

Five Waves

**A Brief Global History of Revolutionary Anarchist Communist Mass
Organizational Theory & Practice**

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INTRODUCTION

Anarchist communism has evolved over the past 140 years as a fighting working class tradition of revolutionary warfare against all forms of exploitation. Its aim is the creation of the freest and most equal society possible, balancing individual and collective interests in as fair a way as possible. But our detractors, both of the left and the right question whether anarchism is strong enough to work in practice.

The examples of the Mexican, Ukrainian, Manchurian, Spanish, Cuban and Iranian revolutions show that anarchist communism – true grassroots workers’ control and full social, political and economic equality – is practical, sustainable and defensible, so long as its core principles of direct democracy are deeply rooted in the working class.

But, other revolutionaries say, our style of organisation is not strong enough to either sustain revolutionary gains or to defend them. This brief history will show how anarchists through the last century have grappled with the issue. It will show that far from being chaotic or anti-organisational, true anarchist militants are lovers of equitable social order and believe in organising their forces to achieve this.

We also believe that it is a method which is not only compatible with anarchist organisations ranging from small “affinity groups” and cells to large-scale union and political federations, but that by requiring a high degree of internal education and direct participation, it is more anarchist than looser styles of organisation which carry the un-anarchist danger of allowing an active minority to lead a passive majority of members.

The rule, as always for anarchists, is that the means determine the end, so internal democracy in our organisations is the most important guarantor that our external relations with the working class will also remain directly democratic and truly free. Revolutionary anarchist communism (or “anarcho-communism”) sprang from the mass workers’ organisations that founded the First International in 1864.

Since then, anarchism has waxed and waned according, largely, to the conditions in which the global working class, peasantry and poor have found themselves, and in their responses to the expansions and contractions of capital as it continually sought to overcome its inherent contradictions. Anarchist communism is not an inchoate, emotionally juvenile, disorganised morass of self-serving, half-baked libertarian ideas, but a consistently egalitarian, militant, directly-democratic, organised revolutionary theory and practice.

Anarchism did not suddenly vanish from the theatre of class warfare with the Conservative Counter-revolution of the 1920s that gave rise to both fascism, Stalinism and other types of reformism like the welfare state. Not only that, but it survived well beyond the collapse of the Spanish Revolution, with significant large-scale efforts in the depths of the Cold War in countries as diverse as Chile, Korea, China and Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s, until regenerated by the neo-liberal contraction in the early 1970s.

Today, it has grabbed headlines around the world as it once did in its hey-day of the 1890s-1930s, being the heart, brawn and brain of the anti-capitalist movement, a phoenix rising from

the ashes of both collapsed pseudo-communist (“state-capitalist”) and collapsed private capitalist regimes (ex-USSR and Argentina, for example), providing a battle-proven, but much neglected alternate model for a world in crisis.

To take a long-term perspective, one can see the fortunes of anarchism — like that of the militant, autonomous working class — rise and fall in waves. The nature of these waves is a complex textile, embracing the weft of working class culture and consciousness, with the warp of capital in crisis, the ebb and flow of the global movements of people, capital and ideas.

This booklet is very far from a total history of the movement — it merely sketches the broader outlines of these waves — and the texts quoted from are not some sort of holy canon, but indicate how, at decisive moments, the movement grappled with the complex question that lies at the heart of making a social revolution and which has vexed all leftist revolutionaries: that of the relationship between the specific revolutionary organisation and the mass of the exploited and oppressed.

FIRST WAVE: THE “INVISIBLE PILOTS” STEER THE SECRET REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

To look at the family tree of anarchism, very roughly, with reference to watershed dates, one saw the French Revolution 1793 give rise to radical republicanism which embraced both Jacobin authoritarianism on the “right” and Enrage libertarianism on the “left”. The Pan-European Revolt of 1848 saw a distinct socialist current, still containing these contradictory strands, branch out from radical republicanism, the contradictions coming to a head in 1868 with the separation of distinct anarchist communist majority and Marxist minority strands within the First International.

Marxism would further divide into rightist social-democratic and leftist Leninist strands in the Russian Revolt of 1905–1906. Earlier, in 1881, an anarcho-insurrectionary minority that favoured armed struggle had branched off to the left of the anarcho-communist working class majority, approximating in many respects the tiny “left communist” and “council communist” tendencies that split to the left of Leninism in about 1918–1923.

But the mass tendency of anarchism arose during an expansive phase of mercantile-fiscal capitalism in the 1860s, when imperialist pioneers began their surge into the unconquered half of North America, and turned their greedy eyes towards the material – and human – resources of Africa, Central America, China and elsewhere. It arose from the ghettos of the newly-industrialised proletariat in the heartland of imperialism and its key raw material producing nations, and its first decades infused everyone from Bohemian intellectuals to Mexican peasants with its raw self-empowerment.

The founding in 1864 of the International Working Men’s Association (IWMA), or First International, saw all of the pre-conditions for revolutionary anarchist communism realised: important sections of the working class had achieved an internationalist, revolutionary consciousness, and had created a transnational federation of their own organisations, primarily based on organised labour.

The proto-anarchist “libertarian mutualism” of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, son of a barrel-maker, rapidly established itself as the major current in the IWMA, but was just as swiftly supplanted by its natural matured expression: anarcho-communism. The main wellsprings of anarcho-communism within the IWMA were the IWMA’s worker organisations themselves, aided and abetted by the International Brotherhood (IB) established by Mikhail Bakunin in 1868 as the clandestine counterpart to the public International Alliance of Socialist Democracy (IASD).

So it was that a first wave of syndicalist organisation sprang up: the Spanish Regional Federation (FRE) founded in 1868 by IB agent Guisepe Finelli; followed by the Proletarian Circle (CP) in Mexico in 1869; the Regional Federation of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay (FRREU) in 1872; the Northern Union of Russian Workers (NURW) in 1878; the Artisan’s Central Council (JAC) in Cuba in 1883; and the Central Labour Union (CLU) in the USA in 1883.

These organisations were each significant in their environs: the Spanish FRE soared to 60,000 members within four years, while the Big Circle of Workers (CGO), which developed out of the CP in Mexico, attained a membership of perhaps 15,000 within six years. The significance of this first wave needs to be underlined.

Firstly, it is important to note that of the six main countries where this first wave entrenched itself, four were later to experience revolutions with significant anarchist involvement. In the case of Cuba, the anarcho-syndicalist movement there dominated the working class from that period until the late 1920s, with a significant revival in the late 1930s through its leading role in the Cuban Revolution of 1952–1959.

In Mexico, the movement dominated the organised working class in the 1910s and was the primary engine behind the revolutionary peak of 1916, while in Spain it became the most important revolutionary player in the 1930s, but in Russia and the USA, it never rose to be more than a militant minority tendency. In Uruguay, the movement remained a strong enough minority current to engage in guerrilla warfare with the state from 1968–1976.

Secondly, the presence of non-European organisations in this first wave undermines the convention that anarcho-syndicalism was a French invention of the 1890s, and emphasises its adaptability and applicability to countries as industrialised as the USA or as backward as Russia. In other words, it arose both in the global north and in the global south, but always in concentrations of expansive industrial growth – not among the declining artisanal class.

Its social vectors were those of intense upheaval created by both a massive and constant movement of workers around the world to satisfy this new growth, and by the loss of political control the old landed oligarchies experienced as a result of the rise of a modernising bourgeoisie, the unintended corollary of which was the rise of a militant industrial proletariat. Politically, anarchism rose during this first-wave period in response to the insufficiencies, authoritarianism and reformism of both radical republicanism and Marxist socialism, and as an organised, mass-based corrective to the vanguard adventurism of narodnik populism.

The first wave broke on the shore of the destruction of the Paris Commune 1871 – itself anticipated by the earlier Bakuninist uprising in Lyons – which saw the driving underground of most revolutionary organisations, and with the split the following year of the First International into an anarchist majority and short-lived Marxist rump which dissolved in practice after only a year. But the anarchists also gained experience in running their own “communes” of Granada, Seville, Malagar, Alcoy and San Lucar de Barramed in Spain during the Cantonalist Revolt of 1873–1874.

The final collapse of the anarchist IWMA in 1877 ended the first genuinely international attempt to organise the socially-conscious working class. Although its torch was soon taken up by the synthesist Anti-Authoritarian International (AAI) or “Black International”, in 1881, the year of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by narodniks. The Black International, which lasted until about 1893, was dominated by the minority anarcho-insurrectionist tendency.

Generally, the radical working class movement entered a period of defeat that saw an anarchist retreat from mass organisation, while terrorism became vogue for all revolutionary tendencies as capitalism contracted with two great depressions, the last in 1893. The Black International took on an attitude of dangerous clandestinity and although the CLU, for example, continued to operate until 1909, the main anarchist “highlight” was the 1886 state murder of the Haymarket Martyrs, the militants recalled worldwide each year today in the commemoration of May Day.

