Boudewijn Chorus
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1976

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The following text is a translation of an Dutch introduction text to the first proper Dutch translation of the 1926, Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (draft), or in short the Platform. Written in 1976, it provides a great overview of the history of organized anarchism in the Netherlands up to the date of writing. It lays down a historical foundation for the necessity and call for organized anarchism, and why it has been so hard to establish a foothold in the Netherlands.

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While not wishing to disregard the contributions of Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis to the propaganda and the spread of anarchism in the Netherlands, it must nevertheless also be noted that it was at the same time he who, through his negative conception of political organization of anarchism, already at the beginning of this century, drove the anarchists in the Netherlands into isolation from which they have not been able to break free from to this day. After the failed rail strike of 1903[1] because of the stereotypical social-democratic betrayal of the SDAP, the decline of the (then still largely anarcho)syndicalist National Labour Secretariat (NAS) took an inevitable turn to decline, since the free socialists, under Domela's influence, considered the NAS to be nothing more than a workers' federation and rejected a development towards strong national organizational unions. Whereas the syndicalists had intended the unionising NAS as an educational school for an

[1] Albert de Jong, De spoorwegstaking van 1903, Heemstede 1953, reissue A.U., Amsterdam 1973.

anarchist society, they eventually had to face the sad political-organizational bankruptcy of anarchism in the Netherlands. For even though the syndicalist trade union organization still had more than 50,000 members in 1920[2], this following had long since ceased to be intentionally anarchist or syndicalist, as became clear three years later with the NAS's withdrawal and the formation of the Dutch Syndicalist Trade Union Confederation (NSV). The odds of developing anarchism in a mass movement of workers and peasants to become an organizational factor of revolutionary potential, to be "the voice of the struggling masses" had passed. And at that stage of the rise of the Dutch workers' movement, this failure, due to Domela's charisma, ultimately proved fatal.

Since then, anarchists have actually had to withdraw as political exiles from their own ideology in socio-cultural emancipation movements like the freethinker organization De Dageraad (now De Vrije Gedachte) and the International Anti-Militarist Society (IAMV). Not that this silenced anarchism; on the contrary, it managed to lay the foundations for pervasive libertarian and humanist currents in socialism, of which pacifism would prove to be the result par excellence for some time to come. In cultural-philosophical terms, anarchist views and analyses made an extremely important contribution in the pre-war years. But the organizational link with the proletariat remained broken.

After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the importance of organized support from the Netherlands to the specific anarchist struggle organizations was also greater than ever. But to more than one-off and propagandistic support, the fragmented movement was not capable of doing more here. On the one hand, the degeneration of pacifism into dogmatic non-violence had a paralysing effect on anarchism; on the other, the anarchists had

[2] Hans Ramaer, Van Domela tot Provo, - anarchisme in Nederland, Maatstaf aug.-sept. 1976 arbeiderspers, Amsterdam. In this issue also interesting data on Nestor Makhno c.s., the Russian revolution and anarcho-syndicalisme.

a considerable part of the economic analysis are also heavily out of date. Do not forget that the text was written against the background of a distinctly rural society, namely that of Russia in 1926 with 85% peasants.

its newspaper Dielo Trouda (Case of the Workers), this group published analyses and historical studies on the Russian revolution, the betrayals and diversions of the Bolshevists, the Cheka terror, the persecution of revolutionary anarchists in Russia. The group held intensive discussions on the failure of the Russian anarchists to protect and connect workers' struggle organizations in opposition to the Bolshevists. Dielo Trouda concluded that this failure must have been first and foremost a question of organizational weakness, of lack of unity and connection of the numerous anarchist groups in Russia since 1905. From this discussion emerged an organizational concept, the Platform. Almost half a century later, again in Paris, it resurfaced, notably at the hands of the Cohn-Bendit brothers[6]. On 16 May 1968, Gabriel recited the song that the armed fighters of Makhno's cavalry army had sung for Makhno and his wife: "hurrah, hurrah / On the march / towards freedom / for mother Galia / for father Makhno / We will defeat / crush in the battle / we will conquer / the last commissar."

