Bakunin, Malatesta and the Platform Debate

The question of anarchist political organization

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The present text —the core of which was taken from the introduction that we wrote for the French edition of *Social Anarchism and Organization*, by the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ)[1]— aims to discuss the question of the specific anarchist political organization, based on the contributions of Mikhail Bakunin, Errico Malatesta and the *Organizational Platform for a General Union of Anarchists*, written by militants organized around the magazine *Dielo Trudá*, among whom were Nestor Makhno and Piotr Archinov.

We are going to take up the contributions of Bakunin and Malatesta to establish a dialogue between them and the Platform, trace the similarities and differences between the proposals of anarchists who advocate an organizational dualism and those of the Bolsheviks, and we will see the proximity of Malatesta with the Synthesis, as well as the historical impact of the Platform, which will make it possible to elucidate the positions that have been disseminated about this debate.

Anarchism is a political-doctrinal ideology that emerged in the nineteenth century, with a hegemony of mass oriented strategies, especially syndicalism (revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism). Among the fundamental positions of "mass anarchism" are the defense of organization, of reforms as a possible path to revolution (provided they are properly conquered through class struggle) and of violence when associated with previously organized popular movements. Such positions are distinguished from other minority positions characterized by their anti-organizationism, their opposition to the struggle for reforms and their defense of violence as a trigger for popular mobilization ("propaganda by the deed").

Those who have taken part in mass anarchism and defend organizational dualism—concomitant organization on two levels, one

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[1] Felipe Corrêa and Rafael Viana da Silva, "Introduction à l'édition francophone."

political/anarchist and the other mass/social—are not the majority, but among them there are relevant authors with significant positions and, above all, a solid historical experience, supported by the theoretical and practical construction of anarchist organizations.[2]

Contributions from Bakunin

Despite the fact that, after important attempts to compile them, Bakunin's complete works have finally been published in French[3], his writings on the so-called "Fraternity" of 1864 and "Alliance" of 1868 —to use the terminology proposed by Max Nettlau— are very little known.

Bakunin's mass strategy has been thoroughly discussed in relevant texts such as *Bakunin: Founder of Revolutionary Syndicalism*, by Gaston Leval,[4] and several others by René Berthier.[5] Not so much his theory of political organization—which he addresses extensively in different documents—which is his attempt to base the political-organizational proposals he had in terms of principles, program, strategy and organization.

There seems to be some shame around these writings, especially among French anarchists. It is as if they belonged to an authoritarian heritage, perhaps of Blanquist and Jacobin inspiration, which remains in the author and should not be brought to light.[6]

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[2] This claim is also supported by the studies mentioned above (Corrêa, Van der Walt, De Laforcade, Viana da Silva). On organizational dualism in theory and practice see the previous chapter "Organizational Issues within Anarchism."

[3] Mikhail Bakunin, *Bakounine: Oeuvres Complètes* [CD-ROM]. Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History (IISH), 2000.

[4] Gaston Leval, *Bakunin: fundador do sindicalismo revolucionário*.

[5] See for example: René Berthier, "Bakounine: une théorie de l'organisation" and "Postface."

[6] In recent decades, the silencing by French anarchists of Bakunin's work is remarkable, especially with regard to the question of anarchist political organization. Virtually none of the numerous programs of the Alliance were included in the published books of this anarchist. Perhaps this question can be explained by

Berthier, René. "Postface". Antonioli, Maurizio. *Bakounine: entre syndicalisme révolutionnaire et anarchisme*. Paris: Noir et Rouge, 2014.

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those of Bakunin and Malatesta. To continue working on deepening this debate seems to us an urgent need.

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We believe that Bakunin's positions on anarchist political organization, from 1868 onwards, are fully reconciled with his mass strategy, which he proposed to the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), and should be recognized as a relevant part of his anarchism. Today, such positions seem to carry weight as a pillar for fruitful reflections on the most suitable organizational model for anarchist intervention.

Bakunin argued that the Alliance should have a dual objective: on the one hand, to stimulate the growth of and strengthen the IWA; on the other, to bring together all those who had political-ideological affinities with anarchism—or, as it was generically called in that period, revolutionary socialism or collectivism—around principles, a program and a common strategy.[7] In sum, create and strengthen both political organization and a mass movement, which has been called organizational dualism:

> They [Alliance militants] will form the inspiring and vivifying soul of that immense body that we call the International Workers' Association [...]; then they will deal with issues that are impossible to discuss publicly; they will form the necessary bridge between the propaganda of socialist theories and revolutionary practice.[8]

For Bakunin, it was not necessary for the Alliance to have a large number of militants: "The number of these individuals should

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following the hypothesis that René Berthier put forward in a talk in 2014 in Brazil. For him, for a long time the French linked Bakunin to Marxism under the umbrella of a so-called "libertarian Marxism," defended by Daniel Guérin. Thus it can be explained, according to him, that a magazine like *Itinéraire*, which dedicated its issues to the "great anarchists" of history, does not have any issue on Bakunin. It is Berthier himself who, to a certain extent, along with other researchers and activists, has taken up the discussion about Bakunin's work.

[7] Mikhail Bakunin, "Letter to Morago (May 21ˢᵗ, 1872)." On the Alliance, see Felipe Corrêa, *Liberdade ou Morte: teoria e prática de Mikhail Bakunin*, chapters 10 and 13.

[8] Mikhail Bakunin, "Letter to Cerretti (March 13–27, 1872)."

not, therefore, be immense." The Alliance had to constitute a political organization, public and secret, with an active minority and collective responsibility among the members, to bring together "the most safe, the most committed, the smartest and the most energetic, in a word the most intimate," with groups in various countries and the ability to decisively influence the working masses.[9] The organization had to be based on internal regulations and a strategic program to establish, respectively, its organic functioning and its political-ideological and programmatic-strategic bases, forging a common axis for anarchist action.

Only "he who [has] frankly accepted the entire program with all its theoretical and practical consequences and who, along with intelligence, energy, honesty and discretion, [has] also a revolutionary passion" could be a member of the organization. Internally, there should be no hierarchy among the members of the Bakuninist political organization and decisions had to be made from the bottom up, generally by majority (varying from consensus to simple majority depending on the relevance of the issue), and all had to abide by decisions taken collectively. This meant applying federalism—advocated as a form of social organization that must decentralize power and create "a revolutionary organization from the bottom up and from the periphery to the center"—in the internal bodies of the anarchist organization.[10]

The Alliance should not exercise a relationship of domination and / or hierarchy over the IWA, rather it should complement it; and vice versa. Together, these two organizational bodies had to complement and enhance the revolutionary project of the workers, without the submission of either party.

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[9] Mikhail Bakunin, "Statuts secrets de l'Alliance: Programme et objet de l'organisation révolutionnaire des Frères internationaux," "Letter to Cerretti (March 13–27, 1872)"and "Letter to Morago (May 21st, 1872)."

