

# *Platformism Without Illusions*



"It is time for anarchism to leave the swamp of disorganisation, to put an end to endless vacillations on the most important tactical and theoretical questions, to resolutely move towards a clearly recognised goal, and to operate an organised collective practice"

- *The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, 1926*

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*The Northeastern Anarchist* is the English-language theoretical magazine of the *Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists* (NEFAC), covering class struggle anarchist theory, history, strategy, debate and analysis in an effort to further develop anarcho-communist ideas and practice.

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#### ***Northeastern Anarchist***

**PO Box 230685**

**Boston,**

**MA 02123,**

**USA**

**email:** northeastern\_anarchist@yahoo.com

**Website:** www.nefac.net

# Platformism Without Illusions

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Most of these pieces are taken from number 6 of *The Northeastern Anarchist*; the theoretical magazine of the *Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists* (NEFAC) except the essay *As Far as Organisation Goes: We are Platformists*, which is taken from number 3 of that journal.

The last piece, *The Anarchist Platform* is a contemporary document which was developed in an attempt to build and unite the various groups and organisations that might subscribe to the ideas of the original Platform and to help spread news and ideas between them.

# THE PLATFORM: IT'S NOT JUST FOR PLATFORMISTS ANYMORE

by Jeff Shantz and P. J. Lilley  
(NEFAC-Toronto)

Much has been made over the last few years of renewed activity by anarchists inspired by the 1926 platform. Rather than engaged debate on the issue, discussion has tended to be polarised between defenders of the platform and unwavering opponents of platformism (and so-called organisational anarchism generally). Lost in this polarisation is the fact that platformism offers some important insights into contemporary anarchist activity, insights that may be especially useful for non-platformists.

We should begin this discussion by saying that we are not platformists. We have never been platformists and, who knows, we may never be platformists. In fact, over the years we've had our own share of problems with the platform and many arguments with proponents of the platform.

Still, we support the recent emergence of platformist organisations in North America generally, and the activities of a specific platformist federation, *NEFAC*. We also think that platformist actions and ideas have much to offer anarchists in North America, both in terms of their critique of North American anarchist movements and in terms of their positive contributions to the struggle for an anarchist society.

Thus we write this short piece not as boosterism for those who agree with the platform, nor as a rebuttal to those who are opposed to the platform. Instead we write it as anarchists still grappling with the questions and challenges posed by the platform. We are encouraged by the possibilities raised by platformist organising which builds anarchism outside of our limited circles and in connection with people's everyday lives and struggles under capitalism.

In our view, the burden is on critics of platformism to explain what is wrong with the emergence of anarchist organisations that through their ideas and activities might serve as a pole of attraction for anarchists. Non-platformists have many questions to answer.

- Ideological Unity
- Tactical Unity
- Collective Action and Discipline
- Federalism

Anarchism will be created by the class struggle between the vast majority of society (the working class) and the tiny minority that currently rule. A successful revolution will require that anarchist ideas become the leading ideas within the working class. This will not happen spontaneously. Our role is to make anarchist ideas the leading ideas or as it is sometimes expressed to become a 'leadership of ideas'.

We work within the trade unions as the major focus of our activity where this is a possibility. We therefore reject views that dismiss activity in the unions. Within them we fight for the democratic structures typical of anarcho-sindicalist unions like the 1930's *CNT*. However the unions no matter how revolutionary cannot replace the need for anarchist political organisation(s).

We also see it as vital to work in struggles that happen outside the unions/workplace. These include struggles against particular oppressions, imperialism and indeed the struggles of the working class for a decent place and environment in which to live. Our general approach to these, like our approach to the unions is to involve ourselves wherever the greatest number are found and within this movement to promote anarchist methods of organisation involving direct democracy.

We actively oppose all manifestation of prejudice within the workers movement and identify working alongside those struggling against racism, sexism, [religious] sectarianism and homophobia as a priority. We see the success of a revolution and the success of the elimination of these oppressions after the revolution being determined by the building of such struggles in the pre-revolutionary period.

