authoritarian organization) 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 organizations, 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 working-class revolutionary trade unions, it must attempt to develop a network of

## (6) Defence of the revolution

Examining the problem of the defence of the revolution, the Platform remarks first the most effective means of defending the revolution would be to find a radical solution to the problems of production, supply and the land. But the Platform also foresaw that the solution to these problems will necessarily spark a bitter civil war in which the exploiter class will strive to retain or regain its privileges. That is quite inescapable. The Platform indicates also that the class currently in power will in that war resort to *"the methodology of all military action: unity of operational planning and unity of overall command."* It goes on to say that the toilers will also have to have recourse to these methods of struggle, and all the armed units that will spring up voluntarily will have to amalgamate into a single army. This necessity does not make it impossible for local detachments to wage an independent fight against the counter-revolution. It does, though, require that a revolutionary worker and peasant army confront the broad front of the counter-revolutionary onslaught.

In order to combat the counter-revolution, the workers must possess their common operational plan and overall command. Otherwise, the enemy will attack them where they are weakest and least expecting it.

History is the best proof of this:

1. All popular revolutions were especially successful when the army ceased blindly to serve the ruling classes and threw in its lot with the rebels.
2. During the Russian Revolution, it was those popular movements that managed to unite their armed forces, units of importance, to which military operations affecting an entire region were entrusted, that met with appreciable success. This was the case with the insurgent movement headed by Makhno. Insurgent groups that failed to understand this necessity perished in the face of a well organized enemy. There were hundreds of instances of that in the Russian Revolution.
3. The Russian counter-revolution led by Kolchak, Denikin, Yudenich and others owes its military defeat chiefly to the fact that it failed to establish a single operational plan and united command for the counter-revolutionary armies. Thus while Kolchak was (in 1918) near Kazan and making for Moscow, Denikin stayed in the Caucasus; but it was only when Kolchak was "liquidated" (in 1919) that Denikin rounded on Moscow. (Note: We are not speaking here of the partisan warfare waged by the partisans against Kolchak and Denikin and which brought the latter to military and social defeat.)

Insurgent revolutionary work during the civil war must know how to use the methodology of unity of operational planning and overall command of the revolutionary armed forces. Without that, the workers and peasants will be beaten by counter-revolutionary forces highly conversant with the military arts. The Platform pointed out how necessary it was that workers utilize that methodology as well as create a single army embracing all of the armed forces at the revolution's disposal. It goes without saying that the Platform insists upon this organization only for the duration of the civil war in the fight against the counter-revolution. Once that war ends, the revo-



common with the one sketched in the Platform. Not a bit of it, though. All one finds there is an admission that the creative endeavor of the social revolution “*will be a natural start to the formation of an anarchist society.*” Now that declaration is borrowed, word for word, from the Platform, which states “*the victory of the toilers... will be the start of the construction of the anarchist society which, once outlined, will then, without interruption, follow its line of development, growing stronger and more rounded.*” In truth, with our adversaries, the right side of their minds has no idea what the left side is thinking and doing.

### **(5) The problem of production**

Nor do the authors of the “Reply” fail to raise categorical objections to us in relation to the problem of production as well. It is very hard to get an idea of what prompts their objections, as well as what they are advocating in their exposition. The idea of unified and coordinated production set out by the Platform leaves them cold, as does the idea of agencies directing production and elected by the workers. In the idea of coordinated production they divine the spectre of centralization and statism and they offer instead the idea of decentralized production.

The idea of unified production is clear: the Platform looks upon the whole of modern history as one single, giant workshop of producers, created by the efforts of several generations of toilers and altogether the property of everybody and no one in particular.

Particular branches of production are inseparably interconnected and they can neither produce nor exist as separate entities. The unity of that workshop is determined by technical factors. But there is only one unified and coordinated production capable of existence in this mammoth factory. Production carried out in accordance with an overall scheme prescribed by the workers’ and peasants’ production organizations, a plan drafted in the light of the needs of society as a whole. The products of that factory belong to the whole of labouring society. Such production is truly socialist.

It is very much to be regretted that the authors of the “Reply” omitted to explain how the envisage decentralized production. But we may suppose that they are talking about several independent productions, isolated industries, separate trusts and maybe even separate factories producing and disposing of their products as they see fit. The authors of the “Reply” declare that decentralized production will operate according to federalist principles. But, since the federated units will be nothing more than small private entrepreneurs (to wit, the united workforce of a single plant, trust or industry), production will not be at all socialist; it will be capitalist, in that it is based on the parcelization of ownership, which will not take long to provoke competition and antagonisms.

Unified production is not centralized production directed from authoritarian “centre”. Unified production is merely authentically communist production.

revolutionary peasant economic organizations, 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 organization, 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 organized cutting edge in their process of emancipation.

Dielo Truda - Nestor Mhakno, Ida Mett, Piotr Archinov, Valevsky, Linsky  
1926

Source: <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/1000>

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## **ON REVOLUTIONARY DISCIPLINE**

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*by Nestor Makhno (January 1926)*

Some comrades have put the following question to me: *How do I conceive revolutionary discipline?*

I take revolutionary discipline to mean the self-discipline of the individual, set in the context of a strictly-prescribed collective activity equally incumbent upon all, the responsible policy line of the members of that collective, leading to strict congruence between their practice and their theory.