[10] Mikhail Bakunin, "Statuts secrets de l'Alliance: Programme et objet de l'organisation révolutionnaire des Frères internationaux" y "Statuts secrets de l'Alliance: Programme de la Société de la Révolution Internationale."

question, in addition to the dominance of the French interpretation, we can get an idea of why the Platform has been considered as a Bolshevik element of anarchism or even something foreign to the anarchist tradition. We have tried to show that this has no foundation.

Although there are reports about the reception of *Dielo Trudá* by Russian anarchists who were in Rio Grande do Sul,[95] it seems that in Brazil the Platform was not discussed even at that time nor in subsequent decades. Although there were different anarchist positions throughout the twentieth century which bear similarities to those outlined in the Platform,[96] it was not until the end of the decade 1990 and early 2000 that the text had been read, translated and discussed by Brazilian militants.[97] Those who have led the debate are the militants involved in *especifismo* anarchism, influenced by the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation, who without knowing the Platform at the time of its formation, reached quite similar conceptions via Bakunin and Malatesta.

Without a doubt, reflection on the Platform should not be taken as an inflexible guide for structuring a political organization. But to reject it on the false argument that it is an "authoritarian deviation" from anarchism or that its contributions should be confined to a specific context is to ignore all the political debates before and after this document, which link the organizational discussion to a long central thread. We understand that it is possible to advance the debate on anarchist political organization if we do it jointly with other contributions, both theoretical and practical, among others

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[95] Edgar Rodrigues, Renato Ramos y Alexandre Samis, *Against all tyranny! Essays of anarchism in Brazil*, p. 19.

[96] For an analysis of the experiences of the forties and sixties of twentieth century São Paulo and Río de Janeiro, see Rafael Viana da Silva, *Elementos inflamáveis: organizações e militância anarquista no Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo (1945–1964).*

[97] Dielo Trudá, "Plataforma Organizacional dos Comunistas Libertários."

anarchists on two levels—as workers in popular mass movements and as anarchists in revolutionary political organizations— and on the duty of anarchists to influence workers in general as much as possible. At the same time, we consider Malatesta's criticisms misplaced, which claimed that the Platform is proposing a hierarchical model of organization and that the executive committee proposed by them would have the function of controlling decisions of the organization.

Be that as it may, we can at least identify three real differences between Malatesta and Makhno and Archinov on the following issues: individual and collective responsibility; fragmentation and the need for union of anarchists; level of autonomy and independence of individuals and groups in the anarchist organization. If for Malatesta responsibility is essentially individual, for Makhno and Archinov it is both individual and collective, so that it binds the militant and the organization at the same time. If for Malatesta the fragmentation of anarchists is not a problem of the first order, for Makhno and Archinov it urgently needs to be overcome in order to allow the union of as many anarchists as possible, provided they are in accordance with the organization's program and strategy. If for Malatesta individuals should have the widest autonomy and independence in groups and these groups in the federations, to Makhno and Archinov unity of action is fundamental, even if it requires a majority vote.

Finally, we must add that for us there is a nexus between certain positions of Bakunin, Malatesta and the Platform that have made it possible to develop a powerful theory of anarchist political organization and that these have served as inspiration for important political experiences. In the specific case of the Platform, it inspired a considerable set of anarchist political practices but, as we have seen, the French and Italian experiences of the 1950s, despite their virtues, offered elements for the argument of "Bolshevik deviation" that had been sustained since the Platform was published. Considering the ideologicalized analysis of the debate and the cases in

The Alliance is the necessary complement to the International … But the International and the Alliance, tending towards the same end goal, pursue different goals at the same time. One's mission is to bring together the working masses, the millions of workers, with their different professions and countries, across the borders of all States, in a single huge and compact body; the other, the Alliance, has the mission of giving the masses a truly revolutionary leadership. The programs of one and the other, without being in any way opposite, are different by the very degree of their respective development. That of the International, if taken seriously, contains in germ, but only in germ, the whole program of the Alliance. The program of the Alliance is the ultimate expression of the [program] of the International.[11]

The union of these two organizations—one political, of minorities (cadres), another social, of majorities (masses)—and their horizontal and permanent organization enhance the strength of workers and increase the opportunities of the anarchist transformation process. Within the mass movement, the political organization makes anarchists more effective in disputes over positions. This formation, organized and in favor of its program, is opposed to forces that are oriented in the opposite direction and that may seek: to raise to the status of principle any of the different political-ideological and/or religious positions; to minimize its eminently class-based character; to strengthen reformist positions (viewing reform as an end) and the loss of combativeness of the movement; to establish internal hierarchies and/or relations of domination; to direct the force of workers toward elections and/or toward strategies of change that imply the takeover of the State; to submit the movement to parties, states or other organizations

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[11] Mikhail Bakunin, "Letter to Morago (May 21st, 1872)."

that eliminate, in the process, the protagonism of the oppressed classes and their institutions.

Contributions from Malatesta

Various ideas from Malatesta resemble those described previously, especially the set of organizational proposals on the "anarchist party," the name by which he referred to the specific anarchist organization. "Parties" of this type took shape historically and had considerable involvement, as were the cases of the Anarchist Socialist Revolutionary Party, of 1891, the Anarchist Party of Ancona, of 1913, and the Italian Anarchist Union, of 1919–1920.[12]

Malatesta conceptualized the anarchist party as "the ensemble of those who are out to help make anarchy a reality and who therefore need to set themselves a target to achieve and a path to follow." For him, "staying isolated, with each individual acting or seeking to act on his own without entering into agreement with others, without making preparations, without marshalling the flabby strength of singletons into a mighty coalition, is tantamount to condemning oneself to impotence, to squandering one's own energies on trivial, ineffective acts and, very quickly, losing belief in one's purpose and lapsing into utter inaction."[13].

In order for anarchists to be effective in their action, they had to establish a common strategy and program and overcome the form of affinity groups that have no contact with social struggles. The

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[12] It should be noted that during his long anarchist career, which spans more than sixty years, Malatesta defended different positions on anarchist political organization. If in some cases it is close to Bakunin's conceptions and, as we will argue, to those of the Platform, in other cases his positions are more related to the Synthesis. It should also be noted that the term "party," used by Malatesta in this period, must be placed in its historical context. It is a term that anarchists will gradually abandon, especially after the Russian Revolution, when it becomes more directly linked to Bolshevism and other initiatives to conquer the state, either through revolution or electorally.

[13] Errico Malatesta, "A organização II."

that such positions will be uncritically consolidated by the world between researchers and militants.

Concluding

Although organizational dualism has not been defended by the majority organizationist anarchists, it has representatives of unquestionable importance and magnitude among anarchists: Bakunin, Malatesta and the editors of *Dielo Trudá*, among them Makhno and Archinov.

Toward the end of the 1860s, Bakunin carried out a theoretical and practical praxis that includes the Alliance and International Workingmen's Association and contributes decisively to the debate on anarchist political organization. In our view, his positions constitute the fundamentals of the *Dielo Trudá* Platform. Malatesta also held positions close to the Platform, although, as we have seen, this does not occur in all his writings on the subject: it is not only about differences with respect to some issues of the Platform, but also that at distinct moments he comes close to the Synthesis position.

