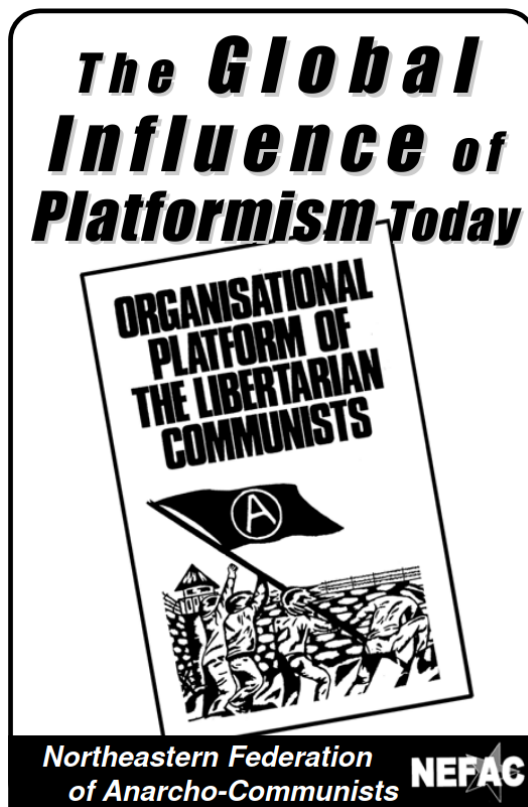


The Global Influence of Platformism Today

Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists



June 2003

Contents

Introduction	3
Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) – Ireland	4
Anarchist Federation (AF) – Britain & Ireland	12
Alternative Libertaire (AL) – France	16
Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA) – Italy	20
Organisace Revolucionních Anarchistu – Solidarita (ORAS) – Czech Republic	25
AKA – Anarcho-Komunist Alternative	
A founding declaration	30
Bikisha Media Collective (BMC) – South Africa	32
Federação Anarquista Gaúcha (FAG) – Brazil	42
Congreso de Unificación Anarco-Comunista (CUAC) – Chile	48

Introduction

So what's all the hype with "platformism" anyway? For those who don't know, "platformism" is a tendency within the wider anarchist movement of groups and organisations who share a basic agreement with "The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists" published by the *Dielo Trouda* (*Workers' Cause*) group in 1926 after their experiences in the Russian revolution of 1917–1921. The Platform is not seeing as a "bible" which we need to obey but as a solid base with which to build a theory of revolution and of revolutionary organisation on.

The texts that make up this pamphlet are taken from the *Northeastern Anarchist* #6 (Spring/Summer 2003). The *Northeastern Anarchist* is the English-language theoretical magazine of the *Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists* (NEFAC), covering class struggle anarchist theory, history, strategy, debate and analysis in an effort to further develop anarcho-communist ideas and practice.

They are reprinted in pamphlet form by *Zabalaza Books* for a number of reasons:

as *Zabalaza Books* is a member of the *Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation*, which is itself part of the platformist tradition, we felt it important that these interviews with our sister-organisations are made easily available to those who may not have access to the NEA; because journals tend to go out of print quite rapidly we thought to make them permanently available or at least until such time as they need updating; and to make the analysis of the condition of the platformist tradition within the anarchist movement more widely known.

If you are interested in getting hold of a copy of the original "Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists", you can download and print it out from the *Zabalaza Books* website or you can order it via mail-order. Details on the back page.

**Yours for freedom,
Zabalaza Books,
June 2003**

Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) – Ireland

It is appropriate that we begin our series of interviews with platformist-influenced groups from around the world with the Workers Solidarity Movement. Through years of anarchist organising in Ireland and a consistent internet presence, the WSM is largely responsible for the resurgence of interest in platformism among English-speaking anarchists. They happen to be one of the groups which NEFAC maintains the closest ties with internationally, and have been very influential to the overall political development of our federation.

Below is an interview with Alan Mac Simoin, Deirdre Hogan, Gregor Kerr, Andrew Flood and Conor McLoughlin, all members of the WSM's Dublin group.

**interview by MaRK,
Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

What is the history of the WSM? When did you form, and under what circumstances? Did the original founding members come out of other existing anarchist, socialist or left-republican tendencies active in Ireland?

