

Leninism Without Lenin

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Confronting the Question of Power, or Promoting the 50th Variant of the Plan to Seize It?

Before beginning, I would like to make it clear that I am writing these modest lines with the intention of encouraging reflection, more in the search for the Truth than with the idea that I am somehow the repository of it.

Dotting the I's

The first thing we need to do is to place our subject in the context that gives it its significance: the advance of what I call “Anarcho”-Bolshevism.

This offensive, which has developed over the last decade, has now conquered many anarchist organizations, taking over the corpse of anarcho-syndicalism and appropriating various publications, publishing houses, libraries, social centers, squats, infoshops, editorials, and initials (often linked with historic struggles of the now defunct workers movement). This process can be traced through many articles, reflections, and communiqués in an infinite number of publications created for the occasion and on different websites, such as Anarkismo.net., A-Info, La Haine, Cladjadep, and Kaos, among others.

In order to promote their advance, the “Anarcho”-Bolsheviks have had to set in motion their own Frankenstein, in effect, reviving past “deviations” of the anarchist project. Specifically, we can identify the party-ist Platform of Nestor Makhno (a leader of partisan bands that fought against both the Bolsheviks and the White counterrevolutionaries during the Civil War in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917), and the Mexican Liberal Party of the Flores Magón brothers. These were lamentable attempts to build anarchist parties that we cannot fully analyze here, but which were responses to the specific influences of their epoch and to the needs and demands of the historical context in which they found themselves. Nevertheless, we should not hide the fact that these projects were refuted at the time, subjected to tough critiques on the part of the partisans of Anarchy. Today, however, the “Anarcho”-Bolsheviks don't present themselves as they really are, and for good reason. In the past, they were not able to impose explicitly Leninist theses on the anarchist movement: They were not able to confuse people with (Lenin's) *The State and Revolution*; nor could they sell the Cuban “Revolution” as anarchist, nor the experience of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, nor the “Foquismo” of Che Guevara and Régis Debray, nor the “Prolonged People's War” of Chairman Mao, nor the “necessity” of the Popular Front. They could not do this openly, and they cannot do so today. But, by camouflaging Leninism in “libertarian” clothes, they have been following essentially the same path, pursuing their offensive and consolidating their gains. With this strategy, they are developing an international network with the sole and decided purpose of constructing what they call “Our Party.”¹

In the United States and Canada, the first steps in the construction of “Our Party” date back to the summer of 1999, during which an initial level of regional coordination and diffuse regional networks, specifically in Quebec and New England, began to develop. These efforts were directed toward promoting a “bi-national” regroupment, motivated by the “mutual dissatisfac-

¹ “Our Party” is the “original” way the Chilean neo-platformists of the Libertarian Communist Organization (OCL) and the members of the neo-platformist Revolutionary Anarchist Organization of Argentina (ORA) named their organizations.

tion with the state of the anarchist movement on both sides of the border,”² and found fruition in April 2002, in the formation, during a congress held in Boston, of the Northeast Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC). This organization was founded on the “platformist principles of theoretical and tactical unity, discipline, collective responsibility, and internal democracy,” and modeled after the Workers Solidarity Movement of Ireland, a platformist organization, based in Dublin, that has been in existence for almost 25 years.

The tactical maneuvers of the Irish neo-platformists, in their concern for geographic expansion, have been felt throughout North America. Some examples are their unsuccessful attempt to assert control over the Anarchist Encounter in Mexico City; the international meeting, titled *Anarkogaláctica*, in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas in the state of Chiapas, both held in July 2007; and the National Anarchist Encounter, held recently in the city of Guadalajara, promoted as a continuation of the Anarchist Encounter in Mexico City, but with the intention of pulling out of the hat a national “anarchist” organization of clear neo-platformist tendency. Also part of this “Unity” strategy was the recent tour of talks and interviews on the part of Andrew Flood.³ This took him to 45 cities in the United States, where he made contact with various anarchist groups, collectives, and individuals, with the goal of drawing up a “map” of the different tendencies within the North American anarchist movement.

