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Review: Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists

**Organizational Platform of the Libertarian
Communists by Dielo Trouda Group, 1926
(Workers Solidarity Movement, 1989); 34pp. \$5**

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As revolutionary anarcho-communists, we rely on the platform to guide the functioning of our federation, our internal relationships, the functioning of our collectives, and our relationship with other anarchists. We do not, however, harbor any illusions that it is an error free document that should not be reviewed critically. The Platform was written in a social reality that has more differences than commonalities to our present day North American social reality. With this in mind, we approach a critical review of the Platform with the hopes of preserving the tenets of the Platform from which our organizing efforts can benefit, while simultaneously discarding many of the irrelevancies of the same document. In the spirit of contin-

uing the debate on the Platform among anarchist-communists, we submit this modest review.

The preface and historical introduction by members of the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) is essential and helps readers understand both where modern adherents of the platform are today as well as the historical conditions that the pamphlet was written under. The history of the Russian revolution and the roles anarchists, including the authors, played in it before being repressed by the Bolsheviks is only sketched briefly, but it provides a clear illustration of where the authors of the pamphlet are coming from. We are also given a short history of the platformist tradition shows how small a tendency it has been. Credit has to be given to the WSM for promoting the platform over the last twenty years, which has led to the largest influence that it has ever had in the international anarchist movement.

The introduction centers on the authors' frustration with the "chronic general disorganization" of the anarchist movement. The Platform puts forward that the lack of organization is because of theoretical problems within the anarchist movement, the main one being an absence of responsibility. There is also a firm rejection of synthesism where individuals who hold differing conceptions of anarchist philosophies, "[...] each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement", are in the same organization. The platform instead argues for an anarchist organization with "...precise positions: theoretical, tactical and organizational. The more or less perfect base of a homogenous program." The platform was meant to be a "skeleton" for the program that they hoped their proposed "General Union of Anarchists" would expand upon.

The general section makes up the bulk of the pamphlet and is broken down into several parts. The first point is class struggle where they argue, "In the history of human society... class struggle has always been the primary factor which determined the form and structure of these societies". This analysis is in-

credibly simplistic, short and is a woefully inadequate summation of much more complex social relations. It is necessary for modern class struggle anarchists to expand upon this point, analyzing how patriarchy and white supremacy and other oppressions stratify and divide the working class.

Also, within the Platform, the sham of bourgeois “democracy’s” collaboration with the ruling class is naturally rejected. However, the concept of direct democracy, one of the principles of anarchism, isn’t differentiated, making it a confusing point, a better word would have been electoralism.

The authors harshly criticize the theory that the state can be a weapon for the working class in their struggle for emancipation:

“The state, immediately and supposedly constructed for the defense of the revolution, invariably ends up distorted by needs and characteristics peculiar to itself, itself being the goal, produces specific, privileged castes, and consequently re-establishes the basis of capitalist authority and the state; the usual enslavement and exploitation of the masses by violence.”

A large part of the General Section concentrates on the role of the masses and anarchists in social revolution. It starts off stating that the anarchist conception of the mass revolutionary potential is markedly different than that of statist. While statist can only conceive of the masses performing a destructive role in social revolution, that of destroying the capitalist social order, anarchists see that people are fully capable of running the new society themselves.

The platform then lays out the basic strategy for the anarchist movement both before and during a revolutionary upheaval. In the pre-revolutionary period the strategy is two-fold. One of creating specifically anarchist-communist organizations (like NEFAC) for theoretical development, producing propaganda, and fighting the battle of ideas within the working class as an organized group. The second main task for anarchists is that of organizing workers and peasants at the points

of production and consumption. In other words, the building of a revolutionary class force that is capable of both seizing economic power from the ruling class and re-organizing production, distribution and consumption during and after the revolution.