We oppose imperialism and put forward anarchism as an alternative goal to nationalism. We defend grass root anti-imperialist movements while arguing for an anarchist rather than nationalist strategy.

We identify a need for anarchist organisations who agree with these principles to federate on an international basis. However we believe the degree of federation possible and the amount of effort put into it must be determined on the success of building national organisations capable of making such international work a reality rather than a matter of slogans.

## JOINING ANARCHIST PLATFORM

To join this list please email: [wsm\\_ireland@yahoo.com](mailto:wsm_ireland@yahoo.com)

**Your email should have the subject 'Anarchist Platform' and should include the following:**

- 1) A statement that you agree with the points and want to subscribe to the list.
- 2) A short introduction that can be posted to the list saying where you are from and

# THE ANARCHIST PLATFORM

by Workers Solidarity Movement (Ireland)  
& Workers Solidarity Federation (South Africa)

## PREAMBLE

The points of the anarchist platform arose from discussion between the Irish *Workers Solidarity Movement* and the South African *Workers Solidarity Federation* (which has now dissolved). Because of this background the points assume a common understanding of what anarchism is. Probably the book 'Anarchism' by Daniel Guerin contains the best detailed explanation of anarchist history and theory from this perspective.

After the dissolution of the *WSF*, the *WSM* decided to use the points agreed upon to launch the Anarchist-Platform email list. The purpose of the list is to bring together anarchists who agree with the points both for the exchange of information but also in the hope that they will meet up with others on the list in their geographical region and engage in common work. As such, list members are expected to actively pursue this agenda and not simply lurk (a common feature of other lists).

## ANARCHIST PLATFORM

We identify ourselves as anarchists and with the 'Platformist' tradition within anarchism which includes groups and publications such as 'The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists', the *Friends of Durruti* and the 'Manifesto of Libertarian Communism' (Georges Fontenis).

We broadly identify with the organisational practice argued for by this tradition but not necessarily everything else they did or said. That is it is a starting point for our politics and not an end point.

**The core ideas of this tradition that we identify with are the need for anarchist organisations that seek to develop:**

Why not draw anarchists together to actively hash out common positions, strategies and tactics? Why not prefer that active engagement to the comfort of spinning out personal utopias, criticising from the sidelines or conversely setting aside political differences altogether? What is there to oppose in efforts "to rally all the militants of the organised anarchist movement?" Why oppose attempts to attract working class militants to anarchism?

The goal of developing anarchist perspectives within unions and other working class organisations is one that anarchists have neglected for far too long. And then many anarchists have the nerve to complain about the un-anarchistic character of the working class.

That some non-platformists have responded to platformist organising dogmatically and reactively, criticising a document to dismiss a movement, referring to broad generalisations about "organisation" rather than specific organisational practices, suggests that some habits are tough to shake. Still, it's exactly the habits nurtured during times of lethargy, insularity and marginality that must be shaken off as people are beginning to seek alternatives to capitalist social relations. Not only thoughts of future societies but of real strategies for making it happen are needed.

To begin with, it seems obvious that the original Dielo Trouda concern with overcoming "the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates" is one that must be shared by North American anarchists today, despite the encouraging upswing in anarchist activity recently (of which platformists have played a good part).

As anarchist movements grow the questions of organisation and the relations of various anarchist activities to each other and to broader strategies and tactics for social change will only become more significant and pressing. If anarchists are to seize the opportunities presented by recent upsurges in anarchist activity and build anarchism in movements that have resonance in wider struggles, then we must face seriously the challenges of organisation, of combining and co-ordinating our efforts effectively. We will be aided in this by drawing upon the lessons of past experiences and avoiding, as much as possible, past errors.

One of the glaring errors has been to avoid questions of organisation and unity, leaving us woefully unprepared when struggles erupt. When movements are in low ebb and goals are less ambitious, such questions may appear less immediate and the impetus to break out of the protective shell of the subculture less pressing. This has been the situation in North America until very recently.