While the Platform, as argued, has in certain respects become relevant again, this is not to say that this edition aims to provoke overestimation of it. After all, the text is 50 years old, and in terms of organizational concepts, the experiences of the anarchist collectives in the Spanish revolution and the subsequent civil war - ten years after the Platform was created - have spoken clearer language than ever in the history of the labour movement. However, the reader may be surprised to find that important parts of the Platform can be applied without question to precisely those experiences. But that does not eliminate several weak passages. The choice of words is not always happy and a certain poetic glorification and romanticising of labour rather contrasts with the down-to-earthness of the overall analysis. Comments on the importance of the peasantry and

[6] Gabriel & Daniel Cohn Bendit, Linksradikalisme, remedie tegen een verkalkt communisme, Kritiese Biblioteek/Van Gennep, Amsterdam 1969. See especially p. 276ff. the similarities with the Platform

significantly lost influence due to a lack of clear answers to the crisis of capitalism and the rise of fascism. Both ideologically and organizationally, the anarchist camp crumbled shortly before the outbreak of the World War. In the illegality of '40-'45, anarchism therefore played no significant role as a political movement. Until the 1960s, this serious shortcoming would make itself felt. While it is true that the momentum of the anarcho-syndicalists who joined the Eenheidsvakcentrale (EVC) shortly after the war initially seemed to lead to a restoration of the class struggle character of organized anarchism, the syndicalists were soon outflanked by the communists, and in 1948 the final split followed. Even the Onafhankelijk Verbond van Bedrijfs organizations (OVB), which was founded afterwards, could not provide a syndicalist alternative for the workers; to this day, the OVB leads a fading existence.

Nevertheless, as a continuing astonishing source of inspiration for many undogmatic socialists, anarchism retained an intrinsic hold on the steadily awakening resistance to the degrading Cold War. The regrouping of pacifism in the years of fear of a nuclear world war, under the influence of Bertrand Russell, who sympathised with anarchism, launched a peace movement that would eventually break the political paralysis of the labour movement entangled in reformism. But in the demonstrations, which eventually lapsed into powerlessness of regularity, the young ban-the-bomb movement could not indulge its creativity for long. Provocative, stripped-down anarchism was reborn in the Provo movement. Organizationally, the provotariat in itself represented little and brought no breakthrough in the massive impasse of organized anarchism. However, it was undeniably the catalyst in the emerging grouping of youth resistance into small independent but politically aggressive action groups. Paris, Berlin, Rome 1968 would reinforce the awareness of the need for adequate organizational connections. But the unsubtle theory of declassification, which refused to recognise the proletariat in

the modern welfare state as a de facto potential revolutionary, ultimately led the provotariat into powerless lanes and rather turned anarchism into a non-committal refuge for the countless uprooted and politically homeless youth, for whom any apparent legitimisation of their unabated privilegedness was welcome. Political direct action became ludic and thus, in the stumbling Kabouterbeweging, powerless. Not because the ludic element in itself disempowered action, but because it became a means to an end. For years, the spawning of this occasional marginal action's epigones kept the poor leftover of organized anarchism, the still-existing Federation of Free Socialists (FVS), from joining forces decisively.

The sad shorthand of anarchism's organizing power, the narrowing of anarchism into a mere stamping ground under the influence of Roel van Duyn as a new charismata, drove the militant anarchists who refused to abandon the class struggle position to other areas of struggle. In the student movement, the Vietnam protest, the boycott-population census action, the environmental movement, neighbourhood and community groups, training work and especially the soldiers' movement, these anarchists have been actively engaged and have rediscovered the importance of structural organizational work. Since 1972, this has led to several, sometimes still premature, organizational experiments in certain anarcho circles. In the discussions underlying these, as yet unrevealed activities, the so-called "Organizational Platform"[1] or short "Platform" emerged at an early stage, synchronous with the exchanges of ideas on the organizational concept of the organization Révolutionnaire Anarchiste (ORA) in France and England, which had chosen the text of this platform as its basic text. A sample, albeit still weak and not yet crystallised, of these discussions

[1] In the original text, the writer incorrectly uses the name "Arshinov Platform" instead of Organizational Platform or Platform for short. Peter Arshinov was the secretary of the editorial group, but the text was a collective work that included the well-known Makhno. Therefore, the name has been replaced here.