Without discipline in the organization - the vanguard of the revolution - one cannot think of undertaking any serious activity for the cause of the Revolution. Without discipline, the revolutionary vanguard cannot be revolutionary vanguard; since, if it were in a disorderly, disorganized state, it would be powerless to analyse and provide guidance on the pressing questions of the day, something that as initiator the masses would demand of it.

I base these positions on observation and experience and on the following prerequisites:

The Russian revolution bore within it a content that was essentially anarchist in many respects. Had the anarchists been closely organized and had they in their actions abided strictly by a well-defined discipline, they would never have suffered the crushing defeat they did.

But because the anarchists “*of all persuasions and tendencies*” did not represent (not even in their specific groups) a homogeneous collective with a disciplined line

of action, they were unable to withstand the political and strategic scrutiny which revolutionary circumstances imposed upon them.

Their disorganization reduced them to political impotence, giving birth to two categories of anarchist.

One category was made up of those who hurled themselves into the systematic occupation of bourgeois homes, where they set up house and lived in comfort. These are the ones I term the “*anarchist tourists*,” who wandered around from town to town, in hope of stumbling across a place to live for a time along the way, taking their leisure and hanging around as long as possible to live in comfort and ease.

The other category was made up of those who severed all real connections with anarchism (although a few of them inside the USSR are now passing themselves off as the sole representatives of Russian anarchism) and who fairly swooped upon the positions offered them by the bolsheviks, even when the authorities were shooting anarchists who remained true to their revolutionary credentials by denouncing the bolsheviks’ treachery.

In the light of these lamentable facts, it will be readily understood why I cannot remain indifferent to the nonchalance and negligence currently to be encountered in anarchist circles. It prevents them from establishing a collective, faced with which those people who grab at anarchism or who are long dead to the cause of anarchism or who just blabber on about anarchism, its unity and actions against the enemy (but who, when it comes to action, run from this unity), would be seen in a different light and would be pushed away to the place they belong. That is why I am speaking about an anarchist organization that rests upon the principle of comradely discipline.

Such an organization would lead to the necessary coordination of all of the living forces of anarchism in the country and would help anarchists to take their rightful place in the great struggle of labour against capital.

Only in this way can the idea of anarchism gain a mass following, and not be impoverished. The only ones who could balk at such an organizational set-up are the irresponsible, empty-headed chatterboxes who have until now almost dominated our movement, through our own fault.

Responsibility and discipline must not frighten the revolutionary. They are the travelling companions of the practice of social anarchism.

Delo Truda, N°7-8, December 1925-January 1926, p.6.

Translated from Russian to French by Alexandre Skirda and from French to English by Paul Sharkey. English translation revised with reference to the Russian by the Nestor Makhno Archive.

period are: a breach with the old order of things and the installation of a new economic and political system, a system which as yet does not represent the complete emancipation of the toilers. Communist anarchism, however, repudiates transitional arrangements of that sort. It advocates social revolution of the toilers that will lay the foundations for their free and egalitarian society.

It strikes us that the problem could not be posed any more clearly. But the authors of the “Reply” have contrived to discover the precise opposite in the Platform. In their estimation, the Platform is, all in all, merely “*an attempt to peddle this idea (of the transitional period) and to graft it on to anarchism.*” And here comes the proof: the Platform looks forward to certain points when the press (or rather the abuse thereof) of the class hostile to the toilers will have been shut down by struggling labour. And the authors of the “Reply” insist: why, doesn’t that amount to a “*transitional period really*”? Then again the Platform declares the anarchist communist principle “*from each according to abilities, to each according to needs*” in no way makes it incumbent upon labour in rebellion to feed everyone, including its avowed enemies who, for counter-revolutionary motives, would refuse to play a part in the production and would dream of nothing other than decapitating the revolution. That principle merely means equality in distribution within the parameters of the egalitarian society; it does not at all apply to those who have placed themselves outside that society for counter-revolutionary purposes. Furthermore, that principle means that every member of labouring society who profits from its services should serve it in accordance with their strengths and capabilities and not at all in accordance with their whims or indeed not at all. The authors of the “Reply” again raise the hue and cry: what about that, is that not a transitional period? They proclaim “*the application of the principle of equal enjoyment of all available and freshly manufactured products, regardless of their quantity, by all the members of the collectivity, without exception, restriction or privilege of any sort.*” True, it is none too clear from this formula whether the rebel workers must feed the bourgeoisie that plays no part in the production and uses its ingenuity to oppose them. But, since that formula is opposed to the labour principle of the Platform, we have to conclude that the toilers do have a duty to maintain the bourgeoisie, even if they have not the slightest desire to do so.

We shall not enter into discussion of such a viewpoint. The working class itself will resolve it practically, come the social revolution. However we do believe that it will not shower the authors of the “Reply” with praise for the tender care with which they surrounded a bourgeois that refuses to work. Would the authors of the “Reply” not be better advised to devise some way of turning bourgeois into honest members of labouring society instead of watching out for them with such solicitude?

But the most impressive sleight of hand by the authors of the “Reply” comes only later. After having seen them rebut all of the positions of the Platform, after having seen them dismiss its authors as shameful Bolsheviks, and their constructive system as a transitional political and economic State system -- one would expect to find them presenting a bold outline of the post-revolutionary anarchist society, of the society in which everybody would find their every need met and which would have nothing in

We shall demonstrate anon to what end our adversaries pretend to be alarmed by the expression “*direction of the masses and events from the ideas point of view*.” But are they not then like those odd sorts who, being terrified by the idea of influence, are afraid of influencing themselves? 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.