The changed circumstances in a time of growth for anarchism, and anti-capitalist activities more generally, require new practices suited to the changed dynamics of struggle. As struggles expand and develop, the question is not so much whether people will form organisations or not, but rather the types of organisations that will emerge. People trying to beat capitalism will certainly try to join forces with others to share resources, co-ordinate efforts and build strength. To stand on the sidelines in such matters is to leave the terrain open to authoritarian and/or reformist organisations to fill the breach.

When one looks at the history of anarchism, organisational perspectives and activities, far from being marginal elements, represent the core of anarchist endeav-

our. Attempts to suggest that organisational approaches represent some deviation from anarchism or the intrusion of un-anarchist ideas into anarchism are a strange attempt at historical revisionism. Of course, most anarchists are involved in some type of organisation or another, whether an infoshop collective, publication team or affinity group.

Much of anarchist activity in North America, unfortunately, still corresponds with the Dielo Trouda description from 1926: "local organisations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them." Absence of durable anarchist organisations still contributes to a drift into passivity, demoralisation, disinterest or a retreat into subculturalism.

Many of these short lived organisations are built on the synthesist basis that platformists have been and remain so critical of. While we're not convinced that synthesist approaches must fail, in my experiences they do exhibit a tendency to be the "mechanical assembly of individuals" which the platformists suggested. Such groupings work reatively well as long as their level of activity doesn't rise above running a bookstore, infoshop or free school. Unfortunately, even in those cases disastrous rifts emerge when meaningful political questions are broached. A consensus based on not wanting to offend other members or declining controversial work because it threatens collective harmony are too often the default positions of synthesist type groups.

Platformists seek a substantial unity based on shared action and reflection. Platformism encourages a political and theoretical honesty. One can take a stand without having to compromise or soft peddle one's positions in order to keep the peace.

Discussion of unity perhaps requires some clarification. When platformists talk of theoretical or tactical unity they are not saying that everyone has to read the same things or agree on all points. Surely, however, there has to be some agreement on basic ideas. And these positions are only determined collectively, through open debate and discussion rooted in actual experience. Unity speaks to a focused sharing of resources and energies that brings currently limited anarchist forces together rather than dissipating and diluting our efforts.

Of course it's always easier to avoid the collective work, the lengthy debate and discussion, the development and revision of ideas through practice and finally the legwork of organising that platformists take on. It's also easier to develop pure schemes in the comfort of one's apartment, rarely worrying oneself whether or not such beautiful fantasies "would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality." Platformists, on the other hand, accept the shared responsibilities of building anarchist movements in connection with those who suffer the assaults of capitalism.

The anarchist organisation is a place to come together and reflect on work being done. It offers the opportunity to examine and refine one's practices and explore alternatives and options given the resources and experiences at hand.

It seems to us that the important thing about platformism isn't found in the specifics of a 1926 document but in the challenge that it puts before us to come

organisation (but we are working on it!) [5]

**- first published in *Ruptures*, French magazine of NEFAC.  
Then in the *Northeastern Anarchist* No. 3**

### Notes

- 1) See Wayne Price's "Love & Rage" piece elsewhere in this magazine. (i.e. in #3 of the *NEA* - ZB ed.)
- 2) See respectively *History Of The Makhnovist Movement*, by Arshinov (Freedom Books, London) and *The Kronstadt Commune* by Mett (Solidarity, available on the web at [flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia/mett.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia/mett.html)). Both are available through AK Press ([www.akpress.org](http://www.akpress.org)). *The Kronstadt Commune* by Ida Mett is available via mail order from Zabalaza Books.
- 3) Today we usually refer to this text as "Arshinov's Platform" or the "Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists" (the title used by those who identify with it). All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Platform [the text is available online at [flag.blackened.net/revolt/platform/plat\\_preface.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/platform/plat_preface.html)].
- 4) 'The Question of the Revolutionary Anarchist Organisation', position of the *Groupe Emile-Henry* (*NEFAC-Quebec*), see [www3.sympatico.ca/emile.henry/orgeh.htm](http://www3.sympatico.ca/emile.henry/orgeh.htm) for a French version.
- 5) 'The Question of the Revolutionary Anarchist Organisation'; *Groupe Emile-Henry*

tion, 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 realisation of these.”