those who wished to question the organizational issue according to the Platform within the FVS as terrorism, sabotage, political murder and manslaughter. The fact that the "supporters" of the Platform concept did indeed - and rightly so - on many occasions show their solidarity in word and deed with the fate of anarchist and non-anarchist armed fighters and urban guerrillas who had fallen into the hands of ruthless state persecution apparatuses made it easy for these officials to be blamed for this. Meanwhile, that one has nothing to do with the other goes without saying. However, there was a curious reason why the systematic gutting of the Platform could unfold so easily. This reason is the simplest imaginable, and as such at the same time a curious barometer of the deplorable infrastructure of the latest Dutch anarcho scene: no adequate translation of the Platform was available! Admittedly, a shameful and barely readable stencil purporting to contain the text of the Platform did briefly circulate in "cadre" circles of the FVS, but such an appalling translation as that scrap presented really cannot bear the title. (Further investigation has meanwhile shown that the text was translated from an English translation - in the preface of which an apology is made for the fact that a correct translation could not be provided - which in turn was taken from the equally bad French translation from Russian …) Even assuming that many Dutch comrades have a reasonable mastery of French, we cannot yet assume that the Platform was commonplace: indeed, its first edition in 1972 was virtually unavailable because the ORA wanted to wait with republication for a revised translation, which did not come out until 1975.

A single word on the origins of the Platform. The Russian anarchists who managed to survive the unscrupulous extermination under Trotsky of Nestor Makhno's militant groups in 1921 and then also managed to escape the terror of the Cheka, settled initially in Berlin, later partly in Paris. There they formed an anarchist group in exile, in which, apart from Makhno himself, his old comrade Piotr Andreevich Arshinov was particularly active. Through

They must take an unequivocal stand for the class struggle and not delay emerging at the fronts of this struggle. It is precisely this issue that the organizational Platform of the Revolutionary Anarchists offered in this document deals with. That is to say, the Platform is characterized by the rejection of the "synthesis conception" - analysed above also in the two Dutch manifestations of the declassification theory and the bollocks analysis that pretends to be able to reconcile social anarchism with individualism, which rejects the class struggle. The Platform demonstrates the importance of understanding that revolutionary anarchism and organization in the labour movement cannot be separated. On this point, the General Section of the Platform document is particularly important.

Within Dutch anarchism, the Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists has suspiciously acquired a bad reputation in recent years. There are some directly identifiable causes for this, which have already been discussed indirectly in the brief historical overview above. The "synthesis" supporters have cleverly exploited the rather widespread misconception in anarchism that organization is synonymous with authority. Organization was said to be power politics and as such contrary to the anarchist principle of complete rejection of authority. The section "Rejection of authority" in the General Section speaks clearly on this point. Another imputation of its reading concerning the Platform is that it would deal exclusively with anarchists' militarist forms of (secret) organization. This then referred to the military background of the authors, all coming from Nestor Makhno's autonomous revolutionary militant groups. That this was not about a military context, but a revolutionary strategy in the civil war, was wisely hushed up. The Platform's Constructive Part, and in particular the section "Defence of the revolution" clarifies this. The Platform categorically rejects any coercion! Furthermore, in the years 1972-1974, particular officials of the Federatie van Vrije Socialisten (FVS) [Federation of Free Socialists] consistently and through extremely transparent manoeuvres sought to frame all

- particularly in terms of the criticism of anarchism's continuous isolation as a result of the lack of organizational perspectives and the elimination of concrete responsibility - has been offered over the last two years by members of the anarcho-socialist journal De AS, among others. "Anarchists cannot possibly identify with the here and there repercussions of original anarcho views, whether expressed within still parliamentary parties like the PSP and PPR, at the base of trade unions like NVV and NKV, or within organizations like the KWJ, the soldiers' union BVD, the socialist students' unions etc. Such repercussions can be welcomed incidentally, perhaps even brought about or strongly influenced by anarchists on the spot. But lasting results, with which anarchists can identify, are not brought about incidentally. They should be achievements of broad infrastructural organization aimed at continuation and consolidation. Such organization will function pre-eminently right through all activity on the left side of the barricades . On the left: there are also conquerors of power, who want to rule themselves and associate with the oppressed to disguise themselves. There, anarchists will have to achieve the unmasking, by doing precisely what is prohibited and refraining from what is obliged. Anarchists may organize themselves right through all the activity to the left of the barricades, but not at random: they look for those class-specific organizations, where the revolutionary potential is greatest because repression is most directly experienced there: guest workers, caravan dwellers, South Moluccans, Surinamese, the unemployed, temporary workers, prisoners, political refugees."[3] "Secondly, the anarcho-socialist will have to manifest himself within the political mass organizations of the working class, especially the trade union movement. Now that the right is currently railing against the workers' movement, more radical noises are heard from the NVV, and even the PvdA's managerial ranks are speaking as ap-

