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The Problem of Organization and the Notion of Synthesis

Dielo Truda

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Several comrades have had their say in the columns of *Delo Truda* (Workers' Cause) regarding the question of anarchist principles and organizational format.

Not that they all approached the problem from the same angle. The essence of this matter, as spelled out by the editorial staff of *Dielo Truda*, consists of the following:

We anarchists who agitate and fight for the emancipation of the proletariat, must, at all costs, have an end of the dissipation and disorganization prevailing in our ranks, for these are destroying our strength and our libertarian endeavours.

The way to go about this is to create an organization that might not perhaps enfold all of anarchism's active militants, but assuredly the majority of them, on the basis of specific theoretical and tactical positions and would bring us to a firm understanding as to how these might be applied to practice.

It goes without saying that the tackling of this issue should go hand in hand with the elaboration of theoretical and tactical positions that would furnish the basis, the platform for this organization. For we should be wasting our time talking about

the need to organize our forces and nothing would come of it, were we not to associate the idea of such organization with well-defined theoretical and tactical positions.

The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad has never lost sight of this latter question. In a series of articles carried in *Delo Truda* its viewpoint has been spelled out in part on the important particulars of the programme: anarchism's relationship to the toilers' class struggle, revolutionary syndicalism, the transitional period, etc.

Our next task will be to arrive at a clear formulation of all these positions of principle, then to set them all out in some more or less rounded organizational platform which will serve as the basis for uniting a fair number of militants and groups into one and the same organization. The latter will in turn serve as a springboard to a more complete fusion of the anarchist movement's forces.

That then is the route we have chosen to a resolution of the organizational problem. It is not our intention to proceed on this occasion with a total re-examination of values or elaboration of any new positions. Our view is that everything necessary for the construction of an organization founded upon a given platform can be found in Anarchist Communism, which espouses the class struggle, the equality and liberty of every worker, and is realized in the anarchist Commune.

Those comrades who champion the notion of a theoretical synthesis of anarchism's various currents have quite another approach to the organizational question. It is a pity that their view is so feebly spelled out and elaborated and that it is thus hard to devise a thorough-going critique of it. Essentially, their notion is as follows: Anarchism is divided into three strands – communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and individualist anarchism. Although each of these strands has features particular to itself, all three are so akin and so close to one another that it is only thanks to an artificial misconception that they enjoy separate existences.

By our reckoning the notion of synthesis is founded on a total aberration, a shoddy grasp of the basics of the three tendencies, which the supporters of synthesis seek to amalgamate into one.

The central tendency, the spinal column of anarchism is represented by communist anarchism. Anarcho-individualism is a best a philosophical and literary phenomenon and not a social movement. It often happens that the latter is drawn into politics and ends up as a bourgeois fad (like Benjamin Tucker and other individualists).

The above does not at all mean that we are against concerted endeavour by anarchists of varying persuasions. Quite the opposite: we can only salute anything that brings revolutionary anarchists closer together in **practice**.

However, that can be achieved practically, concretely, by means of the establishment of liaison between ready made, strengthened organizations. In which case, we would be dealing only with specific **practical tasks**, requiring no synthesis and indeed precluding one. But we think that the more that anarchists clarify the basics – the essence of anarchist communism – the more they will come to agreement on these principles and erect upon that basis a broad organization that will provide a lead in socio-political matters as well as in the realm of trade union/professional matters.

As a result, we do not in any way see a link between the organizational problem and the notion of synthesis. If it is to be resolved, there is no need to get carried away by vague theorizations and expect results from that. The baggage that anarchism has amassed over the years of its life process and social struggle is more than sufficient. We need only take proper account of it, applying it to the conditions and exigencies of life, in order to build an accountable organization.