In 1868, Bakunin wrote his seminal *Programme and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood*. In it, Bakunin laid out the ground-rules for the IB that was

founded that year. The *Programme* reflected Bakunin's rejection of an authoritarian statist solution to the social revolution — "revolutionary in the Jacobin sense", as he put it — an indication of rising tensions between anarchists and Marxists in the IWMA at that time.

After spelling out the principles of the anarchist revolution, the *Programme* went on to address organisational matters following the dissolution of the nation-state and its armed forces, bureaucracy, courts, clergy and private property. Anticipating the anarcho-syndicalist replacement of the state with a decentralised administration of material, the *Programme* said that all church and state properties would be put at the disposal of the "federated Alliance of all labour associations, which Alliance will constitute the Commune."

A "Revolutionary Communal Council" based on a "federation of standing barricades", comprised of mandated, accountable and revocable delegates from each defensive barricade, would "choose separate executive committees from among its membership for each branch of the Commune's revolutionary administration." This administration would be, according to anarchist principles, of public services, not of people. It would be spread by revolutionary propagandists across all old statist boundaries in order to build "the alliance of the world revolution against all reactionaries combined", the organisation of which "precludes any notion of dictatorship and supervisory leadership authority."

The *Programme* then went on to discuss the specific role of the anarchist revolutionary organisation in advancing the social revolution: "But if that revolutionary alliance is to be established and if the revolution is to get the better of the reaction, then, amid the popular anarchy that is to represent the very life-blood and energy of the revolution, an agency must be found to articulate this singularity of thought and of revolutionary action."

"That agency should be the secret worldwide association of the International Brotherhood. That association starts from the basis that revolutions are never made by individuals, nor even by secret societies. They are, so to speak, self-made, produced by the logic of things, by the trend of events and actions. They are a long time hatching in the deepest recesses of the popular masses' instinctive consciousness, and then they explode, often seeming to have been detonated by trivialities."

"All that a well-organised [secret] society can do is, first, to play midwife to the revolution by spreading among the masses ideas appropriate to the masses' instincts, and to organise, not the Revolution's army — for the people must at all times be the army — but a sort of revolutionary general staff made up of committed, energetic and intelligent individuals who are above all else true friends of the people and not presumptuous braggarts, with a capacity for acting as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the people's instincts."

So, in the view of the IB, the anarchist revolutionary organisation is little more than an intermediary, a midwife and an enabler of mass social revolution, but is clearly constituted as a distinct organisation, albeit submerged within the social struggle.

In his earlier *International Revolutionary Society or Brotherhood* (1865), Bakunin had spelled out the internal dynamics of such an organisation, then in practice only in embryo, and the duties of members — after having given an exhaustive account of the revolutionary's understanding and practical application of equality.

"He [sic] must understand that an association with a revolutionary purpose must necessarily take the form of a secret society, and every secret society, for the sake of the cause it serves and for effectiveness of action, as well as in the interests of the security of every one of its members, has to be subject to strict discipline, which is in any case merely the distillation and pure product

of the reciprocal commitment made by all of the membership to one another, and that, as a result, it is a point of honour and a duty that each of them should abide by it.”

This discipline was entered into, Bakunin stressed, by the “free assent” of the members, whose first duty was to society and only secondly to the organisation. Bakunin, who called in one of his letters for anarchists to be “invisible pilots in the centre of the popular storm”, has subsequently been much-criticised for the clandestine nature of his plottings, which have been presumed by some anarchists to be authoritarian because of their secretive operations and requirements of discipline.

But it must firstly be recognised that repressive conditions required secrecy, secondly that the discipline written of was not an externally imposed one, but a self-discipline to freely abide by commonly-agreed commitments, and thirdly that Bakunin’s IB had the practical result of helping to generate the first anarchist mass-based revolutionary organisations among the working class from Russia to Uruguay: the anarcho-syndicalist unions.

Influenced by Bakunin’s arguments, in 1877, a German-language Anarcho-Communist Party (AKP) was founded in Berne, Switzerland, the first of scores of anarcho-communist organisations around the world. The key question raised by Bakunin, that of the role of the anarchist communist revolutionary organisation, was to remain a core debate within the anarchist movement for the following 140 years.

SECOND WAVE: THE “GENERAL UNION” BUILDS AN ORGANISATIONAL PLATFORM

Capitalism began expanding dramatically in the mid-1890s, with the opening up of the African colonies to imperialist exploitation, and a second wave of anarcho-syndicalist organising, larger than the first, exploded on to the world scene. An oft-forgotten key organisation in this resurgence was the National Labour Secretariat (NAS) of the Netherlands which dominated the Dutch labour movement for a decade and peaked at about 18,700 members in 1895 – but it was in that year that in France the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) was founded on a model that was replicated around the Latin world.

This dramatic growth was spurred on after anarchist militants captured the CGT, which then had 203,000 dues-paying members and which declared in its influential Charter of Amiens (1906) that the “*trade union, today a fighting organisation, will in the future be an organisation for production and distribution and the basis of social reorganisation.*”

This growth was accelerated by two other “jolts” that recalled the direct-democratic practices of the French and Spanish communes and anticipated the soviets of the Russian Revolution: the 1903 Macedonian Revolt and the 1905–1906 Russian Revolt. Macedonia saw anarchist guerrillas among those who established communes in Strandzha and Krusevo, while anarchists were among those who established the first soviets in Russia: St Petersburg and Moscow. The Russian Revolt also saw the establishment in occupied Poland of the longest-lived anarchist international organisation, the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) prisoner’s aid network which today has sections in 64 countries.

These jolts helped light the fuse on the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the USA in 1905, establishing an industrial revolutionary syndicalist organising model that swept the English-speaking world in particular, including branches in Australia, Canada, Britain, New Zealand / Aotearoa and South Africa, but also Argentina, Chile and other Latin American countries. It still exists today as a fighting “red” union, with branches in countries as diverse as Iceland and Russia.

The IWW Preamble made the organisation’s class politics very clear: “*The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production and abolish the wage system.*”

“*It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organised, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.*”

The 1905 Revolt also saw a gathering in London of exiled Russian anarchists including the anarcho-communist theorists Piotr Kropotkin and Maria Isidine (Maria Goldsmit) and the

terrorist-turned-syndicalist Novomirsky (Kirilovsky) met and discussed an organised response. Novomirsky said that in order to fight reaction, all “anti-authoritarian socialists should unite into a Workers’ Anarchist Party. The next step would be the formation of a vast union of all revolutionary elements under the black flag of the International Workers’ Anarchist Party.”

Such a party required theoretical unity to enable “unity of action”. It would be “*the only revolutionary party, unlike the conservative parties which seek to preserve the established political and economic order, and the progressive parties [like the Social Democratic Labour Party: both its Menshevik and Bolshevik tendencies] which seek to reform the state in one way or another, so as to reform the corresponding economic relations, for anarchists aim to destroy the state, in order to do away with the established economic order and reconstruct it on new principles.*”

Novomirsky said such a “party” was “*the free union of individuals struggling for a common goal*” and as such required “*a clear programme and tactics*” that was distinct from other currents. It needed to “*participate in the revolutionary syndicalist movement [as] the central objective of our work, so that we can make that movement anarchist*”, and to boycott all state structures, substituting them with “*workers’ communes with soviets of workers’ deputies, acting as industrial committees, at their head*”.

At the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam in 1907, the insurrectionary terrorists who identified as anarchist were roundly defeated, with the resolution that “*anarchy and organisation, far from being incompatible as has sometimes been claimed, are mutually complimentary and illuminate each other, the very precept of anarchy residing in the free organisation of the producers [the anarcho-syndicalist influenced trade unions]*”.

The congress further hailed the “collective action” and “concerted movement”, stated that “[t]he organisation of militant forces would assure propaganda of fresh wings and could not but hasten the penetration of the ideas of federalism and revolution into the working class”. It stated, however, that labour organisation did not preclude political organisation and urged that “*the comrades of every land should place on their agenda the creation of anarchist groups and the federation of existing groups*”.

As a result of this powerful shift towards political action within the context of mass organisation arose the Argentine Regional Workers’ Federation (FORA), founded in 1903, which provided the template for similar federations across Latin America — notably Brazil, Chile, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay — while on the Iberian peninsula, the movement had matured with the formation of the massive National Confederation of Labour (CNT) of Spain, founded in 1910 and the relatively larger National Workers’ Union (UON) of Portugal, founded in 1914.

