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Preface to the 1977 Italian edition of the Organizational Platform

Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica

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Contents

On the 1926 Organizational Platform of the Lib- ertarian Communists	5
Preface and Introduction to the Dyelo Truda 1926 Organizational Platform of the Lib- ertarian Communists	6
PREFACE	6
INTRODUCTION	8

This state of the movement is clearly visible both in the daily union of many comrades and groups, and often in the agendas of the conventions of those organizations who have thus far undervalued the importance of these matters.

We do not wish to add any other specific points. Just one serious observation — on this and other matters, let us confront each other on the basis of real results. Let's not play the games of our enemies who prefer to fish in the troubled waters of confusion and impotence.

On the 1926 Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists

Following the political and social eruption of 1968, dozens of young anarchist groups all over Italy (and in fact all over western Europe) were to re-discover the “Organizational Platform of the Anarchist Communists”, a document which had already sparked bitter debate among anarchists of the time and which continued to enthuse or arouse condemnation throughout the following decades.

In the early '70s, a collective of anarchist militants in the Italian region of Puglia (from the towns of Bari, Foggia, Barletta, Bisceglie, Molfetta and Altamura) accepted the challenge thrown down by the “Platform” and attempted to establish an anarchist organization based on theses (theory, strategy, tactics) shared by its members.

From this was born the Revolutionary Anarchist Organization (ORA, 1975–1986, with sections and members in the regions of Puglia, Campania, Marches, Emilia, Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont) and, following its amalgamation with the Union of Tuscan Anarchist Communists (UCAT), the Federation of Anarchist Communists (FdCA, 1986-present, with sections and members in Tuscany, Marches, Lombardy, Friuli, Liguria, Puglia and Emilia).

In 1977, the ORA, which was still a regional organization at the time, published an edition of the “Platform” as part of a series known as “StoriaDocumenti”. The following Preface and Introduction were written for this publication.

Today, 25 years after its first appearance, the text which we now present is still an extremely useful analysis of a document which continues to be a loud call for anarchists to dedicate themselves to the class struggle, to working in the mass organizations of the workers and in the anticapitalist movements. This work requires analysis, planning, coherence and

co-ordination in our political action and a unitary vision of the objectives which we need to reach. Hence the need for a Union of Anarchists which can overcome the custom of synthesis between different anarchist currents, and instead experiment a practice of unity based on theoretical-strategic theses and on a political programme. And in order to reach this unity, it is necessary to engage in an internal debate which is so intense that it forces each militant to assume responsibility for the collective decisions which have been made.

FdCA

October 2002

Preface and Introduction to the Dyelo Truda 1926 Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists

[From the first pamphlet in the series "Storia Documenti" containing the 1926 Platform and the debate of the time, published in Bari in May 1977 by the Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica]*

PREFACE

The Platform, often known as Arshinov's Platform, was not his alone, but that of a group of Russian anarchist communists who had survived the Russian Revolution and the Leninist victory over the revolutionary front. The group included, for example, Nestor Makhno and Ida Mett. All of them had first-hand experience of the dramatic events of the Russian Revolution, and certainly no less so than Arshinov.

With the consequent freedom of choice from among different tactics, continually ensuring that the discussion of tactics follows the general line.

If there is clarity on this point and, as long as they accept the principle of the need for a line (even if they are a majority), those who do not agree with the old theoretical-strategic line will be the first to try to build a new organization which can successfully express their general political vision.

All this in terms of collective responsibility means that someone joins an organization for the very reason that he or she shares its policies and, therefore, accepts the relationship of responsibility with all the other members. It means that on particular tactical matters, a comrade can choose to agree or disagree with the line and take on the responsibility of doing no more or no less than what s/he said that s/he would do.

If we don't want people to accept a platform which they will not then follow and (even worse) not revise regularly, then let us accept the principle of collective responsibility and furthermore (and this is important), let us make it work by giving the organization efficient structures of assembly decision-making. This is something which the movement today is sorely lacking.