WSM: Up to the 1970s there was no real anarchist history in Ireland. In the mid 70s small anarchist groups were formed in Belfast, Dublin, Dundalk, Cork and Limerick. These groups mainly consisted of people who had returned from living abroad. Most of these groups, while calling themselves anarchist, had no real concept of working together as a group and most only existed for months rather than years. The exception to this was the Belfast group, which founded Just Books (a political bookstore which lasted over a dozen years). The Dublin group which existed at this time fell apart due to having no real group coherence.

Over the subsequent years, various attempts were made to try to pull something together again. In 1982, people from Dublin, Cork and Ballymena started discussion around the area of defining what they meant by anarchism and how to relate to the 'national question' and to the trade unions.

Out of this series of discussions was born the *Workers Solidarity Movement*. The founding members did not come, as a group, from any existing political or anarchist tradition. This was the first conscious attempt to establish an anarchist organisation in Ireland which would have agreed principles and a long-term perspective, and began with just five people.

One problem which emerged in the early years was that much more debate/discussion took place about tactics than about goals. Thus, by 1987 the Cork branch had quadrupled. But it turned out that many of these people had joined with no great understanding of what anarchism was. This led to the Cork branch becoming a collection of 'activists' rather than convinced anarchists, and in the end most Cork members left, with a few of them turning to Bolshevism.

From this episode, *WSM* realised the need for having a clear recruitment policy and the need for people to have a good deal of political agreement before joining the organisation.

How did members of your organisation first become interested in platformist ideas and methods of organisation? What led to this theoretical development?

WSM: From 1968–69 onwards there was much analysis of the failures of the anarchist movement, particularly in France and Italy, where we began to capitalise on the years of political turmoil of the late sixties. Many anarchists began to see the need for some degree of political organisation. This thinking transferred to Britain, where a significant number of anarchists started to move towards platformist politics.

But it seems that many of the people involved were so burnt out or disillusioned by their bad experiences that they were really looking for something outside of anarchism altogether, and some of them ended up in Leninist organisations. That experience does not appear to have been replicated in any other country.

Our interest in platformism has become known worldwide. A lot of this is due to the development of the internet and our use of it. And because the *WSM* is now 17 years old and quite clearly still anarchist, this dispels the myth that platformism is about getting out of anarchism, or moving towards Leninism.

How would you say platformism informs the practical activity of the WSM?

WSM: On a day-to-day level platformism allows the *WSM* to put forward a coherent, consistent set of political beliefs, and allows us to tie our involvement in particular campaigns against war, against unjust local service charges, for abortion rights, against ‘social partnership’, etc. to our anarchist politics. By this we mean that we emphasise that our opposition to the bin charges (increased taxes on garbage pickup), for example, is linked to our opposition to an unjust society and to our belief that a better society is possible. We never hide our anarchist politics.

It also means that we continually debate and discuss politics both the theory and the practice as we strive for theoretical and tactical unity. By theoretical unity we mean that members agree on a certain number of basics. There wouldn’t be much point in having an organisation in which half the members believe that trade union struggles are crucially important, and the other half think that they are a waste of time. It might make a good debating club, but the organisation would be totally hamstrung in trying to make effective political intervention in day-to-day working class struggles. Neither would the organisation be very effective if half the organisation think that trade union struggle is important and the other half agrees that if they say so it must be, but never actually bothers to discuss/debate the issue. Thus internal education is an integral part of our organisation both in terms of political theory and in terms of practice (i.e. the particular tactics which may or may not be successful in any given campaign).

This process is only useful however if it leads to action. When we discuss issues/campaigns, if we decide to prioritise a particular thing (e.g. anti-war work), we do so as an organisation, rather than as individuals. Once a particular issue is prioritised, all the members agree to commit themselves to it for the duration of the campaign, where possible, and the tactics and potential of the campaign are discussed regularly at our meetings.

This leads to collective responsibility, meaning that each member will support the decisions made by the organisation. Without this type of commitment/agreement, decisions made might look very good on paper but would be totally useless in practice. There wouldn’t be much point in our discussing at length how to intervene in the anti-war movement, for example, and then not bothering to actually as individuals attempt to do our best to carry out the decisions made.

This does not of course negate the right of members who disagree with the majority view to express their own views. In doing so, however, they must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the organisation. Where a group of people in the organisation disagree with the majority view, they have the right to organise and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organisation as a whole.

Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and openness strengthen both the individual and the group. This of course distinguishes us completely from Leninism a form of political organisation which does the complete opposite (i.e. which discourages and opposes internal debate and disagreement and in which the 'line' is handed down from the central committee).

Our form of political organisation makes no attempt to impose a monopoly over members' political lives, but recognises that, as individuals, members may be involved in any campaign in which they have an interest (unless of course it is something which conflicts with basic anarchist principles) but we recognise that having a group of people/an organisation which is agreed on a number of basics increases the strength and effectiveness many times over. At all times, of course, political struggle has to be viewed through the eyes of the class struggle (i.e. our fight is not against the State as an abstract institution but against the State as the executive arm of the ruling class).

A point of debate among platformist-influenced groups is centered around the relationship between anarchist organisations and trade unions. What is the WSM's relationship to the trade union movement in Ireland? How would you answer to the criticisms (made by some revolutionary anarchists and ultra-left Marxists) of trade unions being inherently non-revolutionary?

WSM: We would, of course, agree that trade unions are "inherently non-revolutionary". If we only participated in things that were revolutionary we could quickly find ourselves sitting on our butts doing nothing. Trade unions in general are not designed to be revolutionary, anarcho-syndicalist ones may be but even here there are huge practical difficulties [see next question].

Certainly in Ireland the major unions are designed purely to fight on bread and butter issues. To even describe them as 'reformist' would be to imply that they have a goal to change society. They don't, they are simply trade unions no more. There is a "political levy" which goes straight to the Irish Labour Party, which, in this country, could possibly be termed "a party of the middle class" (in the sociological sense of the word anyhow).

We do advocate that members join trade unions and participate in them. This is not at all because they are revolutionary organisations or even that they have any such potential.

At the most basic level joining a union implies that workers have different interests from the boss. The reason that unions survive is that workers recognise, rightly, their need to band together to defend themselves. For most that's as far as it goes unions are organs of self-defence for workers under capitalism. But it's a very important step to see this basic class interest.

Secondly, of course, the most organised and militant workers will, usually, gravitate towards unions. As class struggle anarchists we should be there with them. Union membership is high in Ireland though it is also declining quite fast.

In 1980, union membership as a proportion of those in work was 61.9%, since then it has declined to 44.5% in 1999. Though union membership has risen, it is rising much slower than the rate of new people coming in to work and a huge proportion of the private sector especially the tech sector is un-unionised.

As stated, unions are little more than organisations to defend and improve people's lot under capitalism. In Ireland over the past few years this role has been further limited by social partnership and a lack of democracy.

Social partnership is a system which dictates wages and working conditions along with other vague aspirations which are combined into a national plan between unions, bosses, government, farmers and the "poverty industry". In practice this has frozen shop floor organisation and increased the power of the bureaucrats. People now see very little point in going to union meetings when everything has already been agreed nationally with the bosses. Further the union heads have swallowed draconian restrictions on the right to strike and picket under the industrial relations and public order acts. These have now been used very effectively against strikes, most recently in Dublin airport where eight activists have recently been fined for breaking an injunction to picket in the City Jet Strike.

The lack of democracy in some of the large unions is striking, which only has biennial conferences and where the membership is miles removed from the highly paid full time bureaucracy. The WSM (with some non-party individuals) is probably the only group, which has tried to raise lack of democracy in union structures/rule books as an issue in itself. It seems to be a fairly low priority for the Leninists.

In practice we encourage members to join unions where possible. We have several members in private sector un-unionised employment. Here the best tactic seems to be to lie low but to try to organise people collectively even to pursue small issues. Companies in this sector always operate on the basis of individual contracts so breaking this down is a step. To actually go from this to trying to unionise would probably be only possible on the basis of some real victory for the collective nonunion efforts.

We have active membership in the SIPTU education branch and the INTO (primary teachers union) our members there have had some success in industrial actions noticeably in Trinity College in a recent successful SIPTU fight for pensions for part time cleaners (this was supported by most college workers including many non-unionised ones). With very little on the ground activism it is possible to have a real impact with a couple of members, but some of this impact is due to low activity with the left taking up the slack.

Our long term hope is to create active rank and file groups cutting across unions, sectoral barriers and on union employment. At this point that goal looks quite distant.

What is WSM's position on anarcho-syndicalism? Do you see independent revolutionary anarchist unions outside of existing mass-based trade unions as a viable strategy at this stage of class struggle in Ireland?