The internationalist aspect of this new wave of syndicalism found expression in the 1913 syndicalist conference in London that drew delegates from 12 European and Latin American countries and laid the groundwork for the formation of the International Workers’ Association (IWA) in Berlin in 1922. In the same period, specific anarchist political federations mushroomed, instigated in part by the pro-organisationalist Anarchist International (AI), founded in Amsterdam in 1907 by delegates from Europe, Latin America, Japan, Russia, and the USA, and lasting until about 1915.

These anarchist federations, some of which affiliated to the AI, worked in parallel to and sometimes inside the syndicalist unions. One of the best examples of these is the Anarchist Communist Alliance (ACA), founded in France in 1911 and having as its descendants in the 2000s the Franco-phone Anarchist Federation (FAF), the Co-ordination of Anarchist Groups (CGA), the Libertarian Communist Organisation (OCL) and Libertarian Alternative (AL).

Back in 1910, the first great anarchist revolution broke out in Mexico, providing the template, replicated in other upheavals to come, of how anarchist political organisations, militia and unions could work in concert: the anarcho-syndicalist House of the Workers of the World (COM) — the direct descendant of the first-wave CP — working largely in concert with the Magonistas of the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) and the anarcho-communists of the Struggle (Lucha) group, and defended by the Red Battalions.

Mexico also showed how things could go awfully wrong: despite the fact that the interventionist USA had its imperialist intentions diverted by its 1917 entry into the First World War, the anarchists failed their first watershed test of class solidarity by breaking ranks with the Zapatista peasantry, who the Red Battalions attacked. The anarcho-communists then broke with the COM and backed the Zapatistas, but the revolution never truly peaked, sputtered and finally died after 10 exhausting years, gutted by reformism.

The second wave was not broken on the rocks of the First World War, into which the now-compromised CGT was drawn. The imperialist powers had initiated the bloodbath because capital was in steep decline and beset on all sides by a militant working class which had a lot of momentum left. Despite the scale of the slaughter, the conflict unleashed two other revolutions — Russia and Ukraine — both of which drank deeply from the well of working class self-organisation before the counter-revolution unlatched the guillotine-blade.

Russia showed the danger of anarchists withdrawing from the battle into purist ivory towers, while at the same time proving Bakunin's predictions about the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat to be chillingly correct and in stark contrast to the anarchist-flavoured sovietism of the working class. The Ukraine showed the efficiency of anarchist guerrilla warfare, based on popular support, directly-democratic urban and rural communes and internal democracy, a twin lesson that would stand anarchists in good stead in the dark decades to come.

By the time the global revolt finally ended in 1923, the world was a totally changed place. The second wave transformed anarchism into a truly global phenomenon, with sizeable organisations fighting the class war from Costa Rica to China, from Portugal to Paraguay, from Sweden to South Africa, and with global syndicalism drawn together in the IWA, founded in Berlin in 1922 and representing between 1,5-million and 2-million revolutionary workers globally.

The movement's most remarkable achievements were the commune model that proved the backbone of the Russian and Ukrainian revolutions, the creation of a deeply-entrenched tradition of rank-and-file labour militancy that eschewed bourgeois patronage, the establishment of near-universal labour protections like the eight-hour working day and worker's compensation, a substantial contribution to the virtual annihilation of absolute monarchism, and the mounting of the most serious challenge to clerical control of education across the world.

But the defeats of the Mexican, Russian and Ukrainian revolutions led a lot of anarchists to become defeatist, withdrawing from the fields of social and industrial struggle that they had dominated for decades, leaving the door open to Bolshevism. Those critical of this retreat found themselves having to defend the core principles of the social revolution.

When Nestor Makhno and the surviving Ukrainian anarchist guerrillas fled into exile in 1921 following their defeat at the hands of the Red Army whose backs they had protected for so many years, they faced some hard questions. The most important was: if anarchism places so much value on freedom from coercion, is it a powerful enough strategy to defeat a united, militarised enemy? The survivors were not only embittered by their experiences at the hands of the "revolu-

tionary” reds. They were also greatly disappointed in the poor support given to them by Russian anarchist comrades.

Sure, there was the Nabat, the Alarm Confederation of Anarchist Organisations (ACAO), that worked alongside the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (RIAU), the anarcho-syndicalist unions in the cities and the various Black Guard detachments of guerrillas like Maroussia Nikiforova, but precious little aid had come from anarchists further afield. And the majority of the Nabat had split with the RIAU in 1919 over the latter’s third tactical truce with the Bolsheviks.

This dispute over strategy was to play itself out in exile in France between ex-Nabat “synthesists” like Voline and ex-Makhnovists like Makhno. In 1926, Makhno, the metalworker Piotr Arshinov (who had helped found Nabat), the Jewish woman guerrilla Ida Mett and other exiles of the Workers’ Cause (Dielo Truda) group in Paris published a pamphlet titled Organizatsionnaia Platforma Vseobshchego Soiuza Anarkhistov: Proekt (Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists: Draft).

We prefer the title the Organisational Platform of the Anarchist Communists, but it is more commonly known as the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, or simply the Platform. The text caused big waves through the international anarchist movement because of its call for tight internal discipline, for mutually-agreed unity of ideas and tactics within anarchist groups, and for the formation of a “general union of anarchists”.

By union, the writers of the Platform meant a united political organisation rather than a trade union. As anarchist communists, they considered anarcho-syndicalism with its focus on industrial organising, to be “*only one of the forms of revolutionary class struggle*”. Anarchist unions needed to be united with anarchist political groups, anarchist militia, and anarchist municipal soviets. The Platform emphasised the class struggle nature of anarchism, reminding militants that it was a workerist movement, but one that was not exclusively focussed on industry or the trade unions.

It called for ideological and tactical unity plus collective responsibility and a programme of revolutionary action. More controversially, it called for an “executive committee” to be formed within the general union of anarchists. But by executive committee, the writers of the Platform meant a task group of activists whose job it was to carry out tasks mandated by the union.

The Platform’s vision of the future social revolutionary soviet society was arguably derived from an earlier Makhnovist document, the Draft Declaration of the (Makhnovist) Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine, adopted in 1919 at a congress of the Military-Revolutionary Soviet. The Declaration called — like the Kronstadt Soviet would in 1921 — for a “*third revolution*” against Bolshevik coercive power over the working class, poor and peasantry, and stated that the free soviet system — that is, “*libertarian organisation as taken up by significant masses*”, freely self-organised to oppose “*the notion of political power*” — was the basis of this revolution.

However, since the Soviet and the RIAU were pluralistic organisations, consisting of anarchist, Social Revolutionaries, non-party revolutionaries and even dissident Bolsheviks, the Declaration did not assign the anarchists a specific social function by name. Instead, it stated that not only all “political activity” based on privilege, coercion and enslavement, but all political organisation — presumably including all genuine socialist revolutionary factions like the anarchist communists — would “*tend to wither away of themselves*” under revolutionary conditions.

But it emphasised that the RIAU, while pluralistic, volunteer, and working class-controlled, did form the “*fighting core of this Ukrainian people’s revolutionary movement, a core whose task consists*

everywhere of organising insurgent forces and helping insurgent toilers in their struggle against all abuse of power and capital". So the militant minority's task was clearly pro-organisational in support of the popular revolutionary forces. But the document stopped short of calling for a specific organisation of a distinct revolutionary tendency to carry out that task — as the later Platform did.

Unlike authoritarian socialist organisations where the committee would make all policy decisions, in a platformist organisation, the entire membership is the decision-making body. Any delegates or committees merely carry out tasks mandated by that membership. The Platform's critics included veteran anarchist militants like Voline (Vsevolod Eikenbaum) of Russia, himself a former Makhnovist, Sébastien Faure of France, Errico Malatesta of Italy and Alexander Berkman of the USA.

They accused the exiles of trying to "Bolsheise anarchism" — in the sense of the substitution of a professional revolutionary elite for the revolutionary masses — and the later "conversion" of Arshinov to Bolshevism to enable the exhausted militant to return home gave the critics lots of ammunition, despite the fact that he was executed in 1937 during Stalin's purges for "attempting to restore anarchism in Russia". But Makhno and his co-authors argued that it was exactly because of the disorganisation of Russian anarchists that many of them went on to join the only group with a clear revolutionary plan — the Bolsheviks.

Anarchists, they said, needed to be just as clear and as organised, but along libertarian not authoritarian lines, and guiding, not dictating revolutionary workers' aspirations. Most of the anarchist opposition to the Platform has sprung from misconceptions.

But its original title as a "draft" shows it was intended as an internal discussion document within the international anarchist movement, not as a final blueprint for the only possible style of anarchist organisation. It was neither authoritarian (as we have seen in discussing the executive committee), nor was it vanguardist, that is an attempt to get a tiny group of activists to lead the working class.

