Reply by several Russian Anarchists to the ‘Platform’

Various Authors

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Contents

Reasons for the Weakness of the Anarchist Movement 3
The Anarchist Synthesis 3
Anarchism as a Theory of Classes 4
The Role of the Masses and Anarchism in the Social Struggle and the Social Revolution 4
The Transition Period 5
Production 6
Defence of the Revolution 7
Anarchist Organisation 8
Method of Creating an Anarchist Organisation 8
Role and Character of Anarchist Organisations 9
Form of Anarchist Organisation 10

Reasons for the Weakness of the Anarchist Movement

We do not agree with the position of the Platform 'that the most important reason for the weakness of the anarchist movement is the absence of organisational principles'. We believe that this issue is very important because the Platform seeks to establish a centralised organisation (a party) that would create 'a political and tactical line for the anarchist movement'. This over emphasises the importance and role of organisation.

We are not against an anarchist organisation; we understand the harmful consequences of a lack of organisation in the anarchist movement; we consider the creation of an anarchist organisation to be one of our most urgent tasks … But we do not believe that organisation, as such, can be a cure-all. We do not exaggerate its importance, and we see no benefit or need to sacrifice anarchist principles and ideas for the sake of organisation. We see the following reasons for the weakness of the anarchist movement:

1. The confusion in our ideas about a series of fundamental issues. such as the conception of the social revolution, of violence, of the period of transition, of organisation.

2. The difficulty of getting a large part of the population to accept our ideas. We must take into account existing prejudices, customs, education, the fact that the great mass of people will look for an accommodation rather than radical change.

3. Repression.

The Anarchist Synthesis

We also disagree with the idea of a 'synthesis', as stated in the Platform. The authors proclaim that anarchist-communism is the only valid theory, and they take a critical, more or less, negative position toward individualist anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists.

We repeat what we declared when we organised NABAT (Organisation of Ukrainian anarchists in 1917–1921): 'There is validity in all anarchist schools of thought. We must consider all diverse tendencies and accept them.' To unite all militants we must seek a common base for all, seeing what is just in each concept. This should be included in a Platform for the entire movement. There are several examples of such a Platform, such as the declaration of the Nabat Conference in Kursk, as well as the resolutions of other anarchist conferences of that period. Here are some extracts of the resolution adopted at the First Congress of the Confederation of Anarchist Organisations in the Ukraine, 'NABAT', that took place April 2, 1919, in Elizabethgrad, Ukraine:

> *'… our organisation does not represent a mechanical alliance of different tendencies, each holding only to its own point of view and, therefore, unable to offer ideological guidance to the working population; it is a union of comrades joined together on a number of basic positions and with an awareness of the need for planned, organised collective effort on the basis of federation.'*

Anarchism as a Theory of Classes

Synthesis is needed in this area also. We cannot affirm that anarchism is a theory of classes and reject those who try to give it a human character. And we cannot declare like some do that anarchism is a humanitarian ideal for all people and accuse those who hold to a class base of marxist deviation. Nor, finally, can we maintain that anarchism is solely an individualist conception having nothing to do with humanity as a whole or with a 'class'. We must create a synthesis and state that anarchism contains class elements as well as humanism and individualist principles.

We must try to determine in a theoretical and practical manner the role and importance of each of these elements in the conception of anarchism. To maintain that anarchism is only a theory of classes is to limit it to a single viewpoint. Anarchism is more complex and pluralistic, like life itself. Its class element is above all its means of fighting for liberation; its humanitarian character is its ethical aspect, the foundation of society; its individualism is the goal of mankind.

The Role of the Masses and Anarchism in the Social Struggle and the Social Revolution

The thesis of the Platform on this question can be summarised as follows: the masses must be directed. The contrary viewpoint was the prevailing one in our movement until now: individuals and conscious minority, including their ideological organisations, cannot 'direct the masses'. We must learn from the masses constantly if we do not want to lead them into a blind alley.