These four points are all enormously important in Italy today. On the downside, however, we are behind in our work of clarifying them. There has been enough confusion, what between reactionary "excommunications" and fanfared advances. In our opinion, the absurd excommunications on the one hand and the inability to reply to them clearly on the other have only served, and will only continue to serve, to keep the very problems which Dyelo Truda wished to eliminate with their Platform in a state of suspense, unaddressed and unresolved. The proof of this is the fact that the Italian anarchist communist movement still finds itself deprived of those instruments which it should by now have developed, or at the very least examined in a serious way.

who make mistakes can only correct themselves in this way. Our comrades know full well how important this problem is for the Italian anarchist movement, and has been since the last war.

4. COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

An organization is altogether another thing to an individual. Neither is it a simple hotchpotch of individuals. We organize in order to be able to act in a stronger, more incisive way. Libertarian society could certainly not afford to have people who only think of their own interests. On the contrary, a successful libertarian society is based on the fact that, with the abolition of the weapons of dominion of man over man, through one's own autonomous conscience, each member of society keeps the collective needs in mind. It is an ambitious project of overcoming today's individualism gradually and without external impositions. A specific organization of militants who fight for this type of society and who move together as a result of their shared theoretical and tactical vision, cannot but base itself on collective responsibility.

In our opinion, Malatesta did reach agreement with Makhno on the substance of the matter, even though he spoke of the moral responsibility of the individual. But it is clear that it is the individual who contributes to the creation of the collective responsibility of the organization with an act of moral responsibility. This comes about at the moment when theoretical and strategic unity, as a real product of the members of the specific organization, determine the general line to be followed and the ways in which it can be revised and changed. It is around the theoretical and strategic axis, continuously revised and clarified, and around the various tactics which, while not necessarily equal, do not clash with the general line, that we can build an organization as the unitary political conscience of all its members.

These comrades had settled in Paris during the '20s and had established a group by the name of "Dyelo Truda" which carried out intensive publicity work. Their experiences had provided them with not only a clear, pitiless vision of the faults of anarchism amid the fire of revolutionary struggle, but also with a violent repulsion towards those comrades who had contributed more than others to the confusion among anarchists in Russia and a tremendous urgency to change the state of the movement (we must remember that the international scene at the time was in great turmoil).

This perhaps contributed to the somewhat messianic tones in which the Platform was presented. However, this in no way excuses the exaggerated resentment of certain comrades towards the Platform, resentment which may be justified with regard to the form and the way it was presented, but not with regard to the content.

Some things in the Platform, although important, were not clarified or perhaps not fully explained. Other points are simply mistaken. The organizational structure proposed in the Platform is wrong from an anarchist perspective. The existence of organisms and positions holding delegated political powers from the assembly of the organization's members is unacceptable. The powers which the comrades of "Dyelo Truda" wished to give the secretariats and secretaries in effect admits functions which go beyond the expression of policies which have previously been decided by the whole organization, and provides them with real tasks of direction. This must be rejected. A structure of this type is incompatible with the concept of collective responsibility, which foresees conscious adhesion to policies and their continual acceptance by all the members and which excludes in the strongest possible way any decision-making mechanism outside the assembly that seeks to represent the assembly and bind it through collective responsibility.

These negative aspects, however, do not take away what the Russian comrades have given us with their Platform, its enormous value as a proposal and even more so as a milestone in theoretical-practical confrontation.

The fact is that, at an international level, although many comrades raised a fierce din over the debate, they were unable to discern the positive elements from the negative or debatable points, and cherish what was good. As usual, it was the entire movement which paid the price, and not just the Russian comrades.