It was also not intended to say that all anarchists should be absorbed into one massive platformist organisation. It quite clearly said that platformist groups would maintain links with other revolutionary organisations. Platformism is also not a different strand of anarchism: the platformist method of organising was applied to all forms of anarchist communist organisation, whether economic, political, military or social.

Most importantly, the Platform was not an innovation, but a clear re-statement of the fundamentals of mass anarchist communist organising dating back to Bakunin's time: the necessity for commonly agreed lines of attack on which anarchist organisations had become the primary promoters of exclusively working class interests worldwide.

The intense debate over the Platform split the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist movements in exile, notably in France where the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad (GRAZ) fractured in 1927 into platformist and synthesist tendencies, and in North America where the Russian/Ukrainian diaspora split into organisationalist and *svobodnik*, groupings. The specific platformist tendency in France founded the International Anarchist Communist Federation (IACF) in 1927 with sections in France and Italy and delegates from China, Poland and Spain. The IACF can be considered to be the ideological descendant of Bakunin's IB and, to a lesser extent, of the organisationalist Anarchist International.

The debate also influenced the remaining anarchists in Russia itself, including former militants of the Nabat who had either been driven underground or jailed. According to a Nabat veteran

writing in *Dielo Truda* in 1928 — unnamed for security reasons — who was then in exile in Siberia, the Nabat itself, initially a de facto “synthesist” organisation, had been refining its organisational structure, in the “whirlwind of revolution”, in what approximated a “platformist” direction.

The Nabat veteran wrote that the organisation was in a sense a “party” in that it was not, as claimed by Voline, a loose, affinity-based organisation, but a federation of groups that rallied “*the most determined, the most dynamic militants with an eye to launching a healthy, well-structured movement with the prospect of a standardised programme*”. Nabat members submitted to majority decisions reached at its congresses, and that transcended its different tendencies to promote a unitary “policy line” — “a single, coherent platform”.

“In short, it was a well-structured, well-disciplined movement with a leading echelon appointed and monitored by the rank and file. And let there be no illusions as to the role of that echelon [later referred to as the ‘Secretariat’, in echo of the Platform’s ‘executive committee’]: it was not merely technically executive, as it is commonly regarded. It was also the movement’s ideological pilot core, looking after publishing operations, and propaganda activity, utilising the central funds and above all controlling and deploying the movement’s resources and militants”.

In Bulgaria, the platformist tendency proved strongest with the Bulgarian Anarchist Communist Federation (BACF) adopting the document as its constitution. This may account in part for the diversity and resilience of the Bulgarian anarchist movement, which organised workers, peasants, students, professionals and intellectuals, and not only survived, under arms, the 1934 fascist putsch, but the Second World War (only to be crushed by Stalinist-Fascist reaction in 1948). It was unfortunate that the Platform was not translated into Spanish early enough to influence the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), founded in 1927.

THIRD WAVE: THE “REVOLUTIONARY JUNTA” PUSHES FOR A FRESH REVOLUTION

The Conservative Counter-revolution of the 1920s generated anarchism’s greatest challenge, fascism both brown and red, which would proceed for the decades to come to crush the autonomous, militant working class in a deadly vise. Bolshevism was in many ways more insidious than fascism, by establishing a similar style of totalitarianism, but colouring it red by posing as the liberator of the working class.

Disoriented by the propaganda success of the Bolshevik model and silenced in its gulags, anarchism lost ground throughout the world, despite retaining strongholds in Latin America and the Far East, and even helped establish the first communist parties – which were initially noticeably libertarian in orientation – in countries like Brazil, China, France, Portugal, and South Africa.

But it was not all about repression: the second wave also broke against reformism, the new welfare state sugar-coating that defused militancy in countries as diverse as Uruguay and the USA. While many anarchist and syndicalist organisations were forced underground or destroyed in this long slide into darkness, important struggles against fascism and imperialism were unfolding in countries like Bulgaria and Korea.

It is also amid this turmoil that impressive examples of anarchist-influenced worker self-management – like the Shanghai Commune 1927 – arose. Of greater significance were developments in 1928 when two huge continental anarchist organisations were founded: the East Asian Anarchist Federation (EAAF), with member organisations in China, Japan, Korea, Formosa (Taiwan), Korea, Vietnam and India; and the American Continental Workingmen’s Association (ACAT), with member organisations in 10 Latin American countries. This continued anarchist resistance led to the upsurge of a third wave, with the sorely understudied Manchurian Revolution of 1929–1931, the extreme isolation of which limited its impact to Chinese, Japanese, Manchurian and especially Korean resistance.

The Manchurian Revolution was unusual in that it was initially inserted from above – by the Korean Anarchist Communist Federation in Manchuria (KACF-M) and the Korean Anarchist Federation in Manchuria (KAF-M) working in concert with the anarchist Korean Independence Army general Kim Jwa-Jin. But it quickly gained grassroots support because it was based on worker and community self-organisation. It demonstrated how the upliftment of the working class through economic autonomy and education could combine seamlessly with a bottom-up system of decision-making and a militant defensive programme.

However, it was the explosion of the running class war in Spain into full-throated revolution when the fascist-oriented colonial military staged a coup d’état in 1936 that captured the attention of the whole world. Seen as a laboratory of virtually every known competing political tendency

from anarchism to fascism, the Spanish Revolution was in many ways the most compelling of the century.

But the compromises of reformists in the anarchist ranks, the outside interference of the fascist imperial powers, the betrayals of the Stalinists and the extremely fragmented nature of the republican camp all lead to Spain being recalled, incorrectly, as the swan-song of anarchism, a song soon drowned in the carnage of the Second World War.

Still, the worker-run fields and factories of Spain provided the best-studied methods for the successful operation of an egalitarian society on a large scale, a lesson that humanity will not easily forget. Sadly, of course, Spain (along with the earlier experiences of the “national anarchists” of Czechoslovakia and China and later of Korea) showed clearly that internationalist anarchism and the interests of the global working class are totally at odds with nationalist government, however so-called “revolutionary”.

Although the defeat of the revolution was a great blow for the class, the third wave did not break until the end of the Second World War, when it peaked with armed anarchist resistance movements in France, China, Korea, Poland, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and of course, Francoist Spain, a resistance that was echoed in the anti-colonial struggles to come. Not only that, but numerous anarchist federations were formed during and in the immediate post-war period as anarchists rebuilt their political presence.

In France, the FAF was revived in 1944 and the UA was reformed as the Revolutionary Anarchist Communist Union (UACR); in Italy, the Federation of Italian Anarchist Communists (FdCAI) was founded in 1944 and the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI), into which the FdCAI was later absorbed, the following year; the Anarchist Federation of Britain (AFB) was founded in 1945; and the Japanese Anarchist Federation (JAF) in the same year.

The collapse of Spain also sent an anarchist diaspora into the world, from North Africa to Chile. Its greatest impact was felt in Cuba, where the movement experienced a dramatic growth-spurt, coming to dominate both the “official” and the underground union federations after World War Two, and in Mexico and Venezuela where the exile presence was large enough for them to form their own significant anarcho-syndicalist formations: the General Delegation of the CNT (CNT-DG) and the Venezuelan Regional Workers’ Federation (FORV).

Other anarcho-syndicalist organisations that sprang up in this period include: the clandestine International Revolutionary Syndicalist Federation (FISR) in France in 1943, followed in 1945 by the revived CGT-SR known as the National Confederation of Labour (CNT); the Syndicalist Workers’ Federation (SWF) of Britain; the Federation of Free Labour Unions (FFLU) and Conference of Labour Unions (CLU) of Japan in 1946; and the Federation of Libertarian Socialists (FFS) of Germany in 1947.

Then there was the anarchist tendency in the General Italian Workers’ Federation (CGIL), and the “pure syndicalist” Independent League of Trade Unions (OVB) founded in the Netherlands in 1948. Another strong-point of anarcho-syndicalist organising in the immediate post-war period that is usually overlooked was in China where the movement grew to be about 10,000-strong in the cities, despite the difficult conditions of conflict between the nationalists and the communists.

Also, in Korea, the defeat of Japan led to a rapid reorganisation of anarchist forces with the Eastern Anarchist Federation (EAF), the Korean Youth Federation in South China (KYFSC), the Korean Anarchist Federation in China (KAF-C) and many other organisations combining into the huge Federation of Free Society Builders (FFSB). Here a strong libertarian reformist tendency also developed, with the entry of a few key members of the Korean Anarcho-Communist Federa-

tion (KACF) and the Korean Revolutionist Federation (KRF) into the five-party left-wing Korean Provisional Government from 1940 until about 1946.

The same question raised in the 1920s by the Platform, of how to organise in a free, yet effective manner, was faced during the Spanish Revolution, at the height of the third wave. Seeing how the communists and reformists within the trade unions were selling out the revolution, a militant group of anarchists was formed in 1937 to maintain the revolutionary hardline.