WSM: In general we think the ideal form of union organisation is syndicalist. This form of union organisation would be a vast improvement on the unions in place at the moment. We are not an anarcho-syndicalist organisation though, and do not see our goal as setting up anarcho-syndicalist unions to overthrow capitalism.

In our view syndicalism (at least historically) has failed to address the issue of political power. We believe that to make a revolution it isn't sufficient that workers just seize their workplaces and the land. They must be organised right across communities and workplaces to smash state power and replace it with workers' councils. This requires revolutionary anarcho-communist organisations dedicated to this goal. The workers from day one must abolish all power relations.

Syndicalism doesn't create the revolutionary organisation required to do this. It creates trade unions. As stated these are miles better than other unions but still unions by design. It organises

ALL workers regardless of politics (recently some anarcho-syndicalists have decided to organise ALL workers EXCEPT for Leninists and Trotskyists in their industrial networks this is surely even MORE of a recipe for disaster!).

Many workers will (rightly) join these unions because they use the most radical tactics and get the best results. They won't join them because they are revolutionary anarchists or anywhere close. For this reason syndicalism has been dogged with reformist currents. Spain in 1937 was the high point of syndicalist organisation. Because the *CNT* would not address the issue of political power they managed a situation of dual power workers controlled factories and fields but the government was left. In the end the ruling class managed to get it back together and used the state to smash workers power. Some of the *CNT* higher ups even joined the government and these were from the "radical" *FAI* anarchist wing of the union designed to keep it politically anarchist!

In practice we recognise that syndicalist unions are miles ahead of others, and on the positive side members of anarcho-syndicalist unions are likely to be exposed to anarchist ideas. We would seek to join but maintain our anarcho-communist organisation alongside them, as we would do in any union.

In the last couple of years in Ireland there was an attempt to set up a left split from the *ATGWU* in Ireland. This is the *Independent Workers Union*. Though they still aimed to have full time officials (or at least a full time leader!), it did embrace some syndicalist ideas and it did appear to be a hopeful development. It since appears that two left wing bureaucrats who were kicked out of the *ATGWU* were really using them as pawns in an internal struggle. As the new *ATGWU* leadership will probably reinstate these it is hard to know what will now happen. The *IWU* has a fair sized paper membership in Cork but, as far as I know, most kept *ATGWU* union cards as well. They managed to get a negotiating license held by another small butchers' union. Whether this would have stood up is unclear as the Irish government makes it very difficult to get negotiating rights. We await developments.

There is an added practical difficulty with attempting to establish an anarcho-syndicalist union here. Unlike in the US where any group of workers can in theory at least set up their own union, here the process of establishing a union is fraught with legal minefields including the need to be issued with a negotiating license by the State. Meanwhile we have and seek good relationships and practical solidarity with a huge number of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organisations world wide. We take no side on the numerous disputes that have emerged within the *IWA* and other groups over the past few years.

Outside of trade union activity, a lot of WSM's activity is based around Community organising (water taxes, bin charge etc). What have you brought to these struggles? How effective has your organising been in these areas?

WSM: Firstly two general points. There are a huge number of community, church, women's and voluntary groups in Ireland. By their very nature community groups tend to be organised around the members of a community. This means that groups cannot just parachute in and start arguing their politics from on high. Generally, the only way to be really involved in a community group is to be active within that community! Sorry to state the obvious, but it's a point that is often NOT appreciated by Leninist and reformist groups.

Secondly, many community groups in Ireland have also been co-opted into the whole idea of "partnership". Once community groups begin to have full time paid staff and become dependent on government or European Union funding, they lose site of their initial (often radical) aims

and democratic is structure. Many so-called community groups are now just part of a well paid net work which might be best described as the “poverty industry”. Although some may be very well-meaning, they are not functioning community groups answerable to local people. Only real struggle on local issues tends to draw together and revitalise tenants’ and community groups. The bin charges and water charges campaigns have to some small extent done this in a few parts of Dublin.

Our experience with the *Dublin Federation* of campaigns that beat the water charges was a good one. This federation was, at least in theory, based on representatives from local groups throughout Dublin. It mobilised very large demonstrations, fought court cases and maintained high non-payment in the three council areas that make up the greater Dublin area. Water charges were abolished.