But, in order that the anarchist idea should become the lodestone of the masses, we have to develop well organized ideological activity which in turn necessitates an anarchist organization whose members spread very clear and coherent notions among the masses. All of which is so elementary and self-evident that it is embarrassing to have to spell it out again in this day and age to folk who claim to be conversant with anarchism. The authors of the “Reply” are, moreover well aware of that, since, after having misrepresented our point of view and peddled a mountain of absurdities regarding the General Union of Anarchists, they close by saying that the anarchists’ role in economic organization is to influence the masses morally and in terms of ideas, while that of specifically anarchist organizations would be to help them indeed from this “ideas” point of view. But is not saying that tantamount to borrowing the positions of the Platform after having blackened the name? What is the meaning of “*influence and assist the masses from the idea point of view*”? Are anarchists going to render ideological assistance to a mob in the process of mounting a pogrom or of carrying out a lynch law? All assistance afforded to the masses in the realm of ideas must be consonant with the ideology of anarchism, otherwise it will not be anarchist assistance. “*Ideologically assist*” simply means: influence from the ideas point of view, direct from the ideas point of view [a leadership of ideas]. Bakunin, Kropotkin, Reclus, Malatesta - those are men who were, incontestably, ideological directors of the masses. But we aim to see that such direction, exercised occasionally, becomes a permanent factor. That is only going to be possible when there is an organization possessed with a common ideology and whose membership engages in ideologically coordinated activity, without being sidetracked or dispersed as has been the case hitherto. Those are the terms in which the question is posed. And it is in vain that the authors of the “Reply” will dream up sophisms in order to show that direction in the realm of ideas mean authoritarian direction.

It is the masses of people that will make the revolution themselves, say our adversaries. Understood. But they ought to know that the revolutionary mass is forever nurturing in its bosom a minority of initiators who precipitate and direct events. And we are entitled to assert that in a true social revolution the supporters of worker anarchism alone will account for that minority.

#### **(4) The idea of the transitional period**

The Platform notes that the social political parties understand the term “*transitional period*” to mean a specific stage in the life of a people, the essential features of which

## **The Problem of Organization and the Notion of Synthesis**

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*Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad (Dielo Truda editorial group) March 1926*

Several comrades have had their say in the columns of Delo Truda (Workers’ Cause) regarding the question of anarchist principles and organizational format.

Not that they all approached the problem from the same angle. The essence of this matter, as spelled out by the editorial staff of Dielo Truda, consists of the following:

We anarchists who agitate and fight for the emancipation of the proletariat, must, at all costs, have an end of the dissipation and disorganization prevailing in our ranks, for these are destroying our strength and our libertarian endeavours.

The way to go about this is to create an organization that might not perhaps enfold all of anarchism’s active militants, but assuredly the majority of them, on the basis of specific theoretical and tactical positions and would bring us to a firm understanding as to how these might be applied to practice.

It goes without saying that the tackling of this issue should go hand in hand with the elaboration of theoretical and tactical positions that would furnish the basis, the platform for this organization. For we should be wasting our time talking about the need to organize our forces and nothing would come of it, were we not to associate the idea of such organization with well-defined theoretical and tactical positions.

The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad has never lost site of this latter question. In a series of articles carried in Delo Truda its viewpoint has been spelled out in part on the important particulars of the programme: anarchism’s relationship to the toilers’ class struggle, revolutionary syndicalism, the transitional period, etc.

Our next task will be to arrive at a clear formulation of all these positions of principle, then to set them all out in some more or less rounded organizational platform which will serve as the basis for uniting a fair number of militants and groups into one and the same organization. The latter will in turn serve as a springboard to a more complete fusion of the anarchist movement’s forces.

That then is the route we have chosen to a resolution of the organizational problem. It is not our intention to proceed on this occasion with a total re-examination of values or elaboration of any new positions. Our view is that everything necessary for the construction of an organization founded upon a given platform can be found in Anarchist Communism, which espouses the class struggle, the equality and liberty of every worker, and is realized in the anarchist Commune.

Those comrades who champion the notion of a theoretical synthesis of anarchism's various currents have quite another approach to the organizational question. It is a pity that their view is so feebly spelled out and elaborated and that it is thus hard to devise a thorough-going critique of it. Essentially, their notion is as follows: Anarchism is divided into three strands -- communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and individualist anarchism. Although each of these strands has features particular to itself, all three are so akin and so close to one another that it is only thanks to an artificial misconception that they enjoy separate existences.

In order to give rise to a strong, powerful anarchist movement, it is necessary that they should fuse completely. That fusion, in turn, implies a theoretical and philosophical synthesis of these teachings that we can tackle the structure and format of an organization representing all three tendencies. Such then is the content of the synthesis thus conceived, as set out in the "*Declaration on Anarchists' Working Together*", and a few other articles by comrade Volin carried by *The Anarchist Messenger* and *Delo Truda*. We are in total disagreement with this idea. Its inadequacy is glaringly obvious. For a start, why this arbitrary division of anarchism into three strands? There are others as well. We might mention, say, Christian anarchism, associationism, which, be it said in passing, is closer to communist anarchism than to individualist anarchism. Then again, what precisely is the consistency of the "*theoretical and philosophical*" discrepancies between the aforementioned three tendencies, if a synthesis between them is to be devised?