The Friends of Durruti (AD) were named after the brilliant Spanish anarchist railway worker and guerrilla fighter Buenaventura Durruti who died defending the capital Madrid against the fascist forces in 1936. The AD was founded by rank-and-file CNT militants, key anarchist hardliners and anarchist militia, in particular from the famous Durruti Column and the Iron Column, which opposed the Stalinist and statist order to turn the militia into an ordinary authoritarian army with its class divisions and its heavy-handed punishment regime.

In 1938, when the counter-revolution, encouraged by the Stalinists, was in full swing in the rear of and at the revolutionary front, the AD published *Towards a Fresh Revolution*, a strategic document which was a critique of the reformist tendency within the CNT which had led to anarchist collaboration with bourgeois, nationalist, conservative and Stalinist forces in the Republican government. The document called for a “revolutionary junta” (meaning a “council” or “soviet”) to maintain the revolutionary character of the war by means of the anarchist militia, and for the economy to be placed entirely in the hands of the syndicates.

It was in effect a call to dissolve the bourgeois Republican government and replace it by the organised revolutionary working class under arms. Its other demands were: that workers seize all arms and financial reserves; the total socialisation of the economy and food distribution; that there be no collaboration with any bourgeois groups; the equalisation of all pay; working class solidarity; and no peace to be signed with foreign bourgeois powers.

Like the Makhnovist Platform, the AD manifesto was also accused of being vanguardist and authoritarian, this time because of a misunderstanding, mostly among English-speakers, of what was meant by the revolutionary junta. But junta in the AD’s usage did not have the connotations of a ruling military clique which the term carries in English. It was not to be an “anarchist dictatorship”, supplanting the bourgeois government with an anarchist one. Its task was merely to co-ordinate the war effort and make sure that the war did not defer or dismantle revolutionary gains. The rest of the revolution was to be left in civilian worker hands.

FOURTH WAVE: THE “VANISHING VANGUARD” ADVANCES LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM

The anarchist movement is widely seen as being at its lowest ebb in the 1950s, when capitalism was in post-war boom and the Cold War between the alternate capitalisms of the USA and USSR was at its height. To a large extent this is true: the IWW was at its weakest in 50 years of existence in 1955 and fascism was still in the ascendant in most of Latin America, the Mediterranean and the Far East, with China having been largely lost to Maoist totalitarianism in 1949, and Korea permanently carved into red and blue totalitarian camps by 1953, closing the door on both revolutionary anarchist and libertarian reformist options.

But this view ignores the key role played by the anarchists in the Second Escambray Front, the Revolutionary Directorate (DR) and the clandestine General Confederation of Labour (CGT) in igniting and fighting the Cuban Revolution 1952–1959. Given that the Cuban Revolution remains to this day the touchstone of diverse tendencies that arose from the New Left, the centrality of anarchism to the revolution, and the fraudulent, counter-revolutionary role played by the Castroites cannot be overemphasised.

Also, the suggestion that the Swedish Workers’ Central Organisation (SAC) was the sole remaining lighthouse of large-scale anarcho-syndicalism until its withdrawal from the IWA in 1959, ignores the fact that the National Workers’ Unity Movement (MUNT) of Chile was flexing its muscles and helped establish the powerful Chilean Workers’ Central (CUT) in 1953. The CUT came incredibly close to taking power in the Chilean Revolt of 1956 — before the reformist Stalinists and social democrats prematurely ended a revolutionary general strike — and laid the groundwork for decades of Chilean anarchist militancy.

The view that this period saw the end of anarchist organisation also ignores the massive strike by the anarchist-lead Ship-building Workers’ Federation (FTB) in Argentina in 1956 — the country’s largest strike in the 20th Century — and the five-month syndicalist resistance by some 100,000 workers on the docks, mines and freezing plants of New Zealand / Aotearoa in 1951. Still, it was a period of hibernation, in which much of the syndicalism in evidence was “spontaneous” and divorced from its anarchist origins.

That started to change with developments like the founding of the hugely influential Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) in 1956, an organisation that set the scene for non-sectarian Latin American continental resistance in the years to come. And despite operating in the most difficult of conditions, anarchist guerrillas plagued the authorities in Maoist China, Kruschevite Ukraine and Francoist Spain, while there were anarcho-communist resistance organisations in occupied Korea: the Autonomous Workers’ League (AWL) and the Autonomous Village Movement (AVM), both creations of the FFSB.

Still, anarchism — and the working class as a whole, with which it has always been closely associated — was in dire straits and was only resuscitated on a global scale by the “jolt” of 1968, which initiated a wave of working class resistance to the various forms of capitalism from France to Senegal, from Mexico to Czechoslovakia, from Germany to Japan, from Pakistan to the USA. The jolt, spurred on by the neo-liberal contraction of capital which started dismantling the West’s welfare states and eroded working class conditions in the Soviet bloc still further, unleashed a fourth wave of anarchist organisation and guerrilla warfare, centred primarily in the southern cone of Latin America, but also in the Middle East, a new field of anarchist operations.

Notable anarchist guerrilla organisations of the day in the global south were the Popular Brigades (BP) of Chile, the FAU’s Revolutionary Popular Organisation — 33 (OPR-33) of Uruguay, Libertarian Resistance (RL) of Argentina, the unknown Palestinian guerrilla group that trained some RL guerrillas, the Workers’ Liberation Group (*Shagila*) of Iraq and The Scream of The People (CHK) of Iran. The last two are important in that they developed an anarcho-communism virtually in total isolation from the rest of the anarchist movement, giving an indication of the universal validity of anarchist practice, and they participated in the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979, the most recent revolution in which anarchist guerrillas played a role.

In the global north, anarchist guerrilla organisations included the Angry Brigade (AB) of Britain, the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front (EAAAF) of Japan, Direct Action (AD) of France, Direct Action (AD) of Canada, the Anti-capitalist Autonomous Commandos (CAA) of the Basque country, the Iberian Liberation Movement — Autonomous Combat Groups (MIL-GAC), First of May Group (GPM) and the Groups of International Revolutionary Action (GARI) of Western Europe.

During this wave, anarchism and the libertarian strains of autonomism that sprang up in Western Europe in the 1970s usually played second fiddle to Maoism and Trotskyism, with many anarchists influenced by the insurgent doctrines of Guevara, Mao, Marighella and Negri rather than of Sabate, Mechoso, Christie and Bonanno, but it was not exclusively a period of armed struggle.

Other important developments during the fourth wave were the founding of the synthesist International of Anarchist Federations (IAF) in 1968, the re-establishment of the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) in the same year, a mushrooming of anarchist organisations across the world, and the resurgence of revolutionary syndicalism as evidenced by the Authentic Labour Front (FAT) of Mexico or the establishment of a Marine Transport Workers’ Industrial Union (MTWIU) section in Sweden. One of the key spurs to the resurgence of anarchism was the end of the fascist regimes in Portugal in 1974, then Spain in 1975, which saw the re-emergence of the CNT with 200,000 members.

In this period, the real harbinger of things to come was the re-emergence of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism within the Stalinist and Maoist empires: the Movement of Revolutionary Communards (MRC), the Communist League of Anarchists (CLA) and the Free General Workers’ Union (SMOT), founded in 1979 in the USSR, the Polish Anarchist Federation (PAF) and the Czechoslovak Anarchist Association (EAS), founded in the 1980s.

Notable also were the 10-million-strong, initially syndicalist, Solidarity (*Solidarnosc*) in Poland, the unstudied Neutralist Tribunal (NT) in Vietnam, and the Federation of the Provincial Proletariat (*Shengwulian*), founded in 1968 in China (where an underground Anarchist Federation, AF, was rumoured to operate in the 1970s). Other underground organisations were established in Latin America and Korea, and some, notably in Chile, engaged in guerrilla warfare.

The ideas of the *Platform*, which were expressed in essence again by the Friends of Durruti have maintained the anarchist hardline time and again, especially when the movement has been in crisis. Following the defeat of the Spanish Revolution in 1939, many anarchist militants were disillusioned and a deathly anti-revolutionary liberalism that focussed on “personal liberation” rather than class struggle crept into the movement.

So in 1953, just after the anarchists had launched the Cuban Revolution, the French anarchist militant George Fontenis wrote the *Manifesto of Libertarian Communism* for the Libertarian Communist Federation (FCL). The FCL had split from the FAF the previous year, taking the majority of FAF members with it in yet another round of the historical tensions in the French non-syndicalist anarchist movement between platformists and synthesists.