This is how the problem should be seen. Their solution is very superficial and false because the central problem is not resolved: the revolutionary masses and the conscious minority or their ideological organisations. The political parties have an advantage in this area: it is not a problem for them. Their solution is:

- the masses and developments must be directed;
- the conscious minority, separated from the masses, must take the initiative;
- this 'collective' must be organised into a party;
- the party takes the initiative in all areas, including the social revolution.

The authors of the Platform take a similar position. However they choose to begin with some precaution: 'The ideological direction of revolutionary activities and revolutionary movements should not be understood as a tendency of the anarchists to take control of the building of the new society.'

The Platform expresses the idea that the need to direct the masses is linked directly to a party, a well defined political line, a predetermined program, control of the labour movement, political direction of the organisations created to fight the counter-revolution. The Platform states: *'The anarchist union as an organisation of the social revolution rests on the two main classes of society: the workers and the peasants ... all their energies must be concentrated on the ideological guidance of the labour organisations.'*

The concrete form of organisation needed to achieve such political and social direction of the masses and their actions will be: at the highest level, the leading party (General Union); a little

below: the higher levels of the workers and peasants organisations led by the Union; still lower: the organisations at the base set up to fight the counter-revolution, the army, etc.

We do not believe that the anarchists should lead the masses; we believe that our role is to assist the masses only when they need such assistance. This is how we see our position: the anarchists are part of the membership in the economic and social mass organisations. They act and build as part of the whole. An immense field of action is opened to them for ideological, social and creative activity without assuming a position of superiority over the masses. Above all they must fulfills their ideological and ethical influence in a free and natural manner.

The anarchists and specific organisations (groups, federations, confederations) can only offer ideological assistance, but not in the role of leaders. The slightest suggestion of direction, of superiority, of leadership of the masses and developments inevitably implies that the masses must accept direction, must submit to it; this, in turn, gives the leaders a sense of being privileged like dictators, of becoming separated from the masses.

In other words, the principles of power come into play — This is in contradiction not only with the central ideas of anarchism, but also our conception of the social revolution. The revolution must be the free creation of the masses, not controlled by ideological or political groups.

The Transition Period

The Platform denies the principle of the transition, period in words yet accepts it as a fact. If the Platform contains an original idea it is precisely on this point, on the detailed description of the idea of the transition period. Everything else is only an attempt to justify this idea.

Some Russian anarcho-syndicalists openly defended this idea a few years ago. The authors of that Platform do not defend the idea of a transition clearly and openly. This vacillation, this conditional acceptance and rejection, makes frank and logical discussion of the issue difficult. For instance, they declare on the issue of majority and minority in the anarchist movement: In principle (the classical conception follows) … however, at certain moments it could be that (the compromise follows)…'

We know that life does not happen in 'moments'. Another example: 'We believe that decisions of the soviets wilt be carried out in society without decrees of coercion. But such decisions must be obligatory for everyone who has accepted them, and sanctions must be applied against those who reject them' This is the start of coercion, violence, sanctions.

The Platform states:

> *'Because we are convinced that acceptance of a government will result in the defeat of the revolution and the enslavement of the masses, we must direct all our efforts to have the revolution take the anarchist road … But we also recognise that our organisation of labour on the basis of small groups of artisans cannot help us fulfil our goal. This must be recognised in advance by the specific organisations.*

The Anarchist Union will lead the discussion and will decide the question in case of disagreement. This is precisely the issue. We find the same contradiction with regard to the defence of the revolution:

> *'Politically, whom will the army obey? Since the workers are not represented by a single organisation, they will probably organise various economic organisations. Thus, if we*

accept the principle of an army, we must also accept the principle of obedience of the army to the economic organisations of the workers and peasants …'

This is the transition period!

The Platform states with respect to freedom of press and freedom of speech: *'There can be specific moments when the press, however well intentioned, will be controlled to an extent for the good of the revolution.'* Who will judge when, these 'specific moments' occur? Who will judge what their 'limits' should be? There will be authority and power, even though it may be called by some other name.