For one thing, before we talk about a theoretical synthesis of communism, syndicalism and individualism, we would need to analyze these currents. Theoretical analysis would quickly show the extent to which the wish to synthesize these currents is hare-brained and absurd. Indeed, does not the talk of a "*synthesis between communism and syndicalism*" signify some sort of contrast between them? Many anarchists have always regarded syndicalism as one of the forms of the proletarian revolutionary moment, as one of the fighting methods espoused by the working class in fighting for its emancipation.

We regard communism as the goal of the labouring classes' liberation movement.

So, can the end be in contradiction with the means? Only the wobbly reasoning of some dilettante intellectual ignorant of the history of anarchist communist thought could place them side by side and seek to arrive at a synthesis of them. For our own part, we are well aware that anarchist communism has always been syndicalist in that it regards the existence and expansion of independent professional organizations as a necessity for the social victory of the toilers.

So it could only be, and was in reality only a matter, not of theoretical synthesis of communism and syndicalism, but rather of the role that syndicalism should be assigned in communist anarchism's tactics and in the social revolution of the toilers.

The theoretical inadequacies of the supporters of the synthesis is even more striking

True, there are many obscure points in anarchism. But those are of quite another character. The fact is that alongside unquestionably anarchist personnel, the movement contains a number of liberal tendencies and individualist deviations that prevent it from having a stable base. To restore the movement to health, it must be freed of those tendencies and deviations; but this purge is, to a very large extent, prevented by just those individualists, open or disguised (and the authors of the "Reply" are undoubtedly to be numbered among the latter), who are part of the movement.

## **(2) The class struggle in the anarchist system**

The Platform declares quite plainly that the "*class struggle between labour and capital was at all times in the history of human societies the chief factor determining the form and structure of those societies*," that anarchism emerged and developed on the terrain of that struggle, in the bosom of oppressed, labouring humanity; that anarchism is a social movement of the oppressed masses. The attempt to represent it as a general humanitarian problem amounts to a social and historical falsehood. In the struggle between capital and labour, anarchism fights wholeheartedly and inseparably alongside the latter.

The authors of the "Reply" counter that clear and precise message with "*anarchism is a synthesis of elements: class, humanitarian, individual*." That is the view held in common with liberals fearful of relying upon the truths of labour, who are forever dithering ideologically between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat looking for common humanitarian values to use as connections between the contending classes. But we know well that there is no mankind, one and indivisible, that the demands of anarchist communism will be met only through the determination of the working class and that the activity of mankind as a whole, including the bourgeoisie, will not come into that at all; consequently the viewpoint peddled by the liberals who do not know how to pick a side in the worldwide social tragedy cannot have anything to do with the class struggle, and thus with anarchism.

## **(3) On the problem of direction of the masses and events from the ideal point of view**

The "Reply" rather takes issue more with the idea of an authoritarian leadership of its own devising than with the idea set out in the Platform. And, broadly speaking, throughout the "Reply" its authors strive to divine some hidden meaning to the enigmatic Platform and go on to paint a picture that might strike terror not just into anarchists but even into certain overly sentimental statist. Thus, the influence wielded in the realm of ideas by the anarchists over the revolutionary trade unions is turned by them into subordination of those unions to the anarchist organization. The method of the common revolutionary military strategy applied in defence of the revolution "*becomes*" (in their interpretation) the idea of a centralized State's army. The notion of an executive committee of an anarchist organization "*becomes*" (in their representation of it) that of a dictatorial Central Committee demanding unquestioning obedience. One might think that the authors of the "Reply" are too ignorant to be capable of grasping the essence of all these problems. Not a bit of it! All of the misrepresentations and alterations made by the latter are made to the same end.



### (1) The causes of the anarchist movement's weakness

The Platform locates the main cause of the anarchist movement's weakness in the absence of organizing factors and organized relations within the movement, which plunges it into a state of "*chronic disorganization*". At the same time, the Platform adds that this disorganization itself nestles in a few shortcomings of an ideological nature. We can see these shortcomings in a whole range of petit-bourgeois principles which have nothing to do with anarchism. The disorganization prevailing in our ranks draws succor from ideological confusion. And in order to overcome such practical and ideological confusion, the Platform floats the idea of establishing a general organization founded upon a homogeneous program. In this way, the Platform lays the foundations for a general organization of anarchists and creates ideological homogeneity. The organization thus collectively created will be strong enough to free anarchism from its ideological contradictions and organizational inadequacies and to pave the way for a mighty anarchist organization banded around homogeneous principles. We see no other way of developing and fortifying anarchism among the masses. The Platform has pointed out that the approach of bringing the various strands of anarchism together into one "*tenderly united family*" will not restore the health of the anarchist movement, but will instead weaken and befuddle it.

The criticisms from the "Reply" utterly repudiate the picture of the causes of the anarchist movement's weaknesses that the Platform has outlined. They see the causes located in "*the vagueness of several ideas basic to our outlook, such as: the notion of social revolution, that of violence, that of collective creativity, that of the transitional period, that of organization, and still others.*" Also, the authors of the "Reply" enumerate other matters on which not all anarchists see eye to eye. If they are to be believed, you would think that anarchists have no common view on any matter, and that we would first have to theorize about everything before going on to tackle the organization issue. We have heard these ideas and promises often by now. And, instead of threatening for the hundredth and first time to come up with a probing theoretical work, would the authors of the "Reply" not be better employed getting on with that task, bringing it to fruition and offering it as a counter to the Platform? Our conception of the principles of anarchism is quite different. We are well aware that there is agreement among anarchists on the major issues like the idea of social revolution, that of violence, collective creativity, dictatorship, organization, etc. Those who have thus far remained adversaries of social revolution, of revolutionary violence and of organization, will always be such, and it really would be too naive to begin the history of anarchism all over again just for them. As soon as somebody would come along and tell us that they do not accept the idea of social revolution, someone else would announce that they are against revolutionary violence, and a third would express unhappiness with the very idea of communist anarchism, and a fourth would speak up against the class struggle. Shouting in every instance that "*anarchism's principles*" are not precise enough is tantamount in fact to the failure to devise an overall theory. Didn't we have Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta who were precise enough about anarchism's principles? There were anarchist movements in a variety of countries based on those principles. How can we claim that they were not clear enough?

when they seek to arrive at a synthesis between communism and individualism.

