Historical Background to the Organizational Platform

Barikád Kollektíva

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After the repression of the worldwide revolutionary wave in 1917–23, thousands of proletarian militants had to flee the areas where they actively took part in the revolts, because the terror of the capitalists was not able to kill every revolutionary, though that was its intention. Apparently, the revolutionary movement has suffered a great blow: the triumphant counter-revolution had almost completely destroyed the structures which the proletariat had already conquered while it was organizing itself as a class. The proletarian organizations, which, as the prefigurations of the communist world party were organizing the centralization of the struggle, were destroyed or distorted into the counter-revolutionary caricatures of themselves. Bolshevik social democracy, which called itself "communist", together with the traditional Social Democrats, tried to disintegrate and to falsify one of the foundations of its class-being, the class memory of the proletariat. In fact these tendencies imply the objective negation of the class as such, because their definitions of the class, just like their practical activity, disguises the basic antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, by serving concepts like the Leninist theory of "socialism in one country", the "peaceful adjacency" of socialism and capitalism, the Bersteinian line of the socialist evolution of capitalism etc. These ideologies are the reflections of the negation of classes – the objective life condition of capitalism, which actively helped the bourgeoisie to absorb the class conflict and to reinforce the atomisation of the proletariat.

But still, the counter-revolutionary period was unable to completely destroy the proletariat. That was practically impossible – and it will be so for the bourgeoisie that be -, because the revolution is not the consequence of personal will, but the production and inevitable accompaniment of the capitalist system. Many have tried to interpret, to elaborate the lessons of the revolution (and of the defeat) directly after the defeat – and to carry on on the basis of these lessons. One thing seemed to be obvious for conscious proletarians, the preparers of the new revolutionary wave: social democracy (both its Bolshevik and traditional forms) had denounced itself as the tool of counter-revolution. Actually, it is important to show that social democracy was not a revolutionary movement, what later (according to the public opinion: in 1914) became the traitor of the proletariat. It has been the tool of capital ever since, in its every manifestation. In reality its goal has never been the communist class struggle against the State, value and the dictatorship of capitalism, but the reformation of capitalism, the achieving of compromises, the maintenance of

the State of exploited for the workers by some superficial help. Naturally this does not appertain to those millions of proletarians who were – due to the lack of the break, counter-revolutionary propaganda etc. – organizing themselves in the parties of the Second International; this is about organisation itself, the representative of historical social democracy – which is the answer, and the alternative against the class struggle, offered by Capitalism. The leadership of the Second International had already at its founding congress started its struggle for the elimination of revolutionary elements; and in every important question it committed against the elements entitled "anarchist".

About the end of the revolutionary wave, in 1923–24 the counter-revolutionary tendency of Bolshevism also became apparent for most proletarians. Although only the more important news got out of the Soviet Union itself, the world still could see the tendency of the consequent steps:

The signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, and in connection with this, the repression of the Left SR revolt (1918), the repression of the *Makhnovshchina* (about 1918–21), Kronstadt (1921), and last but not least the NEP, when the triumphant comeback of every characteristic of capitalism was announced (1921) meant the more important turning points. The "center" of the Bolshevik Party (Lenin, Trotsky) abolished every revolutionary protest (either inside or outside the party), and consequently followed the policy of maintaining Capitalism and the dictatorship of value. As early as 1918 they attacked the Moscow Anarchist Center by the force of arms: 600 militants were imprisoned and many of them killed. The reason was that the anarchists had organized their own armed force, the Black Guard, which was preparing for a cruel showdown with the class enemy. And there is nothing more frightening for capitalism than an armed proletariat. So in Bolshevism, the proletarian factions, which were confronting the State power of a re-painted capitalism for the sake of the revolution, were called "anarchist", "leftist divergent" again, or they were treated like criminals and bandits, by this denying their political role.