Taking into account the role of Bakunin and Malatesta in anarchism and that of figures like Makhno and Archinov, it is not very fair to equate their positions with some kind of Leninist or Bolshevik deviation and an alleged anarcho-Bolshevism. Logically, to claim that the Platform contains authoritarian positions implies ascribing responsibility for this to Bakunin. And yet it seems quite evident that both are anarchists and that their positions about the anarchist political organization are fully reconcilable with their other positions.

From the analysis of the debate between Malatesta on the one hand and Makhno and Archinov on the other, we can conclude the following: there is no doubt that the positions in question are anarchist and that they share the opinion on the need to organize

doubt about the theoretical and practical relevance of some of the contributions of the French and Italian platformists of the 1950s—it seems clear that a significant part of them, especially the FCL and the GAAP, brought serious problems. The mode of formation and action of the OPB, the position in favor of elections and the proximity to an authoritarian communist of the stature of Marty of the FCL and the fusion of the GAAP with the Marxists are examples that, although they responded to a specific context, broke with the anarchist principles and strategy enunciated in the Platform.

Without a doubt, they armed the adversaries of the Platform with powerful arguments. As we have seen, the controversy surrounding the Platform was already complicated in its time and since its publication it was accused of Bolshevik deviation by its detractors. The French and Italian cases reinforced these criticisms.

By refraining from making a less ideological analysis of the Platform, comparing its fundamental elements with anarchist classics and ignoring the case of Bulgarian platformism,[93] the Synthesists ended up generalizing these examples—especially the so-called "Fontenis case" [L'affaire Fontenis] in France—and turned them into paradigmatic examples of the *modus operandi* of platformism.

This is how the argument was constituted that very often equates Bakuninist[94] and platformist organizational dualism to a kind of Marxist and/or Bolshevik deviation from anarchism, to a kind of anarcho-Bolshevism. The dominant interpretation of the Platform exercised by the French synthesists and the dissemination that its argumentation reached—orally and in writing—explain

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[93] Bulgarian platformism is quite a different example from the French and Italian cases of the 1950s and became known in France through Balkansky's publications. See for example this book published even by a group of the French-Francophone Anarchist Federation (FAF): Georges Balkansky, *Histoire du mouvement libertaire en Bulgarie.*

[94] Let us recall, as we have already pointed out, that the French attributed a certain authoritarian character to an important part of Bakunin's work.

goal of the party was stated as follows: "We want to act on it [the mass] and propel it along the path that we believe to be best, but as our objective is to liberate and not dominate, we want to accustom it to free initiative and freedom of action"[14]. Obviously that path was that of the social revolution.

The Malatestian party is founded on revolutionary discipline and in the principle of unity. "Without understanding, without coordination of each other's efforts for common and simultaneous action, victory is not materially possible." But "discipline must not be slavish discipline, blind devotion to bosses, an obedience to the one who always speaks so as not to have to move." This is about revolutionary discipline, which means "consistency with accepted norms and fidelity to assumed commitments, [...] feeling obliged to share the work and the risks with comrades in struggle"[15]. The principle of unity establishes that it is not enough to have a platform of association that calls itself anarchist. Although anarchists may seem united, Malatesta affirms that he does not believe "in the soundness of organizations built upon concessions and subterfuge and where there is no real agreement and sympathy between the members." He continues, "Better dis-united than mis-united"[16].

Propaganda and education were fundamental activities to be carried out by the anarchists. We "carry on our propaganda to raise the moral level of the masses and induce them to win their emancipation by their own efforts." Of course, propaganda should be organized and planned: "Isolated, sporadic propaganda which is often a way of easing a troubled conscience or is simply an outlet for someone who has a passion for argument, serves little or no purpose." For Malatesta, "seeds sown haphazardly" had great difficulty germinating and taking root. Rather, what is needed "is continuity of effort, patience, coordination, and adaptability to different

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[14] Errico Malatesta, "A organização II" and "Enfim. O que é a 'ditadura do proletariado'," p. 87.

[15] Errico Malatesta, "Ação e disciplina," p. 24.

[16] Errico Malatesta, "A organização II," p. 62.

surroundings and circumstances." Anarchists should occupy themselves with education, "education for freedom," "making people who are accustomed to obedience and passivity consciously aware of their real power and capabilities"[17]. However, he believed that propaganda and education alone were not enough. "We would be deluding ourselves in thinking that propaganda is enough to raise them [the people] to that level of intellectual development which is needed to put our ideas into effect."[18] In relation to education, Malatesta criticizes the "educationists [...] who assert that through propaganda and instruction, the defense of free thought and positive science, with the establishment of popular universities and modern schools, it is possible to destroy in the masses religious prejudice, moral subjection to state rule and belief in sacrosanct property rights"[19].

In reality, for him these initiatives were very limited: "Educationists should see how powerless their generous efforts are." The consciousness of the masses could not be sensibly elevated and the environment transformed "as long as the economic and political conditions [of the moment] [lasted]"[20].

Malatesta proposed organizational base building work, to be carried out daily by anarchists:

> In normal times [it is necessary] to carry out the long and patient work of preparation and popular organization and not to fall into the illusion of short-term revolution, achievable only by the initiative of a few, without the effective participation of the masses. Since this preparation is carried out in an adverse environment,

object of self-criticism by its own members and that at the time earned criticism from both synthesists and important platformist sectors, like those who later formed the Anarchist Groups of Revolutionary Action [Grupos Anarquistas de Acción Revolucionaria] (GAAR) and the newspaper *Rojo y Negro*. The second was proximity with André Marty, candidate in the 1956 elections together with Fontenis and others from the FCL. Marty was a former member of the French Communist Party who during the Spanish Revolution had been responsible for the International Brigades and had ordered the slaughter of dozens of anarchists.[91]

In Italy, the formation of Anarchist Groups of Proletarian Action (GAAP) was carried out by a platformist sector of the Italian Anarchist Federation. Expelled in 1950, this sector—who criticized the reformism and idealism of its organization of origin and advocated the creation of an anarchist party inspired by the Platform—acted as GAAP until 1956, the year in which it merged with Marxist groups to form Communist Action, a far-left sector of the Italian Communist Party that subsequently contributed to the creation of the Movement of the Communist Left.[92]

Be that as it may, both French and Italian platformism have had further developments and influenced organizations up to the present, the vast majority of which are inscribed in the anarchist camp.

It is not difficult to demonstrate the consequences of the analyzes of French and Italian platformists of that period and of the generalization of its postulates in all sectors of anarchism inspired by organizational dualism in general and in the Platform in particular. Despite the virtues of the projects in question—there is no

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[17] Errico Malatesta, "La propaganda anarquista," pp. 170–172.

[18] Errico Malatesta, "Programa anarquista," p. 14.

[19] Errico Malatesta, *Ideología anarquista*, p. 193.