In fact, what does the anarchism of individualists consist of? The notion of the freedom of the individual?

But what is this "individuality"? Is it the individuality in general or the oppressed "individuality" of the toiler?

There is no such thing as "individuality in general" because, one way or another, every individual finds themselves objectively or subjectively in the realm of labour or else in the realm of capital. But isn't the idea implicit in anarchist communism? We might even say that the freedom of the individual toiler is realizable only in the context of a anarchist communist society that will take a scrupulous interest in social solidarity as well as in respect for the rights of the individual.

The anarchist commune is the model of social and economic relations best suited to fostering the development of the freedom of the individual. Anarchist communism is not some rigid, unbending social framework which, once achieved, is set and sets a term to the development of the individual. On the contrary: its supple, elastic social organization will develop by growing in complexity and constantly seeking improvements, so that the freedom of the individual may expand without hindrance.

Similarly, anti-Statism seems to be one of the fundamental principles of communist anarchism. In addition, it has a real content and real expression.

Communist anarchism rejects statism in the name of social independence and the self-management of the labouring classes. As for individualism, on what basis does it refute the State? Assuming that it does! Certain individualist theoreticians champion the right to private ownership in personal relations and in economic relations alike. But wheresoever the principles of private property and personal fortunes exist, a struggle of economic interests inevitably comes into being, a statist structure created by the economically more powerful.

So what remains of individualist anarchism? Negation of the class struggle, of the principle of anarchist organization having as its object the free society of equal workers; and, moreover, empty babble encouraging workers unhappy with their lot to look to their defences by means of recourse to the personal solutions allegedly open to them as liberated individuals.

But what is there in all this that can be described as anarchist? Where are we to find the features in need of synthesis with communism? That whole philosophy [of individualism] has nothing to do with anarchist theory and or anarchist practice, and it is unlikely that an anarchist worker would be inclined to conform to this "philosophy".

So, as we have seen, an analysis of the theoretical tasks of the synthesis leads into a

dead end street. And we find the same again when we examine the practical aspects of the issue. We have to choose between two options:

Either the tendencies named remain independent tendencies, in which case, how are the going to prosecute their activities in some common organization, the very purpose of which is precisely to attune anarchists' activities to a specific agreement?

Or these tendencies should lose their distinguishing features and, by amalgamating, give rise to a new tendency that will be neither communist, syndicalist nor individualist... But in that case, what are the fundamental positions and features to be?

By our reckoning the notion of synthesis is founded on a total aberration, a shoddy grasp of the basics of the three tendencies, which the supporters of synthesis seek to amalgamate into one.

The central tendency, the spinal column of anarchism is represented by communist anarchism. Anarcho-individualism is a best a philosophical and literary phenomenon and not a social movement. It often happens that the latter is drawn into politics and ends up as a bourgeois fad (like Benjamin Tucker and other individualists).

The above does not at all mean that we are against concerted endeavour by anarchists of varying persuasions. Quite the opposite: we can only salute anything that brings revolutionary anarchists closer together in practice.

However, that can be achieved practically, concretely, by means of the establishment of liaison between ready made, strengthened organizations. In which case, we would be dealing only with specific practical tasks, requiring no synthesis and indeed precluding one. But we think that the more that anarchists clarify the basics -- the essence of anarchist communism -- the more they will come to agreement on these principles and erect upon that basis a broad organization that will provide a lead in socio-political matters as well as in the realm of trade union/professional matters.

As a result, we do not in any way see a link between the organizational problem and the notion of synthesis. If it is to be resolved, there is no need to get carried away by vague theorizations and expect results from that. The baggage that anarchism has amassed over the years of its life process and social struggle is more than sufficient. We need only take proper account of it, applying it to the conditions and exigencies of life, in order to build an accountable organization

Source: <http://www.nestormakhno.info>

## RESPONSE TO THE “REPLY” OF SOME RUSSIAN ANARCHISTS

The “Reply” (of April 1927) from some Russian anarchists to the Platform is an attempt to criticize and utterly refute the “Organizational Platform” published by the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad.

The Reply's authors claim to be in disagreement, not with certain ideas set out in the Platform, but rather with the whole thing. It is precisely “*the Platform as such... its underlying principles, its essence, its very mentality*” that are not, in our estimation, acceptable, they say. They reckon it is not anarchism, but Bolshevism which is set out therein. The ideological essence of the Bolsheviks and the “platformists” is identical. Unquestionably, they say, “*the Platform's authors look upon these as indispensable: the creation of a directing policy centre, the organization of an army and police force at the disposal of that centre, which, in essence means, the introduction of a transitional political authority statist in character.*” And the “Reply” is peppered with lots of other similar and similarly stunning assertions.