So, at the beginning of the twenties, anarchism and "left-wing" communism seemed to be the only heir to the revolution – and social democracy came after them by all possible means. Besides the already-mentioned Russian and Ukrainian Anarchists, on one hand the German and the Netherlands Council Communists were those who belonged here – their party, the German Communist Workers' Party (KAPD) played an important role in clarifying the lessons of the revolutionary wave, and in deepening the break with the capitalist system. On the other hand, the left wing of newly-formed Communist parties, especially in England (Sylvia Pankhurst's newspaper, "The Workers' Dreadnought", and the "anarcho-marxists") and in Italy (the internationalist Communists grouping around Amadeo Bordiga), the German Anarcho-Syndicalists, whose organisation, the German Union of the Free Workers (FAUD), after revolutionary dynamism at the beginning, under the direction of Rudolf Rocker was becoming more and more a withholding force; and the countless "anarchist" tendencies all around the world. In many cases we can only mention people like Errico Malatesta, Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, who were in themselves manifesting tendencies. In England there was a powerful anarchist movement beside the radical communists, just like in Spain. But the foreign – especially Russian – anarchists fleeing from the counter-revolution found asylum mainly in France. (Here we only deal with Europe – we are just mentioning that in this period the center of revolutionary activity had already been placed outside of Europe, mainly in Latin-America.)

The phenomenon called "anarchism" at that time meant very diverse and controversial groups and tendencies. On the whole it was not revolutionary, moreover, its counter-revolutionary essence was due to the fact that in many elements it was really struggling for the revolution, but

it regarded anarchism as a big family or community where the different tendencies want the same thing on an ethereal level. But this was not true. The majority of the "anarchist" groups used bourgeois words and their activity was only the completion of Social Democracy: they denied the centralization of the class struggle, they declared the cult of the individual, they rejected the dictatorial form of the revolution and the proletariat. Most of them praised the self-government of the producers, so instead of changing the base – the dictatorship of value on the human needs – they stressed a completely technical question, the ways of controlling. Others – first and foremost the council communists and many of the anarchist communists – formed a truly communist minority and continued their revolutionary struggle.

There were all kinds of people in the French exile. Everybody was talking about Anarchism and they gave the most narrow-minded bourgeois phantasms this adjective. But essentially this process had the same goal (only to a smaller extent) which Bolshevism had on the "other side": to cloud the essence of the class struggle. They hashed the old position about "the abyss between Anarchism and Communism" – emasculating both sides which are in fact one and the same. The Bolshevik printing-houses were pouring out pamphlets against the Anarchists, calumnies about the *Makhnovshchina*, and Lenin's pamphlet, "Left-wing communism, an infantile disorder" in which the author pronouncedly condemns every revolutionary tendency, and holds brief for the elite party, parliamentarianism and the trade-union struggle. But the "anarchist" side was also quick to answer back – the "leaders", first and foremost Berkman and Malatesta enumerated some untoward arguments against "authoritarian socialism", i.e. "marxian" communism. The most characteristic product of the era was a pamphlet entitled "Bakunin vs Marx" whose unknown anarchist author analyzed the "antagonism" of the two tendencies in a tone more suitable for tabloid newspapers. This is an adequate "anarchist" pair to Lenin's "communist" pamphlet.

In 1926, the largest organization of French anarchists, the Anarchist Union (UA) started a great debate about a manifestation whose goal was to harmonize the positions of the individualists, revolutionary anarchism and syndicalism. The debate grew more and more acrimonious, and the anarcho-communists stated that they had nothing in common with the individualists and other bourgeois "anarchists", so they left the organization and founded the Anarchist-Communist Union (UAC). The new organization stated that "the only possible means of struggle is revolutionary anarchism, the only possible goal is communism; the two are one and the same". They marked as a goal the "break with the Big Family of anarchism" which tried to unify the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary tendencies into one pseudo-community. The majority of the UAC was for the centralization of the struggle and the use of dictatorial means, insofar as in 1927 the founding of an anarchist party was put forward ("party", i.e. centralised fighting organization – not a political party). Then a tendency – the "synthesists" – left the UAC, and following the lead of Sebastian Faure and the ex-Makhnovist Volin, fell back upon the old theory of the popular front, the "synthesis" of the many kinds of anarchism – while the revolutionary anarchists reinforced their organization under the name Revolutionary Anarchist Communist Union (UACR), which operated until 1930.