[20] *Ibid.*

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[91] "Organisation, pensée, bataille," in *Noir et Rouge. Cahiers d'Études Anarchistes Revolutionnaires: Anthologie 1956–1970*; Cédric Guérin, *Pensée et action des anarchistes en France: 1956–1970*; Maurice Joyeux, "L'affaire Fontenis," p. 81.

[92] José A.G. Danton, "Para pensar el anarquismo desde nuestra realidad [...]," p. 20; Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA), *Anarchist communists: a question of class*, p. 107.

among others.[85] Starting in 1950, a trend led by George Fontenis and influenced by the Platform began to function without the knowledge of others and founded the Organization Thought Battle [Organisation Pensée Bataille] (OPB), a secret organization whose objective was to give the FAF a revolutionary leadership, driving away those opposed to the class struggle and social anarchism.[86]

In the three years after its founding, the OPB grew in influence and in 1953, at the Paris congress, now without many of its members, under the influence of the platformists the FAF became the Libertarian Communist Federation (FCL) and adopted as a programmatic document the *Libertarian Communist Manifesto* of Fontenis, also inspired by the Platform.[87] Its existence was relatively short and between 1956 and 1957 the FCL ceased its activities, mainly because of the Algerian war of independence in 1954—in which its militants got involved—repression, the rise of the French Communist Party and its own mistakes.[88]

This process caused immense trauma, especially due to the exclusion of members of the FAF, including its founders, and because of the way in which the OPB was constituted and made use of its ideas. By the end of 1953, the FAF was reconstituted by rekindling synthetist positions and the dispute with the FCL dragged on to its end.[89] In addition to the incorporation of theoretical elements of Marxism, such as dialectical materialism,[90] an already controversial issue, the FCL was involved in very complicated episodes. The first took place in 1955, with the decision to present candidates for the 1956 electoral campaign, an effort that was subsequently the

do not neglect propaganda, agitation or organization of the masses, among other things.[21]

The activities of organized anarchists would therefore be "the propagation of our ideas; unceasing struggle, violent or non-violent depending on the circumstances, against government and against the boss class to conquer as much freedom and well-being as we can for the benefit of everybody"[22].

Bakunin, Malatesta and the Platform: "Anarcho-Bolshevism"?

First of all, it must be said that when Bakunin developed his praxis—and his theory and practice of political organization—which would directly influence Malatesta, Lenin had just been born and Bolshevism would still take many years to emerge. Therefore, to accuse Bakuninist organizational dualism of being "Leninist" is an anachronism.[23]

At the same time, it also seems problematic to assume that by defending organizational dualism Bakunin, Malatesta and Lenin should be considered part of the same current or political-ideological tradition, resembling each other to some extent. As is known, this dualism was understood and practiced in a very distinct way in the anarchist tradition and in the Leninist tradition, including its Trotskyist and other variations. Any canonical text of Marxism-Leninism on the question—for example, Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*[24]—shows this clearly. Apart from parallel work on

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[85] Maurice Joyeux, "L'affaire Fontenis."

[86] Alexandre Skirda, *Autonomie individuelle et force collective: les anarchistes et l'organisation de Proudhon à nos jours*, pp. 203–213.

[87] George Fontenis, *Manifeste du communisme libertaire.*

[88] José A.G. Danton, "Para pensar el anarquismo desde nuestra realidad […]," pp. 19–20.

[89] Maurice Joyeux, "L'affaire Fontenis."

[90] Alexandre Skirda, *Autonomie individuelle et force collective* […], p. 343.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[22] Errico Malatesta, "Programa anarquista," p. 26.

[23] Although the Leninist party form is described in 1902 in Lenin's work, *What is to be done?*, the model will not be internationally divulged until after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

[24] Vladimir I. Lenin, *O que fazer?*

two different levels, one of the cadre party and the other of the mass movement, there are no major similarities.

To be concise, there are two fundamental differences that can be marked between the organizational praxis of Bakunin and Malatesta and that of Lenin: the internal structure of the organization and the relationship between organization and mass movements.

In the first instance, in the anarchist political organization there is internal democracy and decisions are made from the bottom up. It is the grassroots organizations and the militants themselves who discuss and resolve all the organization's issues. There is no hierarchy between the members so there is no leadership-base division. Leninist political organization, on the contrary, is based on "democratic centralism," which envisioned a hierarchical organizational model, with a leadership-base division, so that although the base is consulted for decision-making, who in fact deliberates is the leadership, including against the positions of the base. In other words, there is no internal democracy and decisions are made from top to bottom.

Unity of action, defended by a sector of anarchism, is often confused with democratic centralism. What makes the difference between the two positions is not the obligation regarding the decisions made, common in both cases, but who makes the decisions and the way they are made. In anarchist organizations everyone effectively participates and deliberates on all issues (sometimes through majority mechanisms); in Leninist organizations, on the other hand, even though the rank and file are consulted, the leadership is the one who decides and hierarchically imposes decisions.

Secondly, the anarchist political organization functions in a complementary way to mass movements and does not attempt to impose a relationship of hierarchy and/or domination. Its function is to strengthen the leadership of these movements, since in the anarchist project the masses must be responsible for revolutionary social transformation. The organization is part of

chist Communist Union, also created by platformists. Apart from these, the most relevant experience of the period took place in Bulgaria, when the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB), founded in 1919, adopted the Platform after it was published and used it ever since to guide their political practice. The Bulgarian platformist experience can be considered one of the great episodes of anarchism between the 1920s and 1940s; in fact, it contributed to a considerable mass movement with rural and urban syndicalism, cooperatives, guerrillas and great youth mobilization.[82] The Platform of the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria, published in 1945, reflects the direct influence of the Platform and addresses "crucial questions in terms of tactics and organization and reflects the form of organization in political party," orienting a movement that "had significant clarity to defend against the Bolsheviks" but it was decimated by Stalinism and by fascism.[83]

This debate resurfaced strongly among anarchists after World War II, most significantly in France and Italy. The Platform influenced both the French Libertarian Communist Federation [Fédération Communiste Libertaire] (FCL) and the Italian Anarchist Groups of Proletarian Action [Gruppi Anarchici d'Azione Proletaria] (GAAP), groups of the 1950s that coordinated in a libertarian communist international of platform inspiration.[84]

Regarding the consequences of the organizational debate, the case of the French-Francophone Anarchist Federation [Fédération Anarchiste] (FAF) was the most emblematic. Founded in 1945, the FAF took as its organizational foundation the Synthesis of Sébastien Faure and had different tendencies within it: individualists, humanists, trade unionists, libertarian communists,

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[82] Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame* [...], p. 258.

[83] Michael Schmidt, *Anarquismo búlgaro em armas: a linha de massas anarco-comunista*, p. 40. The Bulgarian Platform appears in the appendix of this book.

[84] Nick Heat, "Introdução histórica"; José A.G. Danton, "Para pensar el anarquismo desde nuestra realidad: sobre el Manifiesto comunista libertario," p. 19.