It is our belief that such assertions make it obligatory upon their authors that they adduce adequate evidence before they make them. Indeed, this practice of making unfounded allegations may lead the anarchist to questionable conduct. Every anarchist, in a true sense of the word, ought thus to make a determined stand against this approach.

In the course of our exposition, we shall see in what measure the authors of the “Reply” have authenticated their claims and this may enlighten us as to the meaning and worth of their arguments.

Its authors open with the declaration that they are “*wholly in disagreement with the group regarding several fundamental or important theses in the Platform.*” But in reality, the dissension relates to every one of the Platform's theses on organization and principle. To explain their difference of opinion, they go to a lot of bother, resort to lots of sophistry and come up with unlikely arguments of their own. Since they are a priori hostile to the entirety of the Platform, but have no explicit view of their own on any of the issues broached therein, this necessarily had to be the case. We can appreciate this if we examine their main objections. But there is more: we shall see too that the authors of the “Reply”, while rebutting certain arguments of the Platform, very often wind up reiterating those arguments, claiming them as their own and using them to counter the Platform.

One point: the best retort to their objections is the Platform itself and the reader will find a specific and definite opinion there on all of the issues broached. We shall, in order to clarify the spirit and the current by which they are motivated, by dwelling only upon certain points from the Platform which the authors of the “Reply” have sought to rebut.

emanating from the vagueness and indecisiveness that characterized its main policy statements on organization and tactics.

Anarchism had no firm, hard and fast opinion regarding the main problems facing the social revolution, an opinion needed to satisfy the masses who were carrying out the revolution. Anarchists were calling for a seizure of the factories, but had no well-defined homogeneous notion of the new production and its structures. Anarchists championed the communist device “*from each according to abilities, to each according to needs,*” but they never bothered to apply this precept to the real world. In this way, they allowed suspect elements to turn this grand principle into a caricature of anarchism. (We might just remember how many swindlers seized upon this principle as a means of grabbing collective assets during the revolution for their own personal advantage.) Anarchists talked a lot about the revolutionary activity of the workers themselves, but they were unable to direct the masses, even roughly, towards the forms that such activity might assume: they proved unable to regulate reciprocal relations between the masses and their ideological centre. They incited the masses to shrug off the yoke of authority, but they did not indicate how the gains of revolution might be consolidated and defended. They had no clear cut opinion and specific action policies with regard to lots of other problems. Which is what alienated them from the activities of the masses and condemned them to social and historical impotence.

That is where we have to look for the prime cause of their failure in the Russian Revolution. We Russian anarchists who lived through the ordeal of revolution in 1905 and 1917 have not the slightest lingering doubt of that.

The obviousness of anarchism’s internal ineffectuality has impelled us to search around for ways that might afford it success.

Upwards of twenty years of experience, revolutionary activity, twenty years of efforts in anarchist ranks, and of effort that met with nothing but failures by anarchism as an organizing movement: all of this has convinced us of the necessity of a new comprehensive anarchist party organization rooted in one homogenous theory, policy and tactic.

These are the premises of the “Organizational Platform”. Should anarchist militants of other countries, with no first-hand experience of the Russian Revolution, but with any knowledge of it, however meagre, be willing to examine carefully the climate within the anarchist movement in their own country, they cannot fail to notice that the internal ineffectuality that caused anarchism to fail in the Russian Revolution is equally prevalent in their own ranks and represents a deadly threat to the movement, especially in time of revolution. They will then understand the significance of the step forward that the “Organizational Platform” represents for anarchism, from the point of view of ideas as well as that of organization and construction.

Piotr Arshinov

## Supplement to the Organizational Platform (Questions and Answers)

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*Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad (Dielo Truda editorial group) November 1926*

As was to be expected, the Organizational 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 endeavor to create an overall anarchist programme as well as an overall libertarian organization, 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 organizational 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 Truda. 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 polemizing without bothering to frame any alternative positive suggestion, in place of the targeted view. What is infinitely harder is to analyze 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:

*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 Gen-*

eral 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 organizational conduct of the activity of the isolated groups”. That type of organization is to be found in all parties, but it is possible only if one accepts the majority principle. In your organization, will each group be free to prescribe its own tactics and establish its own tactics and establish its own stance vis-a-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 organizational unity, that unity will of necessity be coerced. And then if you accept the majority principle inside your organization, 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, cooperative, etc.) organizations 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 organized 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 organization” 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’ organizations 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 organization 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 the Platform rejects the idea of the “transitional period”? And if it

## REPLY TO ANARCHISM’S CONFUSIONISTS: A response to the “Reply to the Platform” by Several Russian Anarchists

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Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad (Dielo Truda group)  
with a foreword by Piotr Arshinov

### FOREWORD: THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

The debates provoked by the “Organizational Platform” have thus far focused chiefly upon its various arguments or indeed the draft organization proposed by it. Most of its critics, as well as several of its supporters, have at no time been clear-sighted in their appreciation of the matter of the Platform’s premises: they have never tried to discover what were factors that prompted its appearance, the point of departure adopted by its authors. And yet these are matters of the greatest importance to those who seek to understand the spirit and importance of the Platform.

The recently published “Reply to the Platform” from Volin and a few other anarchists, purporting to be a wholesale rebuttal of the Platform, has - for all the effort invested in the undertaking, for all its claims to be reading “between the lines” - failed to rise above the level of banal diatribe against arguments that are considered in isolation, and it has shown itself powerless to strike at the very heart of the matter.