But the FCL’s origins were less than honest – with the platformist tendency having arisen within the FAF in 1950 as a secret caucus of which Fontenis was the secretary and called the Thought-Battle Organisation (OPB). The existence of the OPB only became known after the FCL split from the FAF. This unaccountable secrecy and vanguardism, which was apparently designed to attract the left flank of the French Communist Party (PCF) tarnished the debate over the Platform.

As with other platformist-style manifestos, it created quite a few waves, attacking as it did the “synthesis” style of anarchism that included extreme individualism in its mish-mash of libertarian ideas. It also rejected the usual communist theories of the dictatorship of the proletariat (actually the dictatorship of the party) and the two-stage revolution (actually the revolution put on hold forever). It affirmed anarchism as a class-struggle revolutionary theory and practice and called for a disciplined “vanguard” to push the revolution forward. But by vanguard, Fontenis meant not the Marxist-styled, self-appointed “leaders” of the people, which tactic he said “leads to a pessimistic evaluation of the role of the masses, to an aristocratic contempt for their political ability, to concealed direction of revolutionary activity, and so to defeat”.

Instead, the *Manifesto*’s “vanguard” was a revolutionary organisation tasked with “developing the direct political responsibility of the masses; it must aim to increase the masses’ ability to organise themselves”. This group of activists had as its final aim “to disappear in becoming identical with the masses when they reach their highest level of consciousness in achieving the revolution”. It would work within established mass organisations like unions, educational groups, mutual aid societies and others, and actively propagate its ideas. Its basic principles would be ideological and tactical unity, collective action and discipline, and a federal rather than centralised structure.

In Italy in the 1950s, hardline “organisationalist” anarchists founded the Proletarian Action Anarchist Groups (GAAP) within the synthesist Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI), and were later expelled. The GAAP did not survive for long on its own, but in its brief existence, the GAAP united with Fontenis’ OPB to form a short-lived Libertarian Communist International (ICL). Despite the disappearance of a specific platformist tendency in Italy, veterans of the GAAP and the memory of its practice formed the backbone of today’s Federation of Communist Anarchists (FdCA) when it was founded in 1985.

Fontenis is a controversial character in France because he later took a sharp turn rightwards, becoming a Freemason, running the FCL in the legislative elections of 1956 (the organisation collapsed a year or two later), and recruiting the notorious dissident Stalinist Andre Marty to FCL ranks. As with Arshinov earlier, this reversal of anarcho-communism was crudely claimed by many synthesists to be the logical result of platformism. But the later deviance of the FCL does not of itself invalidate the initial FCL positions or its *Manifesto*.

Nevertheless, platformism remained a minority tendency within the global anarchist movement, particularly within France where it had the longest history, but its ideas were revived in 1968 with the founding of the Anarchist Revolutionary Organisation (ORA) tendency that split from the FAF in 1970, calling itself “a federation of territorial or trades groups and not a gathering of individuals”.

The ORA’s *Organisational Contract* of 1970 stated that “anarchism repudiates all authoritarianism: that of pure individualism with its repudiation of society, and that of pure communism which seeks to ignore the individual. Anarchism is not a synthesis of antagonistic principles, but a juxtaposition of concrete, living realities, the convergence of which must be sought in an equilibrium as elastic as life itself”.

While hailing the platformist principles of ideological and tactical unity, collective responsibility, rank-and-file decision-making, and libertarian federalism, the *Organisational Contract* stated that the ORA “has no pretensions to a rigid ideological unity generating dogmatism [or, what it named ‘stodgy uniformity’]. But on the other hand, it refuses also to be merely a motley collection of divergent tendencies, the frictions between which would inevitably lead to stagnation”.

An *Addendum to the Organisational Contract* stated that the ORA “is to be the driving force behind mass movements against authoritarian systems” and it appears to have achieved this in part. The ORA inspired the creation of platformist organisations with the same acronym in Denmark in 1973 (apparently still in existence), Britain in the mid-1970s (since dissolved), and in Italy in 1976, the last of which in 1985 became the FdCA of today. The French ORA became today’s French/Belgian Libertarian Communist Organisation (OCL) and its Libertarian Alternative (AL) splinter. The longevity of the FdCA and ORA/OCL/AL lines help put paid to the idea that platformism is a disguised intermediary stage in a rightward capitulation towards Stalinism.

FIFTH WAVE: THE ANARCHO-COMMUNIST “DRIVING FORCE” FIGHTS FOR A LIBERTARIAN ALTERNATIVE

The fourth wave of anarchist insurgencies were crushed by neo-fascist repression in Latin America in the mid-1970s, with the USA funding death-squads into the 1980s, and by the increasingly right-wing regimes of Western Europe and North America in the same period, but revolutionary syndicalism steadily rebuilt, as did anarchist political organisation. And a fifth wave, far broader than the fourth, was soon unleashed in 1989–1991 with the dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union and the liberation of its Eastern European satellite colonies, right down to the Stalinist oddity that was Albania and the Titoist dissident region of Yugoslavia.

Immediately, the underground anarchist movement in those countries surged forth, with the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (KAS) and the Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists (KRAS), both founded in Russia in 1989, the Polish Anarchist Federation (PAF), founded in the 1980s, and the Czechoslovak Anarchist Association (EAS), founded in 1989, leading the way.

The explosion of new anarchist organisations in the former Soviet empire has been remarkable: from the Baltic states to the Balkan states, and from Belarus to Kazakhstan, there is barely a region of the ex-USSR and its satellites which has not seen a newly emergent anarchist and syndicalist movement. Notable is the revival of organisations like the Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists – Nestor Makhno (RKAS-NM) in former anarchist strongholds like the Ukraine, plus the emergence of “Makhnovist” groups in countries like Greece and Turkey.

Probably the largest anarcho-communist organisation in the world today outside of the syndicalist union federations is Autonomous Action (AD), with branches in 20 Russian cities, plus branches in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. And the recent development of underground anarcho-syndicalist organisations in “communist” countries like Cuba which are rapidly embracing liberal capitalism, demonstrates that we can expect a further emergence in times to come, especially as totalitarianism loses its grip in China, Vietnam and North Korea (though no current anarchist underground is known in those regions).

In Latin America, the collapse of the para-fascist dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay in 1983–1990, and the emergence of militant new social movements as capital contracts ever more severely into neo-corporatist crisis, has spurred on the revival of anarchism: Rebel – Libertarian Socialism (Auca – SL) and the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (OSL) of Argentina; the Gaucha Anarchist Federation (FAG), Cabocla Anarchist Federation (FACA) and the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) of Brazil; Women Creating (MC) and Libertarian Youth (JL) of Bolivia; the Anarcho-Communist Unification Congress (CUAC) of Chile, later renamed the Libertarian Communist Organisation (OLC).

The primary organisation that helped initiate the spurt of new growth was the revived FAU of Uruguay that rebuilt in 1985, repudiated its earlier pro-Castroism and embraced the Platform. The result of its leading role in regenerating anarcho-communist ideas in the southern cone of Latin America is that most of the region's most significant new organisations — the FAG, FACA, FARJ, Libertarian Struggle (LL), OLC and others like the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (OSL) in Argentina — are platformist, or in Latin American terms, *especificista* (specific), organisations.

The Mexican Revolt of 1994 provided additional impetus and helped establish organisations like the Indigenous Popular Council of Oaxaca — Ricardo Flores Magon (CIPO-RFM) and its splinter Magonist Zapatist Alliance (AMZ). In Africa, the conditions of neo-colonialism lead to the construction of anarchist organisations including the Anarchist Party for Individual Freedoms in the Republic (PALIR) in Senegal in 1981, the 3,000-strong IWW section among diamond miners in Sierra Leone in the late 1980s-early 1990s, the Anarchist Workers' and Student's Group (ASWG) of Zambia in 1998 and the Wiyathi Collective within the Anti-Capitalist Convergence of Kenya (ACCK) in the 2000s. The closing phases of resistance to militarism and apartheid saw the (re-)emergence of anarchism where its heritage was slender: the Awareness League (AL) of Nigeria, the Anarchist Resistance Movement (ARM) and Durban Anarchist Federation (DAF) of South Africa.

Inigorated by the “Battle of Seattle” and public disgust at the US-lead imperialist wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, the organised anarchist movement in North America — long plagued by individualism, primitivism and other anti-class-war ideologies — has rediscovered itself, notably with the founding of the North-Eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC) of the USA/Canada in 2000, which sparked the creation of similar regional organisations across the continent.

The neo-liberal crisis has seen the establishment of anarchist organisations in regions where they either had no historical precedent or where the traditions were long-dead: from Lebanon to Sierra Leone; from Costa Rica to Kenya; from El Salvador to Zambia. And a fifth wave of syndicalism has arisen, despite the fractious debates that have cost the IWA its Japanese and Colombian, and factions of its French and Italian sections.