### **The Relevance of the Platform Today**

The members of the *Dielo Trouda* group have the merit to have reflected on means to get militant anarchism back on its track. Their solutions can, still today, serve as a departing point to build an organised and coherent anarchist practice. Of course, we are far from approaching the platform like a bible (or a little red book!), and we are aware that it has some deficiencies, most notably on the question of patriarchy, like we've said, and on the question of the autonomy of social movements.

One of the mistakes of the first 'platformists' was, paradoxically, to put too much hope in the existing anarchist movement. Indeed, they were sure to rally the majority of activists to their concepts. Can we really be surprised, given the virulent attacks of the platform, that it didn't work? Nevertheless, even today, it is still a trap we easily fall into. *NEFAC* didn't avoid it. We have spent a lot of time discussing and trying to convince the activists of our region. We are forced to acknowledge our failure... Is it a bad thing? Not entirely. Indeed, looking at what is actually done - and not only what is said, we are far from sure that the future of revolutionary anarchism lies in anarchist activists. Maybe if anarchists stopped trying to convince one another, they would have more time to give to the rest of the population? As far as we are concerned, we've decided to acknowledge the simple fact of the division of our movement and we have decided to "stop talking about it and start doing it".

What we understand of the platform is the necessity to organise seriously. Which means to give ourselves the means to go forward, and so simple things like a democratic structure with decisional conference, a discussion list, dues, mandated work committees, etc. We also know that anarchism only has limited roots in the region, and that we will need to develop a host of political positions on a variety of subjects in order to remain innovative. To us, the question of tactical and theoretical unity is just common sense and, what's more, a process of continuous debate.

"It's goal not being the seizure of power, the anarchist organisation can neither be a party nor a self-proclaimed vanguard. It is rather an acting minority within the working class. Its hope is to serve as a libertarian rallying point and take part in the theoretical and practical fight against all authoritarian ideologies. It is first and foremost a force of proposition that tries to rally people, by example and suggestion, to its political points of view. [...] Considering that any revolutionary period must be preceded by organisations able to rally people to the anarchist alternatives and methods, we believe that a strong anarchist organisation, rooted in struggles, is necessary. Let's be clear, however, we don't think that *NEFAC* is, right now, such an

together openly and seriously to develop anarchist strategies and practices in a way that is engaged in real class struggles against actually existing bosses, landlords and bureaucrats. Platformists have taken up the challenge of moving anarchism from its current status as social conscience or cultural critique. This is exhibited in the work being done by platformist groups in tenants' unions, workplaces, anti-poverty actions and fighting deportations to name only a few.

These actions, based upon serious debate and an estimation of the capacities to do the work properly, have moved the discussion of organisation out of the clouds of speculation and brought it to the ground of everyday practice.

They have taken it from comfortable abstraction to practical reality based on the experiences of people living under actually existing capitalism.

Of course, the platform is simply a "tactical and theoretical orientation" and platformist organisation is the bringing together of those who would develop that orientation through their practice. Thus it is always open to re-appraisal as circumstances suggest.

It's important to keep in mind that the platform was only ever intended as a beginning, "as the first step towards rallying libertarian forces." Far from being a fully fleshed out program of action it provides only "the outlines, the skeleton of such a programme." Its authors recognised its many gaps, oversights and inadequate treatments.

Part of anarchism's growth must include a commitment to developing visions and practices that can build anarchist movements rather than just "scenes" or cliques. If platformism offers a starting point for this process then it makes a welcome and necessary contribution to anarchism in North America.

Anarchist hobbyism is not much better than the hobbyism of stamp collecting or bird watching. Hobbies offer their practitioners moments of freedom, self-expression and relief from the daily grind but they don't do much to keep the shit from piling up. Anarchism can do better than that and must do better than that. This is what platformism recognises and it attempts to take anarchism out of esoteric hobbyism.

Anarchism must move from the realm of speculation to the terrain of possibility. In giving a serious impetus to this movement, platformist organisations offer much to anarchist efforts in North American.

### **Notes**

1) As well this will not be an exposition of the platform's positions. Those accounts can be found in the *Zabalaza Books* pamphlet "The Global Influence of Platformism Today" or Nicolas Phebus' fine article "As Far as Organisation Goes: We are Platformists" included in this pamphlet.