In their attempt to concretize the organizational project, in 1927 the anarchists of *Dielo Trudá* launched a call for the constitution of an international federation following the bases of the Platform. With the aim of organizing an international conference that same year, on February 5, 1927, they held a preliminary meeting in Paris in which militants from Bulgaria, China, Spain, France, Italy, Poland and Russia participated. From that meeting came a provisional commission made up of the Chinese anarchist Chen, the Ukrainian Makhno and the Polish Ranko, and various circulars were sent to various anarchist groups.

From the international conference, which also took place in Paris on April 20, 1927, some agreements emerged: the recognition of the class struggle as the most important aspect of the anarchist idea, anarcho-communism as the basis of the movement and syndicalism as the main method of struggle; the recognition of the need for a general organization of anarchists based on tactical and ideological unity and collective responsibility; and the need for a program for social revolution.

The conference suffered a major setback: the police assaulted and arrested everyone present, and only thanks to a campaign by French anarchists, Makhno was not deported. Also, many groups, even the conference participants, did not try to or failed to carry out the resolutions that had been adopted.[80]

Still, the conference yielded some practical results. In France, platformists were responsible for the transformation of the Anarchist Communist Union into the Anarchist Communist Revolutionary Union in 1927 and managed to make their positions the majority in the organization, which lasted three years. They also created the Libertarian Communist Federation, which existed between 1934 and 1936.[81] Of shorter existence was the Italian Anar-

the masses and brings together an ideologically related sector that seeks to strengthen its position in political disputes. The Leninist organization differs in that it believes that popular movements are only able to fight in the short term, in the struggles for demands. Leninists believe that it is the party that must provide movements with transformative capacity and that the party itself must lead in the process of revolutionary social transformation. The party is conceived as a separate sector of the masses that exerts a relation of hierarchy and domination over them, withdrawing their class independence and protagonism.

That is why we are not in agreement with the assertion that the positions of Bakunin and Malatesta—according to our point of view, as we will argue later, rescued in several respects by the Platform and by various anarchist political organizations—constitute some kind of "anarcho-Bolshevism" or carry Leninist traits. Both Bakunin and Malatesta—and later Makhno, Archinov, Ida Mett and others—had the anarchist political organization as one of their important topics for reflection and established its framework within anarchist principles. The link between anarchist organizational dualism and Leninism, which has been established with some frequency in the past and continues to establish itself in the present, has no historiographical foundation, not even theoretical-logical. It seems to relate more to the self-serving motives of those who make these claims than to a historical phenomenon.

Anyone who takes on this topic with a minimum of seriousness and intellectual honesty will verify the erroneousness of the alleged relationship of Bakunin, Malatesta and the Platform with Bolshevism. In the case of the Platform, its main aspects are based on the long anarchist political tradition and its authors lived through the experience of a concrete social revolution, dulled by the author-

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[80] Nick Heat, "Introdução histórica."
[81] David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement (1917–1945)*, pp. 174–176.

itarian politics of the Bolsheviks, which makes the characterization of its authors as anarcho-Bolsheviks more absurd.[25]

The Platform and the debate between anarchists

The *Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists*, written in 1926 by a group of Russians and Ukrainians exiled in France, constitutes a frame of reference in the discussion on anarchist organization. In our view, the debate on this document has been relatively truncated and, for certain reasons, misunderstood by a significant part of those interested in the subject.

The result of a process of self-criticism by anarchists in the wake of developments of the Russian and Ukrainian revolutions, the Platform was published as a program proposal for anarchists. Divided into three major sections —general, constructive and organizational—the Platform upholds, among other things: the critique of capitalist society, the State and representative democracy and the centrality of class struggle; the need for leadership of the masses for the revolution, through class and federalist intervention; criticism of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a period of transition; the defense of syndicalism as a relevant means for anarchist action; the establishment of a post-revolutionary society in which production and land have been socialized; the creation of organs for the defense of the revolution; the formation of an anarchist political organization programmatically based on theoretical and tactical unity, on responsibility and federalism.[26]

vist movement Archinov and Makhno responded in long articles. They were responsible for causing unpleasant polemics within international anarchism, especially European anarchism.

Criticisms of anarchist intellectual sectors were not exclusive to Archinov. Anatol Gorelik—a Russian anarchist who went into exile in Argentina in 1922 and contributed from Buenos Aires to *Dielo Trudá*—published in June of the same year, *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*. Beyond an overview of events in Russia, Gorelik criticized the anarchist intellectuals who had isolated themselves from the workers' movement.[77]

With the publication of the Platform in 1926 it was possible to deepen the debate that had been taking place in relation to the Russian and Ukrainian revolutionary process and the written contributions of its members, and above all its defenders were able to concretize their own organizational project in better conditions.

A deep debate about anarchist organization, possibly the largest in history, took place until the early thirties of the twentieth century. Not only did Makhno and Malatesta participate, so did Archinov, Volin, Luigi Fabbri, Camilo Berneri, Sébastien Faure, Maria Isidin, Gregori Maximoff, among others. While the members of *Dielo Trudá* explained and deepened the lines of the Platform, other anarchists tended to criticize it. As in the Makhno-Malatesta debate, some of these criticisms denoted real differences and others were due to misunderstandings or outright gross nonsense.[78]

Among the absurdities were the positions of Volin and other synthesists, who in 1927 claimed that the Platform constituted a "revisionism in the direction of Bolshevism, which the authors hide"[79]. Despite being unfounded, several anarchists and scholars of anarchism followed them and adopted this position.

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[25] Any serious researcher would be horrified to hear this characterization of the members of *Dielo Trudá*. In the 2014 talk mentioned, for example, researcher René Berthier (who is also a member of a synthesist organization) was clear and emphatic when he heard it from another synthesist stating: "That does not exist."

[26] Dielo Trudá, "Plataforma Organizacional dos Comunistas Libertários."

[77] This and other writings from the author in Frank Mintz (ed.) *Anatol Gorelik: el anarquismo en la Revolución Rusa.*

[78] As mentioned above, the whole debate can be found in Felipe Corrêa (ed.), "Dossiê A Plataforma Organizacional."

[79] Volin et al., "Reply to the Platform (Synthesist)."

Two reasons mark the misunderstanding of the Platform, especially if the recently discussed contributions of Bakunin and Malatesta are taken into account.

Regarding Bakunin, ignorance of his texts on the Alliance has prevented appreciating the similarities between his conception of political organization and that of the Platform. With respect to Malatesta, it must be said that the partial dissemination and excessive focus on part of his mail exchange with Makhno about the Platform—specifically the first letter sent by the Italian—has impeded a clearer understanding of his positions.

There is a third reason, in addition, which has to do with sectors that have set the standard for debate in the world, establishing a version that many researchers and militants hold: A significant part of the discussion about the Platform has been monopolized by an interpretation that is dominant in European anarchism in general, particularly French, and which is mostly critical of the Platform.

Next we present elements for the discussion on these three relevant questions, in order to contribute to solidifying our position.