It is necessary to distinguish between the events that took place in Mexico and the speaking tour in the US. At the anarchist Encounter of Mexico City, platformist discourse was present only through the chairmanship of Jose Antonio Gutierrez, in the name of the Workers Solidarity Movement of Ireland and the Libertarian Communist Organization of Chile, which intended to promote the “revolutionary political organization of libertarians, in which to be able to discuss the entire problematic of the construction of popular power.” On the other hand, the *Anarkogaláctica* meeting in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, was integrally synchronized with the programmatic activities of the platformist international and was explicitly intended to be a satellite in the orbit of the Zapatistas, under the logic of “tactical alliances,” and marked by the concern for numbers that characterizes them. Also part of this approach was Andrew Flood’s tour and the invitation to all those contacted to participate in an inter-organizational “strategic encounter” in New York City. This conference, with the participation of the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA), and the neo-platformist NEFAC, concluded with the creation of a new organization, the Class Action Alliance (CAA), which placed itself in the hands of the neo-platformists who coordinate the orientation committee of *Anarkismo.net*.

In order to leave no doubt about its political orientation and objectives, the CAA underlines in its General Principles: “We have confidence in our esteemed anarchocommunist comrades throughout the world and in the inspiration and solidarity which we expect of them in our common search for a new world.”

² Taken from *Who We Are and What We Do? This is NEFAC! An Introduction to the Northeast Federation of Anarcho-Communists*. In: *nefac.net*

³ Founding member of the Workers Solidarity Movement of Ireland.

The “Bakunist Party: Paranoia or Amnesia?”

Every time someone refers to the obvious similarity between classical Leninism and the neo-platformist tendency, he/she is diagnosed as suffering from congenital paranoia. Nevertheless, to judge by both the practice and the discourse of the neo-platformists, we might better diagnose them as amnesiacs. It is sad to say it, but it seems that some people are absolutely incapable of learning the fundamental things about the history of our movement.

Going further into the basic principles of neo-platformism, we need to emphasize its insistence, often repeated in its discourse, that the revolutionary political organization of anarchists “requires clear premises to carry out their role—theoretical unity, tactical unity, discipline, collective action, and internal democracy.” Such words reveal the true intentions of the “anarchist” partyists. Particularly noteworthy is the stress the neo-platformists place on their claim that “Anarchism requires a program, a social plan, not only for the glorious day of the revolution but also for the here and now.”

However, before immersing ourselves further in neo-platformist politics, it is worth dissecting the Frankenstein monster that I mentioned earlier. In so doing, we will be able to analyze the different members that add up to the body of “neo-platformism” so as to better understand its origins.

By way of a brief summary, we can state that neo-platformism is based on a theoretical melange, in the shape of a body, created out of four corpses:

1. “Specifism” or “Specificism”;
2. The Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists;
3. *The Libertarian Communist Manifesto* of Georges Fontenis; and
4. The Council Communism of Anton Pannekoek. (A jolt of electricity—for best results, it is best that this be preceded by a lightning bolt at midnight—and then, Presto! It’s alive! It’s alive!!)

Sifting the parts

Present-day specificism claims the historic continuity of the old FAU (Uruguayan Anarchist Federation), but with particular emphasis on the period 1963–73. This history—above all, the FAU’s actions during that decade—is the source of the recent doctrinal elaborations on the part of the majority of the “specificist” nuclei that currently exist. It is precisely because of the influence exercised by the FAU in distinct milieus that the term “specificism” has begun to be used as nearly equivalent to “platformism.”

It is through the influence, direct or indirect, of the Irish Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) that these elaborations have dovetailed with the old term “platformism,” by adopting the proposal of the Organizational Platform of Dyelo Truda (Labor’s Cause, in Russian) to “make profound and necessary changes in the habitual anarchist conceptions of organization, through the formation of a General Union of Anarchists, the adoption of a sole program of transformation, and the full acceptance of the principles of collective responsibility and tactical unity.”

The above allows us to see how the third member, which enables the creature to take its first steps, or at least to try to do so, is attached.

This limb is the theoretical work of the Frenchman Georges Fontenis. It was he who facilitated, with his *Libertarian Communist Manifesto*, and even more so, with his work, “The Revolutionary Message of the Friends of Durruti,” the word game that has served as the theoretical justification for neo-platformism. This is the supposed opposition between “government” and “power.” According to the neoplatformist interpretation, during the Spanish Revolution, the Spanish anarchists were obligated to stay out of the Republican government but ought to have established “Workers Power.”

It is here where, giving free rein to our rhetorical image, we come upon the fourth limb of the creature: the Workers Councilism of Pannekoek. This complements the call to “Unity” with an “indication of its objective: Organize Production through Workers Councils!”