During the revolution “The role of anarchists in the revolutionary period cannot be restricted solely to the propagation of the keynotes of libertarian ideas.” The pamphlet goes on to state:

“It [the anarchist organization] must manifest its initiative and display total participation in all the domains of the social revolution: in the orientation and general character of the revolution; in the positive tasks of the revolution, in new production, consumption, the agrarian question etc. On all these questions, and on numbers of others, the masses demand a clear and precise response from the anarchists. And from the moment when anarchists declare a conception of the revolution and the structure of society, they are obliged to give all these questions a clear response, to relate the solution of these problems to the general conception of libertarian communism, and to devote all their forces to the realization of these.”

The Platform also upholds the sheer insanity of any sort of “transition period” or “minimum programs”:

“Anarchists have always defended the idea of an immediate social revolution, which deprives the capitalist class of its economic and social privileges, and place the means and instruments of production and all the functions of economic and social life in the hands of the workers”.

What we understand “minimum programs” to mean is the same as ‘reformism’. That doesn’t mean that fighting for reforms (such as housing, better wages, healthcare, or working conditions) is bad, only that it doesn’t go far enough and will be absorbed into capitalism and class society.

The next section is on unionism (also known as syndicalism). It is here that we begin to see how historical conditions have

The first three points of the organization section are brief, I would guess that the authors saw them as common sense positions that had to be noted so nobody would confuse it with the theory of ‘synthesis’ anarchist organization. The final section on federalism contains one problematic point, that of the executive. It seems impossible to simultaneously rail against democratic centralism in one paragraph, and then go on to state that an anarchist organization should have an executive structure that is responsible for “the theoretical and organizational orientation of the activity of isolated organizations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical line of the Union”. Executives, even in the most radical organization, become a hierarchical leadership position that sets the goals for the organization and lowers participation of the general membership. Yes, specific tasks do need to be filled, such as collecting dues, publishing propaganda, and corresponding with other organizations. But a structure of specific working groups, or rotating responsibility between collectives, branches, or “cells” is preferable and more in line with anti-authoritarian principles than an executive structure.

Overall, the ‘Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists’ is a worthy attempt by the Delo Truda group to lay a theoretical base for anarchists to form coherent organizations. It remains a useful document for modern anarchists who see it exactly as such, a pamphlet that is worth reading and drawing ideas from – not some sort of holy book. It remains to be the modern anarchist-communists task to expand on the defects of the platform and build the organizations that can form a true “general union of anarchists”.

However, that doesn't mean that the platform is wrong about the importance of the agrarian question. In fact, it means that more than ever the capitalist class will attempt to starve any revolution to death by cutting off food supplies to the cities. This in fact places an increased priority on keeping supply routes to the cities open, having excellent relations between the city workers and the existing farmers and will necessitate a substantial amount of urban workers leaving the cities to work on farms in order to provide the necessary amount of food for society in a sustainable and non-exploitative manner.

It is striking that for a pamphlet stressing the need for anarchists to become better organized, that the organizational section is the shortest and the most incomplete. However, it does manage to lay down the four key points of platformist organizational theory. That of theoretical unity, tactical unity, collective responsibility, and federalism.

The section starts out with the idea that the platform was the minimum theory necessary to rally the "healthy" tendencies of the anarchist movement into a general union of anarchists. In short, the idea was to form an anarchist international. While this remains a good idea, it is clear that it is premature for the contemporary anarchist movement. First we must have national or regional anarchist federations of sufficient size and organization so that it makes sense to put the work into forming an anarchist international. Given the platform's often enraged denunciations of the 1926 anarchist movement's lack of organization I speculate that the same case existed then. In short, the Delo Truda group was working backwards.

They should have focused on building national organizations before trying to call for an international general union of anarchists. It is understandable, given that the authors saw the revolutionary period they lived in pass by anarchism to the cost of thousands of their comrades' lives, but it remains incorrect.

changed drastically in the last 76 years. When the platform was written there was a wave of mass revolutionary unions across the world. No such comparable movement exists today, especially in the United States and Canada where revolutionary unionism was always much smaller than trade unionism and hasn't been a mass movement since the early 20th century. Even the European revolutionary unions of today are shadows of their former selves never having fully recovered from being smashed during the Fascist period.