Bakunin and the fundamentals of the Platform

We agree with researchers such as Frank Mintz when they argue that the Platform, rather than introduce a new organizational debate among anarchists, takes up fundamental elements of the Bakuninist strategy.[27] In this sense, Van der Walt correctly states that "Makhno and Archinov explicitly related the Platform to the Bakunin heritage." Quoting Colin Darch on the makhnovitchina, he states:

> Bakunin's "aspirations concerning organizations, as well as his activity in the First International give us

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[27] Frank Mintz, "Contexto de la Plataforma."

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[27] Frank Mintz, "Contexto de la Plataforma."

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every right" to view him as an "active partisan" of the idea that anarchism "must gather its forces in one organization, constantly agitating, as demanded by reality and the strategy of class struggle."[28]

Fundamental elements found in the Platform are certainly tributaries of Bakunin, among them the social critique of capitalist and statist domination and the centrality of class struggle, the need for the simultaneous intervention of anarchists at both levels, anarchist organization and mass movements (organizational dualism), the need for a violent social revolution, and in general libertarian socialism as a proposal for a future society.

In a more detailed analysis, as much as we can find differences, there are similarities in the main lines. The federalist functioning of the anarchist organization, without hierarchy or domination among the members, and its complementary relationship with mass movements, are also characteristic elements that allow Bakunin to be related to the Platform. This is not the time to do so, but it would not be very difficult to establish with substance and detail this whole series of parallels.

According to this analysis and what we have mentioned above, far from innovating, the Platform simply proposed a "return"—adapted to a concrete historical context—to the Bakuninist organizational strategy of the post-1867 period. We should recall that this model took shape, in theoretical and practical terms, in other circumstances, in the most diverse times and locations, the Platform being only one of them. For this reason, we understand that the qualifier *platformist* —beyond having the merit of differentiating, among anarchists, a particular organizational strategy—can be easily substituted by others that refer to other authors and experiences, some of which occurred during the first great wave of anarchism in the world.

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[28] Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame* […], p. 256.

Malatesta, closer to the Synthesis or the Platform?

As the complete works of Malatesta are not yet published, not even in Italian, we will have to wait until that happens to be able to deepen the discussion on the positions of Malatesta and be able to decide which were in the majority, which were in the minority, to what extent the positions adopted are related to certain periods of his life, etc. For the moment, we can conclude that, according to what has been said, his positions are varied and allow different interpretations: particularly in reference to the Platform-Synthesis debate, we have already demonstrated that it is possible to link his positions without great difficulty to one or the other camp depending on the texts and extracts taken into consideration.

Debate: historical impact of the Platform and the dominance of the Synthesis interpretation

The distrust of a large part of anarchists in relation to the elements that culminated in the formalization of the Platform began in 1923, shortly after the publication of Archinov's book, *History of the Makhnovist movement*.[73] Distrust spread rapidly in anarchist networks.

Marc Mrachny, a former member of the Nabat organization who spent a few days with the Makhnovists, in June 1923 published a series of criticisms of them in the newspaper *Via Obrera*, an organ of the Russian anarcho-syndicalists published in Berlin. Mrachny said that the role of Makhno had been overrated by some anarchists to the detriment of the working class and that the makhnovitchina had constituted a kind of "military anarchism." In the same issue

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[73] Piotr Archinov, *Historia del movimiento makhnovista.*

Indirectly, the previously discussed issue of collective responsibility comes up again.

When it comes to matters related to the program of anarchist organization, Malatesta relates them more to anarchist principles than to a well-defined strategy. Unlike what he does in the texts of 1897, he goes so far as to affirm that the anarchist party is "the group of those who are on the same side, who have the same general aspirations, who in one way or another fight for the same end against common adversaries and enemies"[71]. Which is to say that the party would be formed by the "partisans" of anarchism, almost automatically, by the simple fact of existing.

Makhno and the Russians advocate that for the formation of a coherent strategy and program for the anarchist organization, in case of divergence in positions, majority voting would be adopted, and the result of the deliberations would be binding for the entire organization, which consequently must apply them. This applies provided members decide to remain in the organization, since the right to a split is given.

Malatesta criticizes decision-making by majority and proposes that differences are voluntarily readjusted, by means of some type of consensus-dissent, and says that the good sense of militancy should lead it to contribute positively to the dynamics of organizational activities: "an adaptation [that] must be reciprocal, voluntary and derive from the awareness of the need to not paralyze social life by mere stubbornness."[72] For him, this means working with a broad program, around anarchist principles, that allows each member and group of the organization to carry out any action that in practice they judge will contribute to that program.

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[71] Errico Malatesta, "Um projeto de organização anarquista."
[72] *Ibid.*

Malatesta, the Platform and Synthesis

Analyzing the controversy around the Platform,[29] in which the debate between Makhno and Malatesta stands out, the proximity between Malatesta and the Platform is not as obvious as it is with Bakunin. According to what we have indicated, if we take into account the more than six decades of Malatesta's anarchist militancy, we can understand that at certain times his positions are closer to those of the Platform and in others to the Anarchist Synthesis.[30]

Texts such as those published in 1897 in *L'Agitazione*, especially "Organization I" and "Organization II"[31], and compilations such as *Anarchist Ideology*,[32] allow us to identify positions quite similar to that of the Platform. However, texts such as "Communism and Individualism"[33] and "Individualism and Communism in Anarchism"[34], as well as Malatesta's interventions at the Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam in 1907,[35] show positions much closer to Synthesis.

In his texts closest to Synthesis, Malatesta criticizes the fact that "anarchists of various tendencies, despite wanting basically the same thing, find themselves in their daily lives and in their

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[29] Many of the texts on the debate can be found on the Nestor Makhno Archive: http://www.nestormakhno.info. Among the anarchists who contributed to this broad debate are: Malatesta, Makhno and the The Platform's own authors —Piotr Archinov, Ida Mett, Jean Walecki, Benjamin Goldberg (Ranko)—in addition to Gregori Maximoff, Volin, Senya Fleshin, Camilo Berneri, Luigi Fabbri, Sébastien Faure and Maria Isidin, among others. For a full compilation of the interventions in this debate, see Felipe Corrêa (ed.), "Dossiê A Plataforma Organizacional": https://ithanarquista.wordpress.com/plataforma-organizacional.

[30] There are two homonymous historical texts that, although they have have significant differences, theoretically ground the "anarchist synthesis": Sébastien Faure, "A sintese anarquista," and Volin, "A sintese anarquista."

[31] Errico Malatesta, "A organização I" and "A organização II."

[32] Errico Malatesta, *Ideología anarquista.*

[33] Errico Malatesta, "Communism and Individualism."

[34] Errico Malatesta, "Individualism and Communism in Anarchism."

[35] Maurizio Antonioli (ed.) *The International Anarchist Congress: Amsterdam (1907).*

propaganda in fierce opposition to each other." Based on this criticism, Malatesta defends the need to "reach some understanding" and that "when agreement is not possible [it is necessary] to know how to tolerate each other. Work together when there is consensus and when there is not, allow others to do what they consider best, without interference"[36]. This should be the case, since "individualist and communist anarchism is one and the same thing — or almost," "there are no fundamental differences"[37].