By means of this theoretical concoction, various expressions, such as “organized anarchism,” “popular anarchism,” “introduced anarchism,” “revolutionary anarchism,” “social anarchism,” “mass anarchism,” “rank and file anarchism,” “anarchocommunists,” “libertarian communists,” and variations on this theme, have become synonyms of “neoplatformism/specificism.” These terms are meant to give shape to what we have called “Leninism without Lenin,” with the clear strategic purpose of converting itself into the sole means to achieve the libertarian society. The underlying message is clear: All individuals, collectives or groups that do not fully support the principles of collective responsibility and tactical unity; all individuals, collectives or groups that do not join the General Union of Anarchists, all individuals, collectives or groups that do not adopt the sole program of transformation, are *not* anarchist.

It is worth emphasizing the distinctive elements of neoplatformism: “tactical unity,” as opposed to the autonomy of groups and collectives; “collective responsibility,” as something distinct from individual responsibility; the permanent construction of the party, the General Union of Anarchists, in contrast to the diversity of organizational forms, and the disciplined commitment to the sole program of transformation as the road to establish “WORKERS POWER.” The similarity between this and the classical conception of the Leninist party is not pure coincidence.

Historical Antecedents

A. Platformism

It is ironic that neo-platformism presents itself as a renovating tendency, intent on solving the political/practical problems that have long confronted the anarchist movement, but at the same time, seeks ideological support in doctrines that are only relevant to a historic scenario that is not our own: abstract principles extracted from a critical evaluation of the defeat of the anarchists in Russia in 1921.

Although the Organizational Platform that Makhno, Peter Arshinov, and Ida Mett drew up in their Parisian exile dates from the early years of the 20th century, the extension of its influence is a relatively recent phenomenon: no earlier than the 1970s and the early 1980s in Europe; and with less than 10 years on the American continent, although one might consider the *Libertarian Communist Manifesto* of Georges Fontenis, written in 1953, to be a distant ancestor.

In fact, the influence of the Organizational Platform in anarchist circles was practically nil until its recent reappearance. It never came up for discussion in the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Fed-

eration), for example, nor did it influence any of the federations that were created in its image. Moreover, the evolution (rather, the involution) that the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation experienced during the period 1963-1975 was completely endogenous and only marginally related to the Platform, so much so that the document was not even known at the time nor was it ever mentioned in the writings of that deplorable period. There can be no doubt that the Platform fell into oblivion and remained in the dustbin of history until in the 21st century, when it began to be circulated once again, thanks to a new version promoted by the Irish Workers Solidarity Movement. In sum, the Organizational Platform played no notable role as a model of organization and action in any country, and, if I find myself obligated to give a brief explanation of the causes of its current diffusion, I would say that it is similar to a critique of the so-called “federations of synthesis” and, in the words of comrade Daniel Barret, is meant as a reevaluation of the problem of political effectiveness.

Such was the fate of those Russian exiles in Paris who devoted themselves to writing such a document, the sad result of asking themselves why the Russian anarchists had not been able to be as “decisive” and as pragmatic as the Bolsheviks, and why the Bolsheviks, although they were a minority, were able to defeat the anarchists, jailing and exterminating them en masse.

It is worth mentioning that, at the time, the proposals of the platformists were the subject of much discussion by those who up until then had considered themselves to be “specificists” and “organicists”—specifically, Errico Malatesta and Fabbri—especially because they were so alien to anarchist principles, and that they played no relevant role until the last 50 years, when they began to be rescued by a few French and Italian nuclei.

B. Specificism

With respect to “specifism” or “specificism,” I must admit that I am not quite clear about who is the accredited “father” of the creature. Most probably it was Malatesta, since we owe to him the most prolix discussions of the issue. What is certain is that at the beginning of the last century, during the period of anarcho-syndicalism, the term was used in a fairly precise way to refer to the nontrade unionist organizations of the “pure” anarchists. Thus, in Spain, and also on both sides of the Rio de la Plata (that is, in Argentina and Uruguay), people spoke of the “specifics” to refer to those anarchist organizations that were parallel to the trade unions. Such parallelism was fraught with conflict, since the pure anarcho-syndicalists were always fiercely opposed to the “specifics,” so much so that in Uruguay and Argentina during the 1920s, the political differences between the factions resulted in shootouts. However, the term “specificism” is far from belonging exclusively to the Friends of Durruti, and even less so, to the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation.