Given that this “Reply” displays utter incomprehension of the theses of the Platform, misrepresenting them and using sophistry to counter them, the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, having scrutinized this would-be rebuttal, has once again identified a series of points that are being queried: at the same time, the Group has registered the political and theoretical inadequacies of “The Reply”.

The commentary below is given over to an examination of their reply. It is not intended either as a complement nor as an addendum to the Platform: it is merely designed to clarify a few of its theses.

Nevertheless, let us avail of this opportunity to point out a few things for consideration by comrades who may take an interest in the Platform for organization of anarchism. We believe that in so doing we will be helping to make its meaning and its spirit better understood.

We have fallen into the habit of ascribing the anarchist movement’s failure in Russia in 1917-1919 to the Bolshevik Party’s statist repression, which is a serious error. Bolshevik repression hampered the anarchist movement’s spread during the revolution, but it was only one obstacle. Rather, it was the anarchist movement’s own internal ineffectuality which was one of the chief causes of that failure, an ineffectuality



us and who follow the state socialists. It goes without saying that anarchism is a revolutionary social movement and that is why I stand and will always stand for its specific organization now and support the organization, come the revolution, of battalions, regiments, brigades and divisions which it will prove necessary to amalgamate, at certain times, into one common regional army, under a united regional command in the shape of supervisory organizational Staffs, the task of which will be, according to the requirements and conditions of the struggle, to draw up a federative operational plan, co-ordinating the actions of regional armies, so as to bring to a successful conclusion the fighting conducted on all fronts against the armed counter-revolution.

The question of the defence of the revolution from the armed counter-revolution is no easy matter. It may require very great organizational commitment from the armed revolutionary masses. Revolutionary anarchists must realise this and stand by to assist them in that undertaking.

\* Note. At the time, the bolsheviks had no forces in Ukraine. Bolshevik forces arrived in Ukraine from Russia some time later and immediately occupied a parallel front against the counter-revolution to ours, endeavouring in appearance to unite with the revolutionary working people who were organized autonomously and not according to their state-controlled prescription, but in reality busying themselves with the decomposition and dispersion of the workers, not disdaining to use methods such as sabotaging prompt supplies of cartridges and shells - exactly at the moment when we were seeking to carry out an offensive along our entire front, and when the outcome of the battle depended on the strength of our artillery and machine-guns.)

Delo Truda N°25, June 1927, pp. 13-14.

Translated from Russian to French by Alexandre Skirda and from French to English by Paul Sharkey. English translation revised with reference to the Russian by the Nestor Makhno Archive.

*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 organization, 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 mobilization" 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.*

*It is in relation to this problem that they key to the whole anarchist conception of social organization 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 non-statist social organization 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.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus, the Organizational 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 organizational 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 “Chief 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 organizational sense. For there will always be groups inside the Union that will feel burdened by various tactical issues, so that ideological or organizational assistance will always be necessary for certain groups. It goes without saying that the Executive Committee will be well placed to lend such assistance,

port and who were armed only with weapons taken from the enemy. Our organization made a large contribution to that: without trampling on the internal autonomy of the fighting units, it enabled them to be re-organized into regiments and brigades, coordinated by a common operational staff.

It is true that the establishment of a general operational staff was feasible only thanks to the appreciation by the revolutionary working masses, fighting on the front as well as behind his lines, of the need for a united command. These workers, under the influence of our anarcho-communist peasant group, also saw to it that every individual was awarded equal rights to take part in all areas of the construction of the new society, including the obligation to defend its gains. Thus, while the counter-revolutionary Denikinist front threatened the very life of the revolution (and our anti-statist ideas which were behind it), which was being watched with a lively interest by the revolutionary workers, these workers came together on the basis of our organizational notion of the defence of the revolution, making it their own and bolstering the insurgent army with a regular influx of fresh combatants to relieve the wounded and the weary.

This phenomenon in the practical requirements of the struggle induced our movement for the defence of the revolution to establish an operational and organizational staff to share the overseeing of all active fighting units.

It is because of this practice that I find myself unable to subscribe to the view that revolutionary anarchists in their practical activity among the ranks of the revolutionary masses should reject the need for such a united operational command Staff to strategically guide the armed forces of the revolution against the forces of counter-revolution.

We are convinced that any revolutionary anarchist finding himself, during an authentic revolution of the workers, in the same circumstances as those we encountered in the civil war in Ukraine will be forced to use the same military-revolutionary methods as we did when we lived through the history of the civil struggle in Ukraine. But if, in the course of a future social revolution, there are anarchists who reject the above-mentioned organizational principles in spite of the existence of armed fronts of counter-revolution, then these anarchists will be part of the movement in word only, whereas in reality they will be outside it, or they will harm it.

In resolving the question of the revolution’s defence, anarchists must be guided by the social character of anarcho-communism. If our movement is a revolutionary social movement, we have to acknowledge the need for it to be organized and endow it with certain means for social action worthy of it, meaning social institutions, then throw ourselves whole-heartedly into the practical life and struggle of the working masses.

Otherwise, if this movement is a utopia of dreamers, then we must not hamper the path of the revolutionary working people, in particular those who do not understand

In its fight against the counter-revolution, the Russian revolution at first began by organizing Red Guard detachments under the leadership of the bolsheviks. It was very quickly spotted the Red Guards failed to withstand the pressures from the organized counter-revolution, to be specific, the German, Austrian and Hungarian expeditionary corps, for the simple reason that, most of the time, they operated without any overall operational guide-lines. That is why the bolsheviks turned to the organization of a Red Army in the spring of 1918.