# Book Review of the ORGANISATIONAL PLATFORM OF THE LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISTS

by Dielo Trouda Group, 1926  
(Workers Solidarity Movement, 1989)

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 organising efforts can benefit, while simultaneously discarding many of the irrelevancies of the same document. In the spirit of continuing 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 showing 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 disorganisation" of the anarchist movement. The Platform puts forward that the lack of

camp of anarcho-syndicalism, they of course agreed with this proposal, the problem was that the platform specifically rejected the program of syndicalism...

*Dielo Trouda* then introduced a simple principle, collective responsibility that was to draw the fire of critiques. The basic idea of collective responsibility was that "if we collectively agree on political positions and a determined line of action, it is in order that each member apply it in its political work. What's more, when we agree on work to do and a way to do it, we become responsible to one and other, of its execution. The collective responsibility, finally, is nothing more than the collective method of action" [4]. This idea was however attacked by the Italian anarchist militant Errico Malatesta, who went as far as to compare it to the discipline of the army.

To hold all of this together, the platform proposed the inescapable principle of federalism, which was said to "reconcile the independence and initiative of individuals and the organisation with service to the common cause". *Dielo Trouda* warned, however, against a usual distortion of libertarian federalism: "the right, above all, to manifest one's 'ego', without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation" and rather advocated that "the federalist type of anarchist organisation, while recognising each member's rights to independence, free opinion, individual liberty and initiative, requires each member to undertake fixed organisation duties, and demands execution of communal decisions." Of course, in order for all that to work beyond the strictly local level, the stated goal of the platform, we need to give ourselves the necessary structures. The *Dielo Trouda* document does not develop a lot on the matter, but mentions the relevance of a decisional congress and an "executive committee" to co-ordinate the activity of the organisation. Having mandated members to carry on certain duty seemed to be too much for some who saw there the embryo of a dictatorial authority...

Where the platform distances itself the most from classical anarchism is probably regarding the role assigned to anarchists during a revolution. Indeed, for *Dielo Trouda*, "the role of the anarchists in the revolutionary period cannot be restricted solely to the propagation of the keynotes of libertarian ideas". But then, what is this role? For the authors, "anarchism should become the leading concept of revolution", they specify that "the leading position of anarchist ideas in the revolution suggests an orientation of events after anarchist theory" which should definitely not be confused with "the political leadership of the statist parties which leads finally to State Power". This idea of the "leading concept" was to get on the nerves of many anarchists and was to be severely critiqued.

The authors had vivid memories of the Russian revolution and reminded us that "although the masses express themselves profoundly in social movement in terms of anarchist tendencies and tenets, these tendencies and tenets do however remain dispersed", therefore, we need a force that "organises the driving power of libertarian ideas which is necessary for preserving the anarchist orientation and objectives of the social revolution". This force will be the anarchist organisation according to the platform. The anarchist organisation 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 produc-

The Program of the *Alliance of Social Democracy*, the first ever anarchist organisation, founded by Bakunin in 1864, advocated the equality of men and women and says that children “are neither the property of society, nor the property of their parents but belongs to their future freedom”. Four years later, Bakunin’s demands at the third conference of the *First International* include: “firstly, the abolition of the right to hereditary property, secondly, the complete legalisation of the political and social rights of women with those of men, thirdly, the abolition of marriage as a civil, political and religious institution”.

Closer to the platform, the ‘Anarchist Program’, written by Malatesta and adopted by the Italian Anarchist Union in 1920, also demands the “reconstruction of the family in such a way that it results from the practice of love, freed of any legal chain, any economic or physical oppression, any religious prejudice” and concludes “we want bread, freedom, love and science for all”. The question was not only theoretical; in the United States anarchists had already moved to practice it. So, when the platform was published, it had already been fifteen years since American anarchists, among them Emma Goldman, were demanding the legalisation of abortion and the free circulation of information on contraception. In Spain, a few years later, they would go much further, thanks to the action of the *Mujeres Libres*. Even the old enemy of *Dielo Trouda*, the Bolshevik government, had legally made women the equal of men, legalised abortion and homosexuality during its first week in power! In short, this ‘oversight’ was a truly important theoretical weakness, a weakness that still has repercussions today.

