

Supplement to the Organizational Platform

(Questions and Answers)

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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 polemicizing 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 General Union. Since you are federalists, you apparently have in mind the existence of an Executive Committee that will be in charge of the “ideological and 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 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 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 the 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, 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 they 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 orchestrate the force of anarchism's theoretical influence upon the march of events.** Instead of being an intermittent influence felt through disparate petty actions, it has to be made a powerful, ongoing factor. That, as we see it, can scarcely be possible unless anarchism's finest militants, in matters theoretical and practical alike, 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 Svobodey* ["Road To Freedom"], the Right Social Revolutionaries' *Narodovlastiye* ["Peoples' Power"], the Ukrainian Left Social Revolutionaries' *Borotba* ["Struggle"], and the Bolshevik's organ *Zvezda* ["Star"]. Only the Cadets, then spiritual leaders of the Denikinist movement, were without their newspaper. Well now! Say the Cadets would have wanted to publish in Ekaterinoslav their own newspaper which without any doubt would have been an accessory to Denikin's operations, would the revolutionary workers and insurgents have had to grant the Cadets the right to their newspaper, even at a time when its **primarily military** role in events would have been apparent? We think not.

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

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

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

(6) The Proper Interpretation of the Anarchist Principle "From Each According to Abilities, to Each According to Needs"

Without question, this principle is the cornerstone of anarchist communism. No other economic, social or legal precept is as well-suited to the ideal of anarchist communism as this one. The Platform also says that: "the social revolution, which will see to the reconstruction of the whole established social order, will thereby see to it that everyone's basic needs are provided for."

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

That being the case, it would be extremely risky and fatally dangerous for the revolution to share out the products that would be available to the revolutionary zone in according to the principle of "to each according needs". It would be doubly dangerous for, aside from the comfort that this might afford the classes inimical to the revolution, which would be morally and strategically unconscionable, new classes will immediately arise and these, seeing the revolution supply the needs of every person, would rather idle than work. Plainly this double danger is not something that one can ignore. For it will quickly get the better of the revolution, unless effective measures are taken against it. The best measure would be to put the counter-revolutionary, non-working classes usefully to work. In one sphere or another, to one extent or another, these classes will have to find themselves useful employment of which society has need; and it is their very **right**

to their share in society's output that will **force** them to do so, for there are no rights that do not carry obligations. That is the very point that our splendid anarchist principle is making. It proposes that every individual in proportion to their needs, provided that every individual places their powers and faculties in the service of society 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."

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