That said, the platform makes two essential points about unionism. One that "In uniting workers on a basis of production, revolutionary syndicalism, like all groups based on professions, has no determining theory, it does not have a conception of the world which answers all the complicated social and political questions of contemporary reality. It always reflects the ideologies of diverse political groupings notably of those who work most intensely in its ranks." However, far from rejecting unionism due to its theoretical deficits they "consider the tendency to oppose libertarian communism to syndicalism and vice versa to be artificial, and devoid of all foundation and meaning". They argued that anarchist organizations should participate in unions, not as individuals, but as an "organized force" who "[...] consider that the tasks of anarchists in the ranks of the movement consist of developing libertarian theory, and point it in a libertarian direction, in order to transform it into an active arm of the social revolution. It is necessary to never forget that if trade unionism does not find in anarchist theory a support in opportune times it will turn, whether we like it or not, to the ideology of a political statist party".

Thus is platformism's basic orientation towards working in unions. The question we face is do we concentrate on tiny revolutionary unions like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), or the much larger but thoroughly reformist trade unions? Undoubtedly our influence would be far greater on IWW, our puny membership numbers would account

for almost 10% of the IWW's total membership, but is it really worth the effort to join and organize with the IWW when the mainstream trade unions consist of millions of workers? Doesn't it make more sense to spread our ideas to the maximum number of workers possible?

The final part of the general section is about the defense of the revolution. In it the authors argue that the main threat a revolution faces is not in the initial overthrow of the ruling class, but in the subsequent reactionary counter-attack. The authors saw from first hand experience, that there will be a civil war between the revolutionaries and the armies of the capitalists. It is for that reason that they argue for the creation of a revolutionary army with a "common" (a euphemism for the more accurate term 'central') command. Now, I think it would be hard to argue with any credibility that regular armies with central commands are more efficient and better able to fight than isolated, part-time, "citizen-soldier" militias.

However, efficiency is only one part of the question of anarchist military organizations. The other is the profoundly political question of if a "regularly constituted military organization" can exist in an anarchist society without being the nucleus of an authoritarian state. We would argue "no". The basis of anarchist military organizations should be the irregular militia consisting of affinity groups of revolutionaries that come together to seize and defend their workplaces and communities.

In times of civil war what is needed is the co-ordination of the various armed affinity groups. The militias should come together and form a single military organization with a democratically elected and recallable central command – but should always maintain a high level of autonomy including the freedom to refuse orders. There should also be no rank system with everyone a common soldier.

Most importantly once the civil war is over the central command should be disbanded and the soldiers returned to their homes, fields and factories with their units serving as local ir-

regular militias. The people in arms is fundamental to defending a revolution and the lessons of the forced militarization of anarchist fighting units and disarming of workers' organizations by the Stalinists and republicans during the Spanish civil war (a good 10 years after the platform was written) should be heeded by contemporary anarchists.

That said, the platform does put forth some key points for any anarchist military organization. They are:

"(a) the class character of the army; (b) voluntary service (all coercion will be completely excluded from the work of defending the revolution); (c) free revolutionary discipline (self-discipline) (voluntary service and revolutionary self-discipline are perfectly compatible, and give the revolutionary army greater morale than any army of the state); (d) the total submission of the revolutionary army to the masses of the workers and peasants as represented by the worker and peasant organizations common throughout the country, established by the masses in the controlling sectors of economic and social life."

The fact that the platform takes on the subject of anarchist military organization is important and something that is sorely missing from modern anarchist organizations.

This brings us to the "constructive section" of the platform, which outlines the basic principles of how production and consumption will be organized during and after the revolution. A main point of this section concentrates on the peasants; again this is a point where the development of capitalism has changed social reality.

The world has seen a huge increase in the percentage of the population that lives in cities. Modern capitalist agriculture is no longer done by exploiting small peasant families or farmers – it is through the use of massive agribusiness super-farms that use technology – much of which is chemical – unsustainable high-yield practices that leave the land infertile and the exploitation of migrant workers. A peasantry that the authors write about just doesn't exist in a modern industrial society.