Where the platform really distinguishes itself from classical anarchism is at the level of its organisational proposals and the positions that follow. In order to create a united organisation, *Dielo Trouda* refused the synthesis of these different currents of anarchism as proposed by Sebastien Faure and Voline, because “such an organisation [...] would only be a mechanical assembly of individuals each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement”, and that of anarcho-syndicalism because it “does not resolve the problem of anarchist organisation, for it does not give [it] priority”. The platform instead proposed “to rally active anarchist militants to a base of precise positions: theoretical, tactical and organisational (i.e. the more or less perfect base of a homogeneous program).”

The activists of *Dielo Trouda* considered this double question of the organisation and of the revolutionary program to be vital to launch the anarchist movement on a clear path. They indeed thought of the platform as “the outlines, the skeleton of such a program” and wanted it to be the “first step towards rallying libertarian forces into a single, active revolutionary collective”. It was however clear that the platform could not be the definitive program of revolutionary anarchism, and it belonged to the future organisation “to enlarge it, to later give it depth, to make of it a definite platform for the whole anarchist movement”.

So the platform was defending the necessity of a theoretical and tactical unity, formulated in a program. This necessity was rejected by the partisans of a “synthesis” model of organisation, who either didn’t see its utility (Faure), or believed it was premature and thought the proposed method to be “mechanical” (Voline). In the

organisation is because of theoretical problems within the anarchist movement, the main one being an absence of responsibility. There is also a firm rejection of synthesis 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 organisation. The platform instead argues for an anarchist organisation with “...precise positions: theoretical, tactical and organisational. 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 incredibly 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, analysing 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 criticise 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 defence 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 twofold. One of creating specifically anarchist-communist organisations (like NEFAC) for theoretical development, producing propaganda, and fighting the battle of ideas within the working class as an organised group. The second main task for anarchists is that of organising workers and peasants at the points of production and consumption. In other words, the building of a revolutionary class force that is capa-

ble of both seizing economic power from the ruling class and re-organising 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 organisation) 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 realisation 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, health-care, 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 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 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

Bolshevism - *Dielo Trouda* thought that the main cause of the failure was "the absence of organisational principles and practices in the anarchist movement," which had its source in "some defects of theory: notably from a false interpretation of the principle of individuality in anarchism: this theory being too often confused with the absence of all responsibility." It's in June 1926 that the *Dielo Trouda* group made public its research on organisation in a short pamphlet titled "Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (project)" [3].

The pamphlet opens with an introduction that is a devastating critique of the "chronic general disorganisation" of revolutionary anarchism, a disorganisation compared to nothing less than "yellow fever." From the first paragraph, the authors are ruthless: "it is very significant that, in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas, [...] the anarchist movement remains weak despite everything, and has appeared, very often [...] as a small event, an episode, and not an important factor." To remedy this state of affairs, the authors think "it is time for anarchism to leave the swamp of disorganisation, to put an end to endless vacillations on the most important tactical and theoretical questions, to resolutely move towards a clearly recognised goal, and to operate an organised collective practice." They proposed the founding of "an organisation which [...] establishes in anarchism a general and tactical political line".

The text of the 'Platform' as such is divided into three parts (general, constructive and organisational). In general, the first and second parts are a rather classical expose of anarcho-communism in which *Dielo Trouda* is only distancing itself on a few points. One of the main points is the primacy of the class struggle in society and its leading role in social change that is affirmed right at the start: "There is no one single humanity, there is a humanity of classes: Slaves and Masters" and "the social and political regime of all states is above all the product of class struggle". This position, which also refuses the "humanist" positions, draws a clear line of demarcation that runs through the whole document. *Dielo Trouda* is resolutely basing itself in the social anarchism camp, strongly pro-class struggle. The constructive section has the advantage (and inconvenience) of the benefit of the Russian experience. Advantage because we get out of the abstract optimism so important to followers of Kropotkin, inconvenient however because the Russian situation in 1917 does not have much in common with the one we are currently living. In this sense, even if also dated, the study of the Spanish experience would be more productive.