This is apparent not only in the veteran anarcho-syndicalist organisations of Western Europe such as the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) of Spain, which at 60,000 members is now the largest in the world (and the third-largest union federation in Spain), but also the 6,000-strong Siberian Confederation of Labour (SKT), the 2,000-strong RKAS-NM of Ukraine, and the National Confederation of Labour — Vignoles (CNT-Vignoles) of France, which claims 1,000 dues-paying members and another 4,000 mobilisable supporters, all of which identify specifically as anarchist.

The Swedish Central Workers' Organisation (SAC) currently claims a membership of 9,000, a thousand lower than in the late 1990s, after it discontinued the practice of including members who had retired from their employment. In addition, there is the “grassroots syndicalist” tendency within the union “base committee” movement of Italy, the alternative syndicalist unions in France (Solidarity Unity Democracy, SUD), Switzerland (SUD) and Mexico (the 50,000-strong FAT), and a palette of new rank-and-file syndicalist organisations from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Malaysia, from Burkina Faso to Bangladesh.

New and old syndicalist unions are collaborating continentally by sector (railways, communications, education etc.) across neo-liberal “Fortress Europe” through the nascent European Federation of Alternative Syndicalism (FESAL) network of “grassroots syndicalist” unions. This expansive fifth wave has seen numerous splinters, but this is a sign of rapid growth and the de-

velopment of a plethora of different libertarian communist approaches to the challenges posed to the working class by turbo-capitalism in the new millennium.

Lastly, the current wave is also a period of intense international organising, with the formation of two new networks: International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS), founded in 2001, and the Insurrectional Anti-authoritarian International (IAI), founded in 2000, representing the majority mass and minority insurrectionist traditions, respectively.

In 1991, following the collapse of Soviet communism, the French platformist Libertarian Alternative (AL) took up the pro-organisationalist torch with A Manifesto for a Libertarian Alternative. Its aim was not only to help inject a hardline perspective into the growing anarchist movement, but to show other true revolutionaries that there was a way out of the dead end which state “socialism” had lead the workers into. It dealt with the situation which the modern working class found itself in under neo-liberalism: mass unemployment, casualisation, neo-colonialism, the enclosure of the people’s “commons” down to the genetic level, the rise of the new technical middle class (computer specialists etc) and so forth.

It emphasised the need for a worker-driven revolutionary project that would aim to dismantle capitalism and all oppressions like that directed against women. Like the Platform, it also called for “statutory rules” in order that the anarchist organisation run efficiently and co-ordinate its external activities. These rules would be based on “a common identity” and strategies would be worked out by free discussion among all members.

In 1997, the Anarchist Communist Federation of Britain (ACF, later renamed the Anarchist Federation, AF), which had sprung into existence as a result of the Miner’s Strike 1984–1985, published *Beyond Resistance: a Revolutionary Manifesto for the Millennium*. Updated in 2003, it described the crises faced by capitalism, both private and state, the rise of religious fundamentalism and ethnic nationalism. It stated boldly that “the old workers’ movement is dead”, that “the old shock battalions of our class, the miners, the dockers, the steelworkers” have been seriously weakened by neo-corporatism. It said that as a result, the revolutionary struggle was now “in the public space of the towns, and of society in general, rather than in the private space of the workplaces”.

The Revolutionary Manifesto said a new post-Soviet coherence would have to be developed within the working class, which required the building of a new mass revolutionary movement. The anarchist organisation should: work within popular struggles; teach workers’ history; ceaselessly agitate for revolution; host open militant debates; support the self-organisation of workers’ struggles; attack Leninism and other elitist “revolutionary” sects; assure the independence of worker’s organisations; and always be at the forefront of countering capitalist repression. Again, as in the Platform, the Revolutionary Manifesto argued for “unified operational decision-making” involving all members.

The organisation should be based on a libertarian structure, a high degree of internal education, collective responsibility for its actions, and must have a collective plan of action. The organisation must be linked into a network of workplace and community organisations that should form a united revolutionary force when the time is ripe. It should rotate and recall its delegates frequently, should develop among members a variety of skills and should allow no leadership to develop.

The ACF’s earlier position paper, *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation*, stated that the organisation rejected “the Leninist concept which springs from the managerial strata and the intelligentsia which seek to dragoon the workers into a new form of oppression: the worker’s

state”. The anarcho-communist revolutionary organisation must be both “part of the class” and “in ideological advance of the class as a whole” while recognising that “it is not infallible and does not have all of the answers all of the time. It is transformed as the working class is transformed in the revolutionary process”.

The ACF called for a class-based approach to a diverse range of anti-capitalist struggles that embraced gender, anti-racist, environmental, cultural and unemployed struggles, calling for the creation of a libertarian front of all such movements within which the task of the revolutionary anarchist organisation was, in echo of the ORA, to “act as the driving force”, not in the Leninist sense of the domination of such a front, but in the sense of acting as a catalyst of radical mass self-organisation.

In regions like North America, where atomistic affinity-groupings and not large-scale anarchist organising had been the rule outside of the trade unions, the dominance of the anti-organisationalist approach seems to have led to the collapse of specific anarchist organisations from the late 1920s and early 1930s until the founding of specific anarchist communist organisations in the 1980s through the 2000s.

In regions like France, however, where mass organisations were the rule, self-described platformist organisations have remained an important influence on the specific anarchist movement to the present day, spreading in the 1970s across Europe and in the 1990s to Latin America, the ex-Soviet empire, the Middle East and Southern Africa. In the new millennium, the mainstream mass organisational tendency is again in the ascendancy.

As a result of the clear need for an organised anarchist fighting strategy to counter neo-liberalism, recent and current anarchist communist, platformist and platformist-influenced groups had or have a presence in countries like:

ARGENTINA:

- Libertarian Socialist Organisation (OSL).
- Libertarian Communist Collective (CCL).
- Rebel – Libertarian Socialism (Auca -SL), dissolved 2004.

ARMENIA & KAZAKHSTAN:

- Autonomous Action (AD), Armenian & Kazakh sections of Russian.

AUSTRALIA:

- Melbourne Anarcho-Communist Group (MACG), formerly the Anarchist Communist Initiative (ACI).

BRITAIN:

- Revolutionary Anarchist Workers (RAW), since dissolved.
- Anarchist Federation (AF).

BRAZIL:

- Gaucha Anarchist Federation (FAG), founded 1995.
- Cabocla Anarchist Federation (FACA), founded 2001.
- Committee for Popular Struggle (COMLUT), Bahia State.
- Libertarian Struggle (LL), Rio de Janeiro.
- Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ).
- Forum of Organised Anarchism (FAO), uniting especificista groups across Brazil.

BULGARIA:

- Federation of Anarchists of Bulgaria (FAB), claims direct descent from the Bulgarian Anarchist Communist Federation (BACF), founded in 1919.

CHILE:

- Libertarian Communist Organisation (OCL), formerly Anarcho-Communist Unification Congress (CUAC).

COSTA RICA:

- Anarchist Communist Organisation (OAC).

CZECH REPUBLIC:

- Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists — Solidarity (ORA-S), moved towards left-communism.
- Anarcho-Communist Alternative (AKA), 2003 ORA-S split.
- Federation of Social Anarchists (FSA).
- Direct Action — Anarcho-Communist Labour Organisation (PA-AKOP).

DENMARK:

- Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists (ORA), founded 1973, possibly defunct.

ESTONIA:

- Anarcho-Communist Federation (AKF).
- Estonian Anarcho-Communist Movement — “Anti!” (AKDE-A!).

FRANCE, BELGIUM & LUXEMBOURG:

- Libertarian Alternative (AL).

- Libertarian Communist Organisation (OCL).
- Libertarian Occitania (OL).
- Co-ordination of Anarchist Groups (CGA), split off the FAF in 2002.

FRENCH GUYANA (French-occupied):

- Libertarian Alternative (AL), Guyanese section of the French/Belgian/Luxembourgian AL.

GERMANY:

- Federation of German-speaking Anarchists (FdA).

GREECE:

- Federation of Anarchists in Western Greece (OADE), founded 2003.
- Makhnovist group.

IRAN:

- Nakhdar group (exiled in France & USA).

IRELAND:

- Workers' Solidarity Movement (WSM).
- Organise!, formerly the Anarchist Federation Ireland (AFI), which merged with the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF) and others.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

- Anarchist Communist Initiative (ACI).

ITALY:

- Federation of Anarchist Communists (FdCA).

LEBANON:

- Libertarian Alternative (Al Badil Al-Taharoui).

MEXICO:

- Alliance of Libertarian Communists (ACL), founded 2004.

POLAND:

- Anarchist-Communist Organisational Platform (AKOP), founded 1997, possibly defunct.

PORTUGAL:

- Revolutionary Anarchist Communist Councils of Action for Autonomous Intervention (ACRACIA), possibly defunct.