The Russian Anarchists (who were mainly revolutionaries) also participated in these struggles. Already in 1925 they founded the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, which ran a newspaper called "Workers' Truth" (Delo Truda) – whose editors were Nestor Makhno, Ida Mett and Piotr Arshinov. That was the organ where they published the programmatic text of the group, the "Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communism", which later became famous simply under the name "The Platform".

The appearance of the Platform instantly initiated heated debates. Led by Volin, the synthesists started an attack in their newspaper "Union". "The claim that anarchism is simply the theory of class struggle, leads to a unilateral position", stated Volin.

The platformists summoned a meeting on 5th February 1927, whose goal was to organize an international conference of revolutionaries. A Provisional Committee was set up, with the participaiton of Makhno, the Chinese Chen and the Polish Ranko. The participants, who were from 6 different countries, worked out the main issues of the future conference:

1. The class struggle as the most important element of Anarchism
2. Anarchist Communism as the foundation of the movement
3. Syndicalism as an important method of struggle
4. The necessity of establishing a General Union of Anarchists, an organisation to be based on ideological and tactical unity and collective responsibility
5. The necessity of a positive programme in order to achieve the social revolution.

This was a very revolutionary programme on the level of the period, though it contains some strange elements too – e.g. the acceptance of a kind of participation in the trade unions – the 1918–21 elements had clearly shown the impossibility of this. The debate about the suggestion could not be finished because the police raided the assembly and everyone was arrested. Makhno was saved from death only by the campaign of the French Anarchists.

In the end the "International Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist-Communists" remained a plan and many of the participants turned against it (e.g. Camillo Berneri, the great Italian Anarcho-Communist, who was later killed by Erno Gero in Barcelona, 1937). The individualist side led by Malatesta also started a great attack against the Platform. Makhno and his comrades on 18th August 1927 published the "Reply to the Anarchist-Communist". In this they explained their views about the necessity of the revolutionary leadership:

> "*It is obvious that the revolution will be accomplished by the masses themselves, but the revolutionary mass always produces the minority which will push the masses forward*".

This point of view was a big mote in the platformists' eye in the opinion of the "anarchists" praising the freedom of the "individual" and the unlimited individualism. The article wrote the following about these people:

> "*The whole company of individualists who call themselves anarchist, are in fact not anarchist at all. The fact that this many people who gather (but on what foundation?) and claim that 'we are one family', and they call this whole mixture an 'anarchist organization' is not just inept, but pronouncedly hostile*".

Although the international organisation couldn't be formed, the Platform had a great effect on revolutionary anarchists of many countries. In France, the platformists took many organizations under their control for a while, but in the end they always had to leave them. This was an important lesson for them that the obsolete, counter-revolutionary organizations should not be

cobbled and reformed, because it is completely useless, but instead of that they should again and again, through many break-ups, concretize the class programme of the proletariat. Organizations were founded in Italy and in Bulgaria, just like in Poland – though that just adopted the general principles, rejecting the Platform as authoritarian.

The 1935–45 war dissolved the ranks of anarchism but since the capitalist peace has not brought much change compared to the capitalist war, the class struggle activity toned up again. By this time the Bolsheviks (including the Trotskyites) have already played their role and could not make any effect to the really class struggling proletarian elements. The revolutionary movement in many cases reached back to the Platform and created, somewhat controversial but in any case revolutionary organizations like the Libertarian Communist Federation (FCL) in France and the Anarchist Proletarian Action Groups (GAAP) in Italy at the beginning of the fifties, and later the Revolutionary Anarchist Federations in different countries.

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