At the Amsterdam congress, trying to mediate between the positions of syndicalist anarchists and others with individualist influences, Malatesta affirms that "cooperation is indispensable, today more than ever. Without doubt, the association must allow individual members complete autonomy and the federation must respect this same autonomy for its groups." If on the one hand, he says, it is understood that it is "wrong to present the 'organizationists', the federalists, as authoritarians, [on the other hand] it is equally wrong to imagine that the 'anti-organizationists', the individualists, have to be deliberately condemned to isolation." In short, Malatesta believed that the dispute between individualists and organizationists was a "simple dispute of words"[38].

These and other positions allow authors to correctly claim that Malatesta "flirted with the synthesist position on some occasions"[39]. But it is necessary to acknowledge that there are also times when he defends quite different positions.

zation in relation to collective decisions and the decision-making method of deliberation. For Makhno and the Russians, action with a clear strategy and program was fundamental, which, in addition to anarchist principles, established a common and unitary path for the organization as a whole: "such a role [of anarchists in a revolution] can only be played successfully when our Party is ideologically homogeneous and unified from the point of view of tactics"[66]. He further states that "our Party must [...] make clear its political unity and organizational character"[67], in a position similar to what Archinov called "homogeneous theoretical and practical program"[68], a form of collective deliberation with binding decision for all its members.

For Malatesta, members and groups of the organization had to have the most complete autonomy and decisions should not be mandatory, but only recommendations that may or may not be followed: "full autonomy, full independence and, therefore, full responsibility of individuals and groups," so that the decisions of the organization's congresses "are not mandatory rules but suggestions, recommendations, proposals." Malatesta even goes so far as to elevate this position—according to our point of view related to organizational strategy—to a principle of anarchism, when he emphasizes the "principles of autonomy and free initiative which the anarchists profess," certainly a doubtful conclusion from a historical point of view.[69]

Archinov asks: "What would be the value of a congress that only issued 'opinions' and did not take charge of making them come true? None. In a vast movement [like anarchism], a solely moral and non-organizational responsibility loses all its value"[70].

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[36] Errico Malatesta, "Individualism and Communism in Anarchism," pp. 14–18.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21.

[38] Errico Malatesta, "Intervention, 6th session," p. 96.

[39] Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame* [...], p. 250.

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[66] Nestor Makhno, "Uma segunda carta a Malatesta."

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] Piotr Archinov, "O velho e o novo no anarquismo."

[69] Errico Malatesta, "Resposta de Malatesta a Nestor Makhno."

[70] Piotr Archinov, "O velho e o novo no anarquismo."

carrying out what he had promised, everyone will say that it was his fault and that therefore it is he who is responsible, not those who did what they were supposed to right up to the last."[63]

In sum, it can be said that there are points of agreement and others of divergence in this controversy between Malatesta and the editors of *Dielo Trudá*. Malatesta does not relent when it comes to the idea that responsibility is essentially individual, although he understands the need for coordinated actions and agreement and respect for these actions and pacts on the part of the members of an anarchist organization. For Makhno and Archinov, responsibility is individual and collective at the same time, it necessarily binds the militant and the organization, making them responsible to each other, and it has to do with the guiding role of anarchism in the revolutionary process. As Malatesta himself notes, the notion of collective responsibility and the position of full independence and autonomy that he himself defends are incompatible.[64]

Another divergence has to do with the greater or lesser need for unification (homogeneity) of anarchists. While the Russians advocate that the anarchist organization must bring together the majority, if not the entire organized and revolutionary sector of anarchists—emphasizing "the great need for an organization that [brings together] most of the participants in the anarchist movement"[65]—, Malatesta affirms: "Let us therefore abandon the idea of bringing together all [the anarchists] in a single organization." For the Russians fragmentation was the central problem, something that doesn't seem to be that essential for Malatesta.

There are also very important differences in terms of organization—that is, to the organic functioning of the anarchist grouping—which includes the level of commitment and autonomy of the members and groups that belong to the organi-

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[63] Errico Malatesta, "A propósito da responsabilidade coletiva."

[64] Errico Malatesta, "Resposta de Malatesta a Nestor Makhno."

[65] Dielo Trudá, "Plataforma Organizacional dos Comunistas Libertários."

The debate between Makhno and Malatesta: necessary clarification

With regard to the debate between Makhno and Malatesta on the Platform,[40] Malatesta's positions are also modified throughout the debate, hampered by issues of text comprehension and mutual comprehension. There are some aspects relative to context that should be pointed out: the fact that Malatesta was on house arrest and quite removed from anarchist discussions; the problem of translation of the Platform, done by Volin, one of its greatest opponents, who "adjusted" it to his point of view through a series of terminological choices;[41] a certain difference of evaluation of anarchism at that moment, which the Russians considered much more critically than Malatesta and, consequently, they saw more need for a significant change in their organizational patterns. Their critical position is related to the historical experience of Russian-

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[40] The debate was reflected in the correspondence between the two: Errico Malatesta, "Um projeto de organização anarquista" and "Resposta de Malatesta a Nestor Makhno," and Nestor Makhno, "Reposta a "Um projeto de organização anarquista" and "Uma segunda carta a Malatesta." Malatesta's article "A propósito da responsabilidade coletiva" can also be useful.

[41] Alexandre Skirda, a Russian translator who, in addition to participating in the political debate, was in charge of the publication of the new translation of the Platform into French, says about the original translation: "Let us remember that Volin's first translation was described as 'vile and boring' and its author accused of not being 'careful to adapt the terminology and phrases to the spirit of the French movement' (*Le Libertaire*, 106, 04/15/1927). We investigated what these accusations could refer to and found, indeed, several consciously distorted terms: *napravlenie*, which means both 'direction' and 'orientation', was consistently used in the former sense. The same occurs with the term *rukovodstvo*, which means 'conduct' and as a derived verb it has the sense of 'guide, lead, direct, manage' but it was also systematically translated as 'direct'. The most flagrant case is that of *zatrelchtchik*, which appears in the last sentence of the Platform and means 'instigator' but Volin translated it as 'vanguard'. This is how, through light brushstrokes, the deep meaning of a text can be modified." Alexandre Skirda, *Autonomie individuelle et force collective: les anarchistes et l'organisation de Proudhon à nos jours*, pp. 245–246.

Ukrainian anarchism, since their progress and defeats contributed to reinforcing their conviction on the importance of the specific anarchist organization and of its fundamental axes.[42] We will discuss some questions on this debate that we consider necessary to address in more depth.

First of all, it makes sense to clear any doubts about our position: for us, Malatesta as well as Makhno and other Russians who wrote the Platform are anarchists, considering a historical and global approach to anarchism. Both positions can be more or less historically identified in various anarchist authors and episodes. Mainly in his first letter, Malatesta exaggerates and commits misunderstandings when criticizing the Platform. There is no justification for a statement like the one in which he says that the Platform is "typically authoritarian" and does not constitute a document of anarchism, but rather "a Government, a Church," which Makhno simply refused to comment on due to its degree of absurdity. Malatesta also hints that the Platform admits that "to organize means to submit to leaders and belong to an authoritarian, centralizing body that suffocates any attempt at free initiative."[43] For us, there is no doubt that the Platform is anarchist, it does not bear any relation with governments, churches or any other type of authoritarianism, fits without difficulty into the historical tradition of anarchism and does not assume, as its detractors said from the beginning, a Bolshevik detour.