All the disquisitions of the FAU on the subject of “specificism” come from Juan Carlos Mechoso— who in that area was directed by the teachings of the old Spanish anarchists who arrived in the barrio of El Cerro, in Montevideo, Uruguay, after the defeat of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism. And from him derive the current usage and meaning of the term. Recently—as a result of the influence the FAU exercises in various milieus—the term “specificism” has come to be used as the equivalent of “platformism” when in reality it also ought to encompass the “federations of synthesis.”

Without a doubt, the best discussion of the subject is contained in the pamphlet, “The Seditious Awakening of Anarchy,”⁴ by comrade Daniel Barret, and can be found as a marginal gloss in notes

⁴ In: www.nodo50.org

82 and 84. Here Barret states that “specificist” refers to any anarchist organization, independent of its size, age, or level of formal structure. That is, all nuclei that define themselves as specifically anarchist would properly be characterized as “specificist.”

Nevertheless, as I indicated before, current “specificism” claims for itself the historic continuity of the old FAU, with specific emphasis on the “official” vision of the period 1963–1973. This vision has existed for some time in condensed form in a thick book consisting of three volumes: *Anarchist Direct Action: A History of the FAU*, under the signature of Juan Carlos Mechoso. Largely a collection of documents, this book has come to exercise an enormous influence over neo-platformist organizations. It is a shamelessly uncritical text, with little serious discussion of anything, sufficiently useful to feed the internal mystique of the organization and for presentation to the outside world, but completely useless today, either as a review of the mistakes committed by the FAU in past or as a guide to appropriate anarchist activity in the present.

Whoever reads this book, especially the volume dealing with the period 1965–1973 (which covers the last part of the history, but which was in fact edited first), might find the account of the expropriations (armed robberies) and legal proceedings somewhat humorous. But he/she will find no clear explanation of exactly how and why the FAU, which was founded in 1956, came to adopt, during those years 1965–73, political positions that were increasingly less anarchist: in its internal organization, in its daily political pronouncements, in its medium—and long—range plans, etc. This “evolution” culminated in a congress in July 1975, in which the FAU changed its entire self-conception and turned itself into a political party—the Party of the People’s Victory—whose aim was to form a provisional government with all the forces opposed to the military dictatorship of the time. These developments are discreetly omitted from this so-called history. As a result, the book really goes no further than 1973, because if it had, it would not serve the ends of the present-day FAU, nor would it be useful for neo-platformism in its current work of wooing other anarchist organizations.

It really isn’t strange that the history of the FAU, especially the period 1965–1973 (omitting, of course, its transformation into a party of the Marxist-Leninist type) is so appealing to the neo-platformist groupings today, since it offers them, on a silver platter, an antecedent with which they can easily identify. Nevertheless, the big problem with any international debate over this subject results from the terrible ignorance of at least one-half of the FAU’s history. It is worth adding that in those years the FAU wound up much further away from anarchist principles than any other “deviation.” Among other things, it rejected federalism, something the Platform itself did not dare to do, and that the neo-platformists have also not subscribed to, at least not publicly.

As far as the Friends of Durruti are concerned, I have to note the galloping opportunism that is implied in their very name, given that Buenaventura Durruti had already been assassinated by the time the group was formed. The “rescue” of his name reflects more a marketing strategy, an attempt to take advantage of the popularity of the martyred anarchist, than a question of ideological affinity. Moreover, a certain mythology has developed around the whole affair, since the group itself had little significance in its own time. However, the organization’s message is extremely interesting as a critique of the ministerial anarcho-syndicalism of Federica Montseny, Abad Santillan, etc., in spite of the lamentable conclusions to which their forced landing in the dangerous waters of “Workers Power” (a euphemism employed in “anarcho”-communist organizations to mean the Dictatorship of the Proletariat) led them.

By way of a preliminary conclusion

Having said all this, I think it is crucial to emphasize that the present day anarchist “movement” is still immature, that it lacks a model of organization and action, and that it is undergoing a degree of ideological confusion, or worse, an ideological discussion that is considerably out of touch with our present needs. However, leaving this topic aside for the moment, we can draw some preliminary conclusions about our theme.