Another point where the platform is departing from traditional anarchism is on the question of patriarchy and it is, unfortunately, to register a sharp set back. Indeed, none of the questions related to patriarchy - be it the oppression of women, sexual repression or the family and the education of children - are addressed. The word 'women' doesn't even appear in the document! Nevertheless, even if it's not in the same manner that we would address the subject today, the question was far from ignored by other anarchist currents. If we can understand that *Dielo Trouda* was not really inspired by the example of French individualist anarchists - who go really far in their critique of patriarchy and the bourgeois moral order - other revolutionary anarchist documents, similar to the platform, had nevertheless addressed the issue.

## AS FAR AS ORGANISATION GOES: WE ARE PLATFORMISTS!

by Nicolas Phebus (Quebec City-NEFAC)

In Quebec, and more generally in North America, anarchism and organisation have not been coupled well. Indeed, the last serious attempt to build a political anarchist group in North America date's back to the adventure of the *Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation* [1].

However, there have been, and there still are, organised anarchists around the world. Generations of activists worked hard on the question of organisation, and, for those of us who don't want to reinvent the wheel, it is useful to look at their analysis and proposals. Even if we find good things in 'classical' anarchists like Errico Malatesta and Michael Bakunin, we at NEFAC are mainly influenced by a tradition called, for lack of a better word, 'platformism'.

### The Dielo Trouda Group and the Platform

The 'platformist' tradition started with the analysis of the anarchist defeat at the hands of the Bolsheviks during the civil war made by a group of Russian anarchists in exile. This group included such important figures as Nestor Makhno, one of the main leaders of the insurrectional army of the Ukrainian peasantry, Peter Arshinov, historian of the same movement and old friend of Makhno, and Ida Mett, passionate partisan and historian of the Kronstadt insurrection [2]. Based in Paris, the group was organised around the publication of an anarcho-communist magazine in Russian, called *Dielo Trouda (Worker's Cause)*, a project originally conceived of by Arshinov and Makhno while they were rotting in the Tsarist prison some fifteen years earlier which was finally founded in Paris in 1925.

In addition to the less and less frequent letters from comrades "still in the country" and the analysis of the nature of the Soviet regime - Arshinov was one of the first to rightly call it State Capitalism - the magazine mainly concentrated on finding the cause of the "historical failure of anarchism" in the revolutionary period that just swept Europe. Like most activists that were still anarchists - many defected to

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 organisations should participate in unions, not as individuals, but as an "organised 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".

This 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 organise 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 defence 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 organisations. The other is the profoundly political question of if a "regularly constituted military organisation" can exist in an anarchist society without being the nucleus of an authoritarian state. We would argue "no." The basis of anarchist military organisations 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 organisation 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 irregular militias. The people in arms is fundamental to defending a revolution and the lessons of the forced militarisation of anarchist fighting units and disarming of workers' organisations 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 organisation. 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 organisations 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 organisation is important and something that is sorely missing from modern anarchist organisations.

This brings us to the “constructive section” of the platform, which outlines the basic principles of how production and consumption will be organised 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.

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 organised, that the organisational section is the shortest and the most incomplete. However, it does manage to lay down the four key points of platformist organisational 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 organisation 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 organisation I speculate that the same case existed then. In short, the Dielo Trouda group was working backwards.

They should have focused on building national organisations 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.

The first three points of the organisation 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 organisation. 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 organisation should have an executive structure that is responsible for “the theoretical and organisational orientation of the activity of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical line of the Union”.

Executives, even in the most radical organisation, become a hierarchical leadership position that sets the goals for the organisation 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 organisations. 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 'Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists' is a worthy attempt by the Dielo Trouda group to lay a theoretical base for anarchists to form coherent organisations. 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 organisations that can form a true “general union of anarchists”.

**- reviewed by Mick Black (NEFACToronto)  
& Jessica, Sabate Anarchist Collective (NEFAC-Boston)**