In order to give rise to a strong, powerful anarchist movement, it is necessary that they should fuse completely. That fusion, in turn, implies a **theoretical** and **philosophical** synthesis of these teachings that we can tackle the structure and format of an organization representing all three tendencies. Such then is the content of the synthesis thus conceived, as set out in the "Declaration on Anarchists' Working Together", and a few other articles by comrade Volin carried by *The Anarchist Messenger* and *Delo Truda*. We are in total disagreement with this idea. Its inadequacy is glaringly obvious. For a start, why this arbitrary division of anarchism into three strands? There are others as well. We might mention, say, Christian anarchism, associationism, which, be it said in passing, is closer to communist anarchism than to individualist anarchism. Then again, what precisely is the consistency of the "theoretical and philosophical" discrepancies between the aforementioned three tendencies, if a synthesis between them is to be devised?

For one thing, before we talk about a theoretical synthesis of communism, syndicalism and individualism, we would need to analyze these currents. Theoretical analysis would quickly show the extent to which the wish to synthesize these currents is harebrained and absurd. Indeed, does not the talk of a "synthesis between communism and syndicalism" signify some sort of contrast between them? Many anarchists have always regarded syndicalism as one of the forms of the proletarian revolutionary moment, as one of the fighting methods espoused by the working class in fighting for its emancipation.

We regard communism as the goal of the labouring classes' liberation movement.

So, can the end be in contradiction with the means? Only the wobbly reasoning of some dilettante intellectual ignorant of the history of anarchist communist thought could place them side by side and seek to arrive at a synthesis of them. For our own part, we are well aware that anarchist communism has always been syndicalist in that it regards the existence and ex-

pansion of independent professional organizations as a necessity for the social victory of the toilers.

So it could only be, and was in reality only a matter, not of theoretical synthesis of communism and syndicalism, but rather of the role that syndicalism should be assigned in communist anarchism's tactics and in the social revolution of the toilers.

The theoretical inadequacies of the supporters of the synthesis is even more striking when they seek to arrive at a synthesis between communism and individualism.

In fact, what does the anarchism of individualists consist of? The notion of the freedom of the individual?

But what is this "individuality"? Is it the individuality in general or the oppressed "individuality" of the toiler?

There is no such thing as "individuality in general" because, one way or another, every individual finds themselves objectively or subjectively in the realm of labour or else in the realm of capital. But isn't the idea implicit in anarchist communism? We might even say that the freedom of the individual toiler is realizable only in the context of an anarchist communist society that will take a scrupulous interest in social solidarity as well as in respect for the rights of the individual.

The anarchist commune is the model of social and economic relations best suited to fostering the development of the freedom of the individual. Anarchist communism is not some rigid, unbending social framework which, once achieved, is set and sets a term to the development of the individual. On the contrary: its supple, elastic social organization will develop by growing in complexity and constantly seeking improvements, so that the freedom of the individual may expand without hindrance.

Similarly, anti-Statism seems to be one of the fundamental principles of communist anarchism. In addition, it has a real content and real expression.

Communist anarchism rejects statism in the name of social independence and the self-management of the labouring classes. As for individualism, on what basis does it refute the State? Assuming that it does! Certain individualist theoreticians champion the right to private ownership in personal relations and in economic relations alike. But wheresoever the principles of private property and personal fortunes exist, a struggle of economic interests inevitably comes into being, a statist structure created by the economically more powerful.

So what remains of individualist anarchism? Negation of the class struggle, of the principle of anarchist organization having as its object the free society of equal workers; and, moreover, empty babble encouraging workers unhappy with their lot to look to their defences by means of recourse to the personal solutions allegedly open to them as liberated individuals.

But what is there in all this that can be described as anarchist? Where are we to find the features in need of synthesis with communism? That whole philosophy [of individualism] has nothing to do with anarchist theory and or anarchist practice, and it is unlikely that an anarchist worker would be inclined to conform to this "philosophy".

So, as we have seen, an analysis of the theoretical tasks of the synthesis leads into a dead end street. And we find the same again when we examine the practical aspects of the issue. We have to choose between two options:

Either the tendencies named remain independent **tendencies**, in which case, how are they going to prosecute their activities in some **common organization**, the very purpose of which is precisely to attune anarchists' activities to a specific agreement?

Or these tendencies should lose their distinguishing features and, by amalgamating, give rise to a new tendency that will be neither communist, syndicalist nor individualist... But in that case, what are the fundamental positions and features to be?