In analyzing present-day neo-platformism, it is necessary to distinguish several distinct circles, since the farther away they are from the concrete historical context that gave rise to the Organizational Platform, the more the groups are responding to situations that are in no way comparable to that situation.

At one time, we indicated three circles which we had, perhaps arbitrarily and no doubt malevolently, named according to their degree of proximity to Leninism: “non-Leninists,” “proto-Leninists,” and “hidden” and/or “admitted Leninists.” After thinking about the most recent movements of the groups that I included under the heading of “non-Leninists,” I’ve decided to change their label to “in transition to Leninism.”

Here I feel obligated to make it clear that I do not believe that any of the groupings belonging to this category (of those furthest away from Leninism but in transition to that ideology, the one that stands out is NEFAC) are motivated by any “diabolical” inspiration. I simply think they are naive in their formulations and guided by an over-eagerness to make alliances with other groups. This, of course, does not absolve them from criticism.

The second group—that of the “proto-Leninists”—is the circle that orbits around the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation, which has remained enrolled as neo-platformist, out of reasons of simple political proximity and in the face of the unity moves of the Social Action Group of the General Confederation of Labor—the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) of Burgos, Spain, and the WSM.

The last group—that of the “hidden” or “admitted Leninists”—is made up of the Revolutionary Anarchist Organization (ORA) of Argentina, the Libertarian Communist Organization (OCL) of Chile, as well as the Libertarian Communist Alliance (ACL), and a pair of “anarcho”-Zapatista nuclei of diffuse politics, also in Mexico, such as the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca-Ricardo Flores Magón (CIPO-RFM). Because of its opportunist practice, and above all, in response to the international initiatives of the neo-platformist organizations (such as the Social Action Group of the General Confederation of Labor of Burgos), the latter has donned the T-shirts of “anarcho”-communism, in a search for its “soul.”

All this raises a list of topics that deserve serious reflection, since they are real problems of present-day anarchist practice.

As comrade Daniel Barret reminds us: “Anarchist thought and action work with very specific and distinct materials, not to realize the goals of others more rapidly or with more energy, but to fertilize their own dreams.”⁵ It is an arduous task that some comrades, or not so close comrades, consider to be divisive, instead of understanding that the only thing that is meant by this is to concretize, here and now, the destruction of the State/Capital, thus giving free rein to Anarchy,

⁵ Barret, Daniel, *Anarchism, Anti-Imperialism, Cuba and Venezuela: A Fraternal Dialogue (But Without Concessions)* with Pablo Moras. In: www.lahaine.org

not as a philosophical model, but as an objective necessity, and that any “deviation” from this obligation only allows the continuation of the system of the State/Capital in new forms.

Perhaps it is necessary to “advise” the neo-platformist groupings that they might just as well shorten their trajectory, that if they choose to follow the example of the FAU, the best thing to do is to begin at the end —I don’t see what impediment there could be—and transform themselves right now into the kind of political party the FAU of the 1960s and 1970s became; in other words, to tell them that if this is the example they have chosen to follow, there is no reason not to go straight to the conclusions instead of spending years, perhaps even decades, playing around with the premises.

The lamentable thing is that in the face of these critical conclusions, the neo-platformists will, once again, opt for the “red herring,” dredging up the over-used diagnosis of congenital paranoia, complaining about the false accusations of the “purists,” or citing the trite fallacy of the “Law of the Pendulum,” where opposites supposedly meet or coincide.

Nevertheless, our arguments and criticisms throw light on this verbiage. We are convinced that in the daily struggle against Power, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are not now nor ever will be anarchists, and that we will act, consistent with our anti-authoritarian principles, to nourish solidarity in practice. And there, I hope we will meet everybody, fulfilling our dreams of expropriation, insurrection and destruction, until not a vestige of the past remains, nourishing with deeds that liberating spirit which is—in the words of the “disappeared” comrade, Amanecer Fiorito—“the only anarchism possible, negator of antiauthoritarian institutions, cleansed of liberal, Social Democratic and ‘dictatorial’ (statist) influences, and blessed with revolutionary feeling.”⁶

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⁶ Fiorito, Amanecer, Severino di Giovanni y Paulino Scarfo, “La Película,” La Protesta No. 8214, September-October 2000, Buenos Aires, Argentina. In: Fiorito, Amanecer, The Black Selection of Articles of Protest, Liberty Editions, 2007, Buenos Aires, Argentina, pp. 15–22.

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