The Platform writes regarding the anarchist principle 'From each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs':

'This principle is the touchstone of anarchist-communism. But it is a conception of principle: its realisation will depend on the practical steps taken during the early days of the revolution.' Here again the 'howevers'. What. then, is the transition period?

It is clear and logical to us: the idea of the necessity to lead the masses to guide developments, therefore the need for elements of power and a transition period. We, on the other hand, regard the essential core of the social revolution to be the role of the mass of the workers who, thrust into the colossal process of social destruction by their historical experience, can achieve the free society in freedom, conscious of what they are doing.

Production

How will production be organised? Will it be centralised and planned the way the Bolsheviks are doing? Will it be too decentralised on a federalist basis?

This is the most important question. The authors of the Platform write: 'The organisation of production will be carried out by organisations created by the workers — soviets, factory committees which will direct and organise production in the cities, the regions and the nations. They will be linked closely with the masses who elect and control them, and have the power of recall at any time.

The Platform accepts a centralised, mechanical system, giving it the simple corrective of election. This is not enough. We think that changing names of an administrative body by means of an election is no great change. A mechanical, inanimate process can never come alive. So far as we are concerned, the participation of the masses cannot be limited only to 'electing'. There must be an immediate participation in the organisation of production. As a matter of principle we are not against committees (factory committees, workshop committees), nor against the need for a relationship and co-ordination between them. But these organisations can have a negative aspect: immobility, bureaucracy, a tendency to authoritarianism that will not be changed automatically by the principle of voting. It seems to us that there will be a better guarantee in the creation of a series of other, more mobile, even provisional organs, which arise and multiply according to needs that arise in the course of daily living and activities. Thus, in addition to organisations for distribution, for consumers, for housing, etc. All of these together offer a richer, more faithful reflection of the complexity of social life.

Defence of the Revolution

This is the way the Platform sees the problem:

> *'In the first days of the social revolution, the armed forces are formed by all the armed workers and peasants, by the people in arms. But this is only in the first days when the civil war has not reached a climax, when the combatants have not yet coordinated their military organisation. After these early days, the armed forces of the revolution with its general command and general plan of operation. This organisation of struggle against the counter-revolution on battlefields in civil war is under the direction of the workers and peasants producers' organisations.'*

We see two errors here, one technical, one political. The technical error: only a centralised army can defend the revolution. To avoid total confusion, we point out that the opposite is also incorrect, namely, that only isolated, local units with no contact with each other can guarantee the success of the revolution. A highly centralised command developing a general plan of action can lead to catastrophe. Actions without co-ordination are also inefficient. The defects of the first, which do not take local conditions into consideration, are self-evident. The discouragement of local and individual initiative, the weight of the apparatus, the tendency to regard the center as infallible, the priorities of the specialists are all the weaknesses of centralised command. The defects of the second system are self-evident.

How can these problems and defects be resolved? We believe, especially in view of the Russian experience, that the armed participation of the working masses is essential, not only in the first days of revolutionary action, but during the entire period of struggle. Local formations of workers and peasants must be maintained with the understanding that their action is not isolated, but rather coordinated in a common campaign. And even when the situation requires larger armed formations, the command should not be centralised. There should be joint combat effectiveness when necessary, but they must be able to adapt easily to changing situations and take advantage of unforeseen conditions.

It must not be forgotten that the partisan units won the victories in the Russian Revolution against the forces of reaction, Denikin, Kolchak, Wrangel. The central army, with their central command and pre-established strategic planning was always taken by surprise and was unable to adapt to the unexpected. Most of the time, the centralised Red Army arrived late, almost always in to receive the laurels and glory of victory which belonged to the real victors, the partisans. One day history will report the truth about the bureaucracy of military centralisation.

We can be asked how is it possible to defend the social revolution against foreign intervention without a solid centralised army. We respond, first, that this danger should not be exaggerated. Most of the time such an expedition comes from far away with all the difficulties this entails; second, the Russian Revolution had a series of such interventions, and they were all defeated by partisan units, not by the centralised army, by the active resistance of the masses, by the intense revolutionary propaganda addressed to the soldiers and sailors of the invading forces.