Second, there are unquestionable similarities between the positions of Makhno and Malatesta. They both agree, for example, in the need for anarchists to organize themselves in a revolu-

the military that kill rebel soldiers or the armies that decimate populations in invasions—another completely out of place comparison, from our point of view—noting:

> I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and cooperates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to coordinate his actions with those of his fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others and, thus, the common cause; and respect the agreements that have been made, except when wishing sincerely to leave the association when emerging differences of opinion or changed circumstances or conflict over preferred methods make cooperation impossible or inappropriate. Just as I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.[60]

Malatesta complements his criticism by saying that "perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among the members of an association" and emphasizing that, if this were the case, "agreement would soon be reached"[61].

In the following response, Makhno once again affirms that "anarchist action on a wide scale will only achieve its goals if it possesses a well-defined organizational base, inspired and guided by the principle of the collective responsibility of its militants"[62].

Some time later, Malatesta would go on to affirm that responsibility is essentially individual: "Moral responsibility (and in our case we can talk of nothing but moral responsibility) is individual by its very nature." Adding: "If a number of men agree to do something and one of them allows the initiative to fail through not

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[42] We can mention the case of the Nabat Confederation, which brought together various anarchist organizations. Although the differences in analysis between historians and anarchists themselves on the organizational conception and anarchism of Nabat do not allow us to know for sure if it was closer to the conception of the Synthesis or the Platform, we can affirm that, along with the experience of the Russian and Ukrainian revolutions, it broadly contributed to the Platform. Piotr Archinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement.*

[43] Errico Malatesta, "Um projeto de organização anarquista."

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[60] Errico Malatesta, "Resposta de Malatesta a Nestor Makhno."
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Nestor Makhno, "Uma segunda carta a Malatesta."

gerous for the social revolution"[56]. Makhno further relates collective responsibility to the question of anarchist ideological influence on the masses:

> The collective spirit of its militants and their collective responsibility will allow modern anarchism to eliminate from its circles the idea, historically false, that anarchism cannot be a guide—either ideologically or in practice—for the mass of workers in a revolutionary period and therefore could not have overall responsibility.[57]

Archinov, for his part, supporting Makhno's positions and criticizing Malatesta, reinforces the sense of collective responsibility in the following way:

> The practical activity of a member of the organization is found in full harmony with general activity and, inversely, the activity of the whole organization cannot be in contradiction with the conscience and activity of anyone of its members, provided that you have accepted the program on which the organization is based.[58]

The idea is that an anarchist organization cannot be founded if not on this principle, in the sense that the member "could not carry out his political and revolutionary work if not in the political spirit of the Union […] his activity could not be contrary to that which was developed by all its members"[59].

In the following response, Malatesta is still standing his ground, going so far as to relate collective responsibility with governments,

tionary political organization (a "General Union" for the first, an "Anarchist Party" for the second). They are also in agreement —despite terminological divergences[44]— on their conception of organization as a promoter of their ideas and practices among the masses (that's why they use terms like "influence," "orientation," "suggestion," even "direction") and as guiding the direction of struggles and workers' movements towards social revolution and socialism or communism libertarian. Malatesta says:

> I believe that we, anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realization of our ideals. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will only be useful if won in that way.[45]

In this same sense, Makhno asserts that "anarchism is a revolutionary social doctrine that must inspire the exploited and oppressed"[46] in the struggles for social transformation, and as the Platform proposes, it must make "revolutionary anarchist positions" penetrate into the movements of "workers and peasants," to become a "pioneer" and "theoretical guide" of popular organizations in the city and countryside.[47] The *Supplement to the Platform* affirms that the tools to influence the masses should be "propaganda, force of argument, and spoken and written persuasion"[48].

Third, it should be noted that two of Malatesta's criticisms of the Platform are completely misplaced: the idea that the Russians

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[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] Piotr Archinov, "O velho e o novo no anarquismo."
[59] *Ibid.*

[44] The discussion between Malatesta and Makhno got very complicated due to terminological problems, to which the issues previously noted on translation contributed.
[45] Errico Malatesta, "Resposta de Malatesta a Nestor Makhno."
[46] Nestor Makhno, "Uma segunda carta a Malatesta."
[47] Dielo Trudá, "Plataforma Organizacional dos Comunistas Libertários."
[48] Dielo Trudá, "Suplemento a la Plataforma Organizativa (Preguntas y respuestas)."

were proposing a hierarchical organization and that the Executive Committee (despite its name, which indicates that it executes and not that it deliberates) should control the decisions of the organization.

It was not for nothing that Makhno was surprised by Malatesta's first text and told him: "My impression is that… you have misunderstood the project for the 'Platform'."[49] Let us agree that it is true to some extent.

The Platform is clear about the functions of the Executive Committee:

> The execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted; the theoretical and organisational orientation of the activity of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical line of the Union; the monitoring of the general state of the movement; the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the Union; and with other organisations.[50]

It is, according to our point of view, a type of secretariat that guides the decisions made by the base of the organization.

The proposed organizational form is federalist, built by the base, from the bottom up, so that it reconciles "the independence and initiative of individuals and the organisation with service to the common cause." However, so that "shared decisions"—that is, socialized among the whole membership and established collectively—can be carried out, federalism demands that members "undertake fixed organisation duties, and demands execution of communal decisions"[51].

There is nothing in the Platform or in documents related to it that allows for linking it with an organizational model based on hierarchy and domination (internal or with respect to the masses) or that allows for conceiving the Executive Committee as a type of central committee that would decide the direction of the General Union.

The debate between Makhno and Malatesta: real divergences

At this point we will identify issues that, taking into account the entire debate, constitute real disagreements between the two militants. The question that undoubtedly occupied most of the debate was the question of collective responsibility. At first, for Malatesta the idea that there was mutual responsibility between militant and organization ("the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union as a whole"[52]) constituted an "absolute denial of all individual independence, all freedom, all freedom of initiative and action"[53]. In this text, for Malatesta responsibility means autonomy and independence of individuals and groups: "Full autonomy, full independence and, therefore, full responsibility of individuals and groups"[54].

In his first reply, Makhno claims that Malatesta always accepted the individual responsibility of anarchist militants: "You yourself, dear Malatesta, recognize the individual responsibility of the anarchist revolutionary."[55] His rejection of collective responsibility would be, according to Makhno, "without basis" and would be "dan-

[49] Nestor Makhno, "Resposta a 'Um projeto de organização anarquista'."
[50] Dielo Trudá, "Plataforma Organizacional dos Comunistas Libertários."
[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Errico Malatesta, "Um projeto de organização anarquista."
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Nestor Makhno, "Resposta a 'Um projeto de organização anarquista'."