Arshinov afterwards became a Bolshevik and the Platform became known by all and sundry as “Arshinov’s Platform”. This absurd occult game is the last thing we need. For us, and for history, it is the Platform of Dyelo Truda, of a group of Russian comrades, all demonstrably anarchist communists to the last degree.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said within the Italian movement about the Dyelo Truda Platform, above all in the last decade. So many words and so much prejudice.

If an explanation is needed, it could be said that those who relaunched the debate a few years ago did not have the necessary political clarity to explain to the movement the real, current reasons which lay behind the need for discussion. On the other hand, those who reacted hysterically to this initiative with condemnations and excommunications, evidently did not have the ability and/or the desire to affront a debate where, rather than the Platform in question, it was the real needs of Italian anarchism which were at stake.

The Dyelo Truda Platform wished to raise four points:

1. class struggle

to create organization, but they differ noticeably in just how unitary they need to be, ranging from simply declaring oneself to be anarchist (“pure” synthesis) to precision of strategic unity (tendency). In terms of the movement, it is a matter of the problem of anarchist pluralism. Let us take for granted the existence of several tendencies within anarchism. We then have two choices: either expect all those who call themselves anarchists to survive politically, united as part of the same organism whatever the effect of their actions be with respect to the exploited and the social revolution (even if some forms of anarchist political practice become outmoded as a result of historical facts), or hold that each tendency should organize itself, act and establish its effectiveness autonomously from the others without fear of prejudiced criticism.

We believe that it is not enough to call oneself anarchist in order to be revolutionary, in order to be as politically useful as possible in the revolution of the exploited masses. If we wish to be fair to them, we must allow a possible relationship between the masses and the various anarchist tendencies so that these tendencies can be seen for what they are and not just as part of one great, confused melting pot. The result in that case is confusion, even between anarchists (where only those who thrive on confusion benefit) and represents a missed opportunity for anarchism within the social revolution. For this reason, the best way to honour the pluralism of anarchist tendencies is for them to present themselves in the struggle with clear, specific features, with the possibility to express them and with the freedom to debate with each other politically and, if necessary, to criticize each other.

Let us see the real differences (neither blown out of proportion nor artificially reduced). Let us see their comparison and evaluate them without distortions. Let us no longer pay the price of powerless confusion for the sake of some abstract, purely mental, unity. Let each tendency assume its responsibilities towards the exploited and the social revolution — those

the anger of the exploited without offering the clarity of revolutionary vision in order to reach anarchist communism.

What is serious is that often one or other of these two errors is committed as a result of simple short-sightedness with regard to the real problem.

We urgently need to recognize our backwardness in this area. It is one of the cardinal points of the struggle against the political and labour organizations controlled by the dominating class, in other words, in our struggle for a social revolution.

In conclusion, the specific organization of the anarchist communists and the organization of all the exploited masses must exist and express themselves in their specific areas. But at the same time, they must harmonize more and more in the revolutionary struggle, or face defeat.

3. THEORETICAL UNITY OF THE SPECIFIC ORGANIZATION

An organization of synthesis or of tendency? In the days when the Platform first appeared, this was a lively, explicit debate within the anarchist movement. Today, instead, it seems that everyone is opting for an organization of tendency or, at least, it seems that the polemics have become blurred or have run out of steam. Unfortunately, there is still little clarity and for this reason the matter should be well debated.

Synthesis is the union of all those who look to anarchism, irrespective of the various theoretical and strategic interpretations held by each, basing themselves on the sole necessity that anarchists be able to co-ordinate themselves when and how they wish, on the basis of activities carried out at the time.

The unitary tendency, instead, does not place the organization at the source of the needs of the moment, but rather at the service of a common theoretical-strategic line which is shared by all the comrades who organize together. If you like, it could be said that both positions require unitary tendency in order

2. the relationship between specific organizations and mass organizations (organizational dualism)
3. theoretical unity of the specific organization
4. collective responsibility

1. CLASS STRUGGLE

This point has often been the subject of a false comparison. On the one hand, that known by some as “anarchist humanism”, on the other, “class struggle”. The former is held to be the real content of the libertarian struggle, its objective the enhancement of mankind and its needs without the chains of exploitation and, therefore, class divisions. The latter is held to be marxist and leninist ideology which uses the class struggle to shift power to a new class, that is to say to a new party.