Finally, we point out that a centralised army with its central command and 'political direction', has too much opportunity to stop being a revolutionary army; consciously or not it becomes an instrument to hold back, a tool of, reaction, of suffocation of the true revolution. We know because history has taught these lessons in the past. The latest example is the Russian Revolution with its Red Army.

The position of the Platform on the role of the army as a 'political defender', an 'arm against reaction', surprises us. We believe that such an apparatus can have only a negative role for the social revolution. Only the people in arms, with their enthusiasm, their positive solutions to the essential problems of the revolution (particularly in production) can offer sufficient defence against the plots of the 'bourgeoisie'. And if the people fall, no 'apparatus', no 'army', no 'tcheka' can save the revolution. To disagree with this viewpoint means that the problems of the revolution do not interest the masses except as a political cloak. This is the typically — Bolshevik conception.

This leads to the following conclusion: a leading organisation (the Union) that orients the mass organisations (workers and peasants) in their political direction and is supported as needed by a centralised army is nothing more than a new political power.

Anarchist Organisation

We return to the problem of organisation which is of concern to us. We believe that the disorganisation of the anarchist movement around the world does us great harm. We are convinced that forces and movements must be organised. Three questions arise when we consider the creation of an organisation: the method of establishing an organisation, the aim and essence of an organisation, and its form.

Method of Creating an Anarchist Organisation

Why and how should an anarchist organisation be created? We must start by trying to understand the most important causes of disorganisation among anarchists. It is clear and simple for the authors of the Platform: some anarchists have a 'disturbed' character, a sense of 'irresponsibility',' a 'lack of discipline'. We believe that among a number of causes of disorganisation in anarchist movements, the most important is the vague and imprecise character of some of our basic ideas.

The authors of the Platform agree with this. They speak of 'contradiction in theory and practice', of doubts without end'. There are two ways to resolve this question: Take one idea among 'contradictory ideas' as the basis, accept it as the common program. If necessary, organise with a certain discipline. At the same time, all who disagree with the program should be excluded and even driven out of the movement. The organisation thus created — the only organisation — will further clarify its ideas (there are comrades who believe that the anarchist ideas on this issue are sufficiently clear). As a serious organisation is created, we will have to devote our best energies to clarify, deepen and develop our ideas.

Above all we must try to reduce the 'contradictions' in the field of theory. Our efforts to create an organisation will help us in our ideological work. To put it another way, we will organise our forces as we develop and systematise our ideas.

The authors of the Platform forget that they are following an old road in seeking to create an organisation based on a single ideological and tactical conception. They are creating an organisation that will have more or less hostile relations with other organisations that do not have exactly the same conceptions. They do not understand that this old road will lead inevitably to the same old results; the existence not of a single organisation but of many organisations. They will not

be in a co-operative, harmonious relationship, but rather in conflict with each other even though they are all anarchist: each organisation will claim the sole, the profound truth. These organisations will be concerned with polemics against each other rather than developing propaganda and activities to help the anarchist movement in general.

The authors of the Platform speak of the need for 'ideological and tactical unity'. But how is this unity to be achieved? This is the problem, and there is no satisfactory answer. The method outlined does not lead to unity. On the contrary, it will make the differences, the discussion, among us more acute leading even to hatred.

This approach must be treated as follows? the 'only', the 'true' theory and tactic of the authors of the Platform must be rejected without further discussion.

However this is not the anarchist way to act. We suggest another course of procedure. We believe that the first step toward achieving unity in the anarchist movement which can lead to serious organisation is collective ideological work on a series of important problems that seek the clearest possible collective solution.