It was then that we issued the call to form “*free battalions*” of Ukrainian working people. It quickly transpired that the organization of the “*free battalions*” in the spring of 1918 was powerless to survive internal provocations of every sort, given that, without adequate vetting, political or social, it took in all volunteers provided only that they wanted to take up their weapons and fight. That was why the armed units established by that organization were treacherously delivered to the counter-revolutionaries. And this prevented it from seeing through its historical mission in the fight against the German, Austrian and Hungarian counter-revolution.

However, following that initial set-back to the organization of “*free battalions*” - which might be described as direct revolutionary combat units for the defence of the revolution - we did not lose our heads. The organization of “*free battalions*” was somewhat overhauled in its format. The battalions were complemented by auxiliaries or light partisan detachments of a mixed type, that is, comprising infantry and cavalry alike, whose task was to operate far behind the enemy’s lines. And, I repeat, it proved itself during its revolutionary operations against the German, Austrian and Hungarian expeditionary forces and the bands of the Hetman Skoropadsky in the late summer and autumn of 1918.

Sticking to that form of organizing the defence of the revolution, the revolutionary Ukrainian working people themselves were able to wrest from the clutches of the Austro-German Junkers the noose that the latter had thrown around the revolution in Ukraine and, not content with defending the revolution, they followed it through as fully as they could for a number of months, defending it from the German-Hungarian armies and from the forces of the Ukrainian director, led by Petlyura and Vinichenko, and from the forces of the generals Kaledin and Denikin.\*

But as the counter-revolution spread inside the country, it received aid from other countries. From these other countries, the counter-revolution received support not just in the form of arms and munitions but also in the shape of troops. Despite that, our organization of the defence of the revolution also expanded in size and at the same time, as the need arose, adopted a new format and more suitable fighting methods.

As is known, the most dangerous counter-revolutionary front at that time was that of Denikin. However, the revolutionary insurgent movement held its own against Denikin for a period of 5-6 months. Many of the best Denikinist commanders came to grief against our organized revolutionary forces, who had not yet sought any sup-

for it will be, by virtue of its situation and its functions, imbued with the tactical or organizational line adopted by the Union on a variety of matters.

But if, nevertheless, some organizations 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?

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 disorganization, the intention being to lay down, in place of a multiplicity of tactical lines giving rise to intestinal frictions, 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 organizations 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 organization.

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 organization run by a political party. Against which we offer soviets of the workers' and peasants' production and consumption organizations. 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 organizations, which would perform those functions with an eye to meeting the needs of the whole labouring society. A Federation of these organizations 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 commune, 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' organizations 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 maximized.

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 unshakable 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 orches-

## **On the Question of the Defence of the Revolution**

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Nestor Makhno

Within the context of the debate that has taken place among our comrades in many countries regarding the Draft Platform of the General Union of Anarchists, published by the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, I have been asked by a number of comrades to write one or two articles specifically on the defence of the revolution.

I shall strive to deal with this serious question most diligently, but, before I do, I think I have a duty to warn comrades that the point regarding the defence of the revolution is not the central issue of the Draft Platform of the General Union of Anarchists... And since this point is not fundamental, I do not feel any pressing urge or necessity to devote time and energy on discussing it to the extent that many of our comrades do.

For me personally (and I would also say for every serious, conscientious comrade) what is important is the fundamental aspect of the "*Draft Platform of the General Union of Anarchists*". It is correct, and it points out the necessity for our anarcho-communist circles to study it seriously. Whatever is missing should be added and, based on the resulting work, we need to carry out a regrouping, introducing a greater organization of our forces. Otherwise, our movement will be condemned to succumb once and for all to the influences of the opportunists and liberals who haunt our circles, if not outright speculators and all sorts of political adventurers, who, at best, can prattle on and on but are incapable of fighting on the ground for the attainment of our movement's great objectives. The latter can only happen if we carry along with us all who instinctively believe in our movement and who seek to achieve the widest possible freedom and independence through revolution, so as to build a new society, a new justice, a new order, wherein every individual may at last freely exercise his creative drive for the benefit of himself and his equals.

As far as the question of defence of the revolution generally goes, I shall be relying upon my long experiences first-hand during the Russian revolution in Ukraine, in the course of that unequal, but decisive struggle waged by the revolutionary movement of the Ukrainian working people. Those experiences taught me, firstly, that the defence of the revolution is directly bound up with the revolution's offensive against the counter-revolution. Secondly, the growth and development of the forces for the defence of the revolution are at all times conditioned by the resistance of the counter-revolutionaries. And thirdly, what follows from the above, namely that revolutionary actions in the majority of cases are closely dependent on the political content, structure and organizational methods adopted by the armed revolutionary detachments, who are obliged to confront conventional, counter-revolutionary armies along a huge front.



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 and not that he serve it not at all.

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 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, analyzing 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.*”

2nd November 1926

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

#### (4) DEFENCE OF THE REVOLUTION

The author’s voiced objection to the programme’s thesis regarding defence 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 organizations.

Subordination of the army to these organizations 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 defense 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 organizations.

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 organizations. It is to these very same organizations, 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' organizations likewise has to be accepted. We can see no other possible solution to the matter.

#### **(5) PRESS FREEDOM, FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OF ORGANIZATION, 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 endeavors, 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.

Monopolization 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 armored 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 Svobody* ["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.

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