The fact is that we must not talk here about ideology or, in other words, imagine we can combat the ideological distortions that the marxist-leninists brought to the revolutionary struggle of the exploited class using some new ideology created by a (good) vanguard like the anarchists.

It seems to us, instead, that those who distort the revolutionary appeals of the masses in their minds need to be opposed by ... the revolutionary masses themselves.

The historical facts that have provided anarchism with its own historical space and vigour, have been the revolts by one social class which, for the very reason that as a class it has been forcibly deprived of labour, time and self-determination, has rebelled against the other class, the exploiter class.

The latter gains immediate advantage from class divisions and tries to obfuscate the explosive reality with interclass ideology. The exploited, instead, have everything to lose from this division, both in the present and in the future. It is, in fact, from them that the idea of the destruction of classes was born.

The first step, therefore, is to accept their class struggle against class, and the idea of equality against the practice of division.

Once this terrain has been won, it is then necessary to fight against the ideology of the “dictatorship of the exploited”, which we know well makes no revolutionary sense. The struggle of the exploited class must not degenerate into a “dictatorship of the class”. After all, it is the exploited who have pursued a classless society (and only they who can do so).

To sum up: the exploited assert their existence and their needs by fighting against the exploiter class. When, during this struggle, the proletariat asserts (as it almost always does) the idea of a society without classes, then those in a dominating position react more forcibly and the struggle against this class by the exploited class becomes ever more necessary.

At this stage there is the risk that the falsely revolutionary idea of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” can be expressed. In other words, that a new dominating class be born. The guarantee that this does not happen lies in the clarity of the idea of equality, that is to say that this idea rests in the hands of the only people in whose interest it is to keep the idea alive — the exploited masses. They must always remain as a compact, autonomous class together with anyone else who joins them in the revolutionary struggle, every time the risk of the formation of a more or less dominating class rears its head.

And, we repeat, the only power which has the capacity to bring about equality and the only material interest to pursue it, is found amongst the exploited masses, on the precise condition that they always remain united and that they destroy classes of any type which thrive on inequality. Everything outside this, outside the history of revolutions, is simply a mass of dangerous mental exercises which only serve to confuse.

It is not a coincidence that the western bourgeoisie and the eastern “socialist” bureaucracies both tell us that we are all

equal and that in their societies either there exist no class divisions or that they are fast disappearing. They are simply trying to deny the existence of their dominion. We will have no truck with this idea.

2. SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS & MASS ORGANIZATIONS (“Organizational Dualism”)

On this point there has been, unfortunately, little (if any) serious debate, aside from various superficial mentions and recent (and quite justifiably worried) awakenings.

Revolutionary anarchist militants must unite with the exploited masses, but at the same time they must be able to carry out their propaganda in order to bring the masses’ own history to their attention, to point out the past mistakes and victories on the road of revolution — an element of clarity is necessary.

The exploited masses must organize their strength and clarity in their struggle against the exploiter class: the material possibility that a classless, self-organized society can be brought about lies in just this.

Anarchist revolutionaries together with the exploited must organize themselves by making the most of the specific qualities they can lend to the social revolution, but these qualities will have no sense if they are not harmonized. The masses need dialogue with those who provide them with the elements to defeat the dominant ideological mystifications in the light of the history of the revolutionary masses. This does not, however, mean that this clarity cannot change from a possible revolutionary weapon into a real and active revolutionary weapon in the hands of the masses alone, that they alone can build the new society.

This enormous problem cannot be resolved by naturally cancelling one of the two terms, that is to say, by expecting that only those who are in the specific anarchist communist organization can make the revolution, or that it is enough to organize