For those comrades who are afraid of philosophical and intellectual digressions and wanderings, we make it clear that we are not concerned with philosophical problems or abstract dissertations, but with concrete questions for which, unfortunately, we do not have clear answers. For example, the questions, among others, of the constructive task of anarchism, of the role of the masses and the conscious minority, of violence, the analysis of the process of social revolution and the problem of the period of transition, the way to the libertarian society, the role of workers and peasants organisations, of the armed groups, the relations with unions, the relationship between communism and individualism, the problem of the organisation of our forces.

How can this be realised?

We suggest that there be a publication for discussion in every country where the problems in our ideology and tactics can be fully discusses, regardless of how 'acute' or even 'taboo' it may be. The need for such a printed organ, as well as oral discussion, seems to us to be a 'must' because it is the practical way, to try to achieve 'ideological unity', 'tactical unity', and possibly organisation.

There are, however, comrades who refuse to use an organ of discussion. They prefer a series of publications, each defending a particular position. We prefer a single organ with the condition that representatives of all opinions and all tendencies in anarchism be permitted to express themselves and become accustomed to living together. A full and tolerant discussion of our problems in one organ will create a basis for understanding, not only among anarchists, but among the different conceptions of anarchism. This type of agreement to discuss our ideas together in an organised fashion can advance along parallel lines.

Role and Character of Anarchist Organisations

The role and aim of an organisation are fundamental. There cannot be a serious organisation without a clear definition of this question. The aims of an organisation are determined in a large part by its form. The authors of the Platform attribute the role of leading the masses, the unions and all other organisations, as well as all activities and developments to the anarchist organisation. We declare that juxtaposing the words 'to lead' with the adverb 'ideologically' does not change the position of the Platform's authors significantly because they conceive the organisa-

tion as a disciplined party. We reject any idea that the anarchists should lead the masses. We hope that their role will only be that of ideological collaboration, as participants and helpers fulfilling our social role in a modest manner. We have pointed out the nature of our work: the written and spoken word, revolutionary propaganda, cultural work, concrete living example, etc.

Form of Anarchist Organisation

The contradictions, the semi-confessions, the vacillations in language of the Platform are characteristic on this point. However, in spite of many precautions, their conception appears to be that of any political party: the Executive Committee of the Universal Anarchist Union must, among other things, assume the ideological and organisational direction of every organisation according to the general ideological and tactical line of the Union. At the same time, the Platform affirms its faith in the federalist principle which is in absolute contradiction with the ideas cited above. Federalism means autonomy at the base, federation of local groups, regions, etc., and finally a union of federations and confederations.

A certain ideological and tactical unity among organisations is clearly necessary. But how? In what sense? We cite again the resolution adopted by the Ukrainian organisation, NABAT, at the Kursk conference: 'A harmonious anarchist organisation in which the union does not have a formal character but its members are joined together by common ideas of means and ends.'

The authors of the Platform begin by affirming: 'Anarchism has always been the negation of a centralised organisation.' Yet they then go on to outline a perfectly centralised organisation with an Executive Committee that has the responsibility to give ideological and organisational direction to the different anarchist organisations, which in turn will direct the professional organisations of the workers.

What has happened to federalism? They are only one step away from bolshevism, a step that the authors of the Platform do not dare to take. The similarity between the bolsheviks and the 'Platform anarchists' is frightening to the Russian comrades. It makes no difference whether the supreme organ of the anarchist party is called Executive Committee, or if we call it Confederal Secretariat. The proper spirit of an anarchist organisation is that of a technical organ of relations, help and information among the different local groups and federations.

In conclusion, the only original points in the Platform are: its revisionism toward bolshevism hidden by the authors, and acceptance of the transition period. There is nothing original in the rest of the Platform. This cannot be clear to the comrades of other countries because not enough has been published yet in other languages on the Russian Revolution and anarchism in Russia. The comrades therefore do not know much about developments there. Some of them are therefore able to accept the Platform's interpretation.

However, we think that the 'acceptance' will not last long.

We are convinced that discussion of the Platform will help clear up some of the misunderstandings.

Sobol — Schwartz — Steimer — Voline — Lia — Roman Ervantian — Fleshin

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