[3] Boudewijn Chorus, Anarchism-discussion, The AS 15/16, Aug. 1975, Stg. Pamflet, Groningen.

provingly about the long-standing anarchist demand for workers' self-government as they are relativisingly about parliamentarism (cf. the brochure Doe-het-zelf-bestuur, Vormingswerk PvdA 1975), anarchism must not (no longer) isolate itself in an admittedly sympathetic but marginal trade union organization like the OVB. After all, it is a widespread misconception that a political ideology needs a close-knit political organization. The question whether anarcho-socialist activities require a national organization of anarchists can therefore be answered in the negative. Michael Bakunin already argued that the working class must organize itself in its capacity as a worker."[4]

"I want to start from the idea of class struggle for the formulation of patterns in which socialist struggles will be able to emerge. At least two currents show up. One current is the reformist, which puts class struggle second. The social democratic movement today takes this position. To the extent that this movement talks about class struggle, it does so in terms of a contest. Two teams, two classes (capital/labour) face each other. They engage in a contest, the class struggle. Reformists thus assume the existence of classes before and independent of the class struggle; the class struggle is entered into one day, in other words, the class struggle exists only afterwards, so that it need not or cannot be thought about and worked on at the moment. The other current is the revolutionary, which puts the class struggle primary. Revolutionaries regard the existence of classes and the class struggle as one and the same thing. The exploitation of one class by another determines division at that same time; exploitation is already class struggle! Class struggle is thus seen as changed in the mode of production. […] It is now often thought that bourgeois democracy has made class struggle disappear. This is a deception of sight. The compromise of (bourgeois) democracy does not make that class struggle disappear at all. On the contrary, it is an expression of it (Lefebvre). In the struggle of

[4] Hans Ramaer, Anarchisme-discussie, De AS 20, apr. 1976.

the bourgeois class against feudalism, it had to appeal to the people. Bourgeois democracy developed in the struggle and emerged from the struggle as a compromise between bourgeoisie and "the common people". […] On several occasions in the past, some anarcho-socialists have insisted on inserting themselves into the organizations of the broad strata of the working population. I share that view for reasons of propagandistic-strategic importance. Of course, like everyone else, I know that the workers' movement in a bourgeois society is twofold. It reflects in that sense the contradiction inherent in bourgeois society. That whole society, every institution of it, is soaked with that contradiction. […] If people want to be able to act in a meaningful way, they have to make some sense of the immense complexity (the chaotic, uncharted environment around them). But he cannot make all complexity totally comprehensible, so he tackles bits of complexity at a time. This is how he pushes back the chaotic (reduction). […] Every institution is now the generalisation of certain reductions. […] did I make this theoretical circumvention? Well, it is claimed that anarcho-socialists cannot sit in parliamentary bodies without violating their principles. Parliamentarianism is presented as the one moment when anarcho-socialists should withhold their participation in the existing system. But name me which institution in a bourgeois society is not beset with contradictions on the basis of which I must decide to abstain from participation."[5]

These quotations, from which the good listener can still distil the necessary contradictions as a measure of the stage of discussion, clearly point to the crux of the exchange of ideas: anarchists should not lock themselves up in their own and certainly not in class-independent organizations, but enter - whether or not in mutual organizational relationships - into existing class organizations.

[5] Thom Holterman, Anarchisme-diskussie, De AS 21/22, aug. 1976. Zie ook zijn brochure Over arbeidersstrijd en arbeiderskontrole, Tegengif nr. 1, Stg. Pamflet, Groningen 1976.