RUSSIA:

- Platform Front (PF), founded 2004, since dissolved.
- Autonomous Action (AD).
- Federation of Anarcho-Communists (FAK), AD split.

SLOVAKIA:

- Direct Action — Anarcho-Communist Labour Organisation (PA-AKOP).
- Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists — Solidarity (ORA-S), moved towards left-communism.
- Anarcho-Communist Alternative (AKA), 2003 ORA-S split.

SOUTH AFRICA & SWAZILAND:

- Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF), founded 2003.

SPAIN:

- Mutual Aid Libertarian Network (RLAM).
- Andalusian Anarcho-Communist Organisation (OACA).
- Libertarian Alternative (AL).

SWITZERLAND:

- Libertarian Socialist Organisation (OSL).

TURKEY & WESTERN OCCUPIED KURDISTAN:

- BlackRed (KaraKizil) group, “Makhnovist”.
- Liberter, which together with BlackRed runs the Anarchist Communist Initiative (AKi).

UKRAINE & BELARUS:

- Autonomous Action (AD), Ukrainian & Belarussian sections of Russian AD.
- Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists “Nestor Makhno” (RKAS-NM).

UNITED STATES & CANADA:

- North-Eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC).
- Northwest Anarchist Federation (NAF).
- Furious Five Revolutionary Collective (FFRC), Pacific northwest.
- Heatwave Communist Anarchist Federation (HCAF), Texas.

URUGUAY:

- Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU).
- Cimarron Libertarian Organisation (OLC).

The lead given by both new organisations like NEFAC and older ones like the FAU have inspired a tremendous growth-spurt of anarcho-communist organising marked by the Platform-influenced coherence of their critiques and practices. The new organisations have mushroomed despite the unfounded, hoary old anti-organisationalist claims that they were reviving anarcho-Bolshevism.

There is no real platformist international, because as we have shown, platformism is primarily an organisational tactic within anarchist communism, not an ideological strategic orientation in its own right, albeit one that is oriented towards the mass line. But the aforementioned organisations – networked together loosely as the International Anarchist Platform (IAP) – are increasingly working alongside other anarchist groups and federations around the world, especially the International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS) network, the unaligned anarcho-syndicalists and the anarcho-communists, and to a lesser extent, the International of Anarchist Federations (IFA). There is also the platformist Latin American Anarchist Coordination (CALA) that links organisations in Argentina (OSL), Brazil (FAG), Chile (OCL) and Uruguay (FAU).

This brief introduction to anarcho-communist organisation originated in the experiences of ILS member organisation the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF) of southern Africa (zabalaza means struggle), a platformist organisation that was founded in 2003. The ZACF, with its paper Zabalaza: a Journal of southern African Revolutionary Anarchism, was built on ground established in the late anti-apartheid struggle by the semi-clandestine Anarchist Revolutionary Movement (ARM) and Durban Anarchist Federation (DAF) of more than a decade before.

We believe strongly that the platformist approach is a vital contribution to rebuild the mainstream international anarchist communist revolutionary workers movement, to put the movement at the forefront of the fight against capital and the state, and to ensure that its revolutionary gains are vigorously defended.

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST ORGANISATION IN A “FRONT OF OPPRESSED CLASSES”

History is not neutral. In school we are told that we need governments and bosses. We are told that history is a struggle between different governments, armies and ruling elites. We are told that only the rich and powerful make history. What we are not told is that ordinary people have fought the bosses and rulers every step of the way and that this class war is the true engine of civilisation and progress.

We are not told that governments and capitalism are not only unnecessary, but destructive of all that is worthwhile. We as anarchists know that people, even the bourgeoisie, are not inherently bad. We all merely conform to our class interests. But given the right conditions, conditions of true equality and freedom, a powerful spirit of mutual aid and co-operation springs up. How we act is related to the structure of society.

When oppression and exploitation are forcibly removed, then the “goodness” that is in most of us comes through and flourishes as it did when the workers held the reigns in Argentina, Macedonia, Ukraine, Spain, Mexico, Manchuria, China, Albania, Iran, Cuba, France, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Algeria and elsewhere. We hope that we have shown that what we anarchists are saying are not just pretty, unrealistic ideas. We hope we have indicated with this brief introduction that these ideas can work. A new society can be created with the workers, peasants and the poor in control.

But it won't happen spontaneously — we must organise for it. That is why we need revolutionary organisations, organisations that draw together all those fighting for workers' control of the means of production and directly-democratic community self-organisation, organisations that give us the chance to exchange ideas and experiences, and to learn from the lessons of history. We do not need groups of pushy leaders and their passive followers.

As Rosa Luxemburg said in *Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy*: “Let us put it quite bluntly: the errors committed by a truly revolutionary workers' movement are historically far more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of even the best central committee”. We do not need elite political caucuses and “vanguard parties” dictating to us from on high. What we need is working class organisations under workers' directly-democratic control, with strictly-mandated delegates subject to rank-and-file decision-making, mobilising the mass of ordinary people in the process of making a truly social, grassroots revolution.

A most important point, however: anarchists are not, and should not, be the sole organisers of the working class in preparation for revolution. To put it plainly, we anarchists are not fighting for an anarchist world, but a free world, and we are not the only social force moving in a libertarian direction. We need to be deeply and intimately involved in the global anti-neoliberal movement and in the practical day-to-day struggles of the working class, demonstrating mutual

aid, solidarity, responsibility, federalism and all the other principles of revolutionary anarchism in action.

This point was made by the anarchist group Rebel – Libertarian Socialism (Auca -SL) of Argentina, in an explanation of its ideas on joining the ILS in 2003: “the model of the Single Revolutionary Party is exhausted. It has demonstrated its lack of flexibility against the different political manifestations of our class”.

This echoes the ACF’s *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation* that stated: “A libertarian communist organisation will obviously not be the only organised tendency within the working class. Unlike Leninist organisations, it does not see itself as the Party but as one of several organisations which will participate in the mass movement alongside those without affiliation.”

In opposition to this traditional, narrow-minded political idea of the role of the revolutionary organisation, Rebel promoted the idea of a “Front of Oppressed Classes where syndicalist, social and political models which, in general, struggle for revolutionary change will converge. It is there, in the heart of the FOC, where a healthy debate of political tendencies and positions should be engaged in, so that the course the FOC takes is representative of the existing correlation of popular forces.”

The FOC idea is totally different to the Popular Front idea common to the Marxist-Leninists in which they form a front organisation supposedly for solidarity purposes, then insert their leaders to rule this commandeered social force which they then order about like an army. Instead the anarchist FOC concept represents the progressive political plurality, anti-authoritarian solidarity and innovative diversity of a united working class in action against both capital and its siamese twin, the state. Rebel warned against any bureaucratisation of the social struggle along Marxist-Leninist lines.

We in southern Africa made a similar point in our position paper *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation in the Class Struggle* (1997): “The Anarchist organisation sees itself as part of the working class, its Anarchist ideas a historical development of the experiences of workers, who as an exploited class seek to create a new world free of tyranny and exploitation in any form.”

Rejecting the Marxist-Leninist concept of a “revolutionary leadership” of the single revolutionary party, we aim for a “leadership of ideas” of libertarian class autonomy and diversity within the class. “We support all progressive struggles both for their own aims and for the increased confidence that campaigning can give people.”

“Secondly, we support them because we recognise that it is in struggle that people are most readily won to the revolutionary ideas of anarchism. Third, we support them because it is in struggle that people can potentially create organisations of self-management that develop their skills and that may possibly help in the revolutionary transformation of society.”

By involvement in everyday struggles, we build tomorrow today, build a new world in the shell of the old, creating a dual-power situation as exists now in Argentina: popular power of the base undermining parasitic power of the bourgeoisie. Importantly, “[w]e defend other progressive organisations that are involved in struggles from repression. Where necessary, we will engage in United Front [similar to the FOC concept] actions alongside them”.

However, whilst we defend these groups unconditionally, we do not do so uncritically – we maintain our independence and argue for our ideas. If you like what you have just read, if you want to be part of the fastest growing movement on the left, you should think about joining the global anarchist communist revolution of the workers, peasants and the poor – and the associated libertarian social movements of the base in which we work.

The natural skills, intelligence, innovation and solidarity owned by the working class are the only things that can produce both the social revolutionary dynamite needed to destroy the neo-fascist neoliberal system – and the fertiliser that will enrich the post-revolutionary soil so that it comes up roses: beautiful, but armed with thorns. The renewed energy, potency and practicality of the anarchist movement has seen new organisations spreading like wild-fire.

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Michael Schmidt
Five Waves
A Brief Global History of Revolutionary Anarchist Communist Mass Organizational Theory &
Practice
November 2005

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