The lesson we drew from this was that local organising, involving and empowering people and giving them a say in the campaign is the way to go! The lesson drawn by the reformist/Leninist members of the *Socialist Party* was that the election of one of their members was the main factor. In fact, he was elected AFTER the charge was beaten and his election was linked to the massive mobilisation that beat the charges. The successful grassroots campaign beat the charges AND built an electoral base.

The Trotskyists put the cart before the horse and decided that electing a TD (Irish member of parliament) was the crucial factor. Now the *Socialist Workers Party* has joined the *Socialist Party* in attempting to build electoral machines. Of course we argued long and hard against this in the campaign and gained respect for our ideas from many people who would have considered anarchism as a loony bin philosophy. Unfortunately, the electoral road seems quick and easy and the long-term disempowerment isn’t always readily viewable.

The water charges campaign worked as a federation. It was a VERY imperfect federation dominated by the *Socialist Party* and with many local groups that were just paper tigers. But it did contain several highly active ones.

So far the campaigns against bin charges have been almost completely top down. For example, in Dun Laoghaire the *Socialist Party* and *Socialist Workers Party* have informally split the area. Neither side has any interest in building local groups and leaflets are centrally planned and designed and then handed to people to be given out. In the city center area, with *WSM* participation, there are a couple of active local groups where we have members living but, again, the campaign in general works top down. We have also found (in fairness) that in the absence of any major council threat building local groups is not that easy. There just isn’t any reason to get involved and people expect the campaign to function as a sort of insurance service for which they pay a few euros.

Long term, though, the main problem in Dublin is the domination of the two Leninist groups who look only to recruiting members/voters. This is worrying not only because it is not the way to involve or empower anyone, but also because it means a hollow campaign with no in-depth membership beyond Trot full timers. If the council go on the offensive we may pay the price.

WSM has been very active around abortion rights in Ireland (campaigning heavily against the recent anti-choice referendum, supporting the Women on Waves project, etc). In what ways have you tied this activity into more traditional class struggle anarchism?

WSM: Due to the high cost involved in travelling to England for an abortion, it is working class women who are most effected by the lack of access to abortion in Ireland. Both in our own propaganda and within broadbased pro-choice groups we have always argued that, because of

this, the lack of abortion rights in Ireland is a class issue. Within broadbased pro-choice campaign groups we have also pushed for grassroots activism such as door to door leafleting, as opposed to political lobbying and media stunts.

Although the WSM is the oldest formal anarchist organisation still active in Ireland, new groups such as the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF) and Anarchist Federation Ireland (AFI) have recently formed. What is your relationship to these organisations?

WSM: Unlike Leninists, we don't see other anarchist groups as 'rivals'. Our basic approach is to work hard to keep good relations going between the anarchist groups in Ireland despite the political differences that exist.

In recent times we have co-operated very successfully with both the *ASF* and the *AFI* as well as with other anarchists and libertarians in campaigning against the Nice Treaty (i.e. the latest phase of the European Union project). We are also currently working very closely with them in building support for direct action against Irish involvement in the U.S. war against Iraq.

Some of the people in the *ASF* were in *Organise!* before so we have had a relationship with them for over a decade which has included organising joint lecture tours, summer schools and providing speakers for each other's meetings. At times in the past we have had joint internal discussions which have included looking at possible grounds for unity.

The *AFI* formed more recently. Our political differences with them would be wider on day to day issues, particularly on the question of involvement in mass organisations of the working class, e.g. Trade Unions. This has not however stopped us from working with *AFI* members in a number of campaigns to date.

Apart from these organisations we put a fair bit of effort into promoting and maintaining good relations within the wider anarchist movement which includes many individuals who are not members of any anarchist group. This has included initiating with others a series of island wide 'Grassroots Gatherings' which happen every 4 to 6 months in a different city. Last summer it included two anarchist summer camps which were really social rather than political gatherings. It also included starting the mailing list Irish Anarchism which is now moderated by members of both the *WSM* and *AFI*.

What sort of international relationships do you have with other platformist anarchist organisations? What prospects do you see for the development of platformism within the international anarchist movement?

WSM: We should start by pointing out that as a very small organisation our general approach has been that we do not have the resources to sustain any sort of real membership of a formal international organisation. And we think 'pretend' internationals whose sole role is to inflate the self-importance of local groups do more harm than good.

So our formal relationships are very weak. We exchange publications with around 35 other organisations internationally. We are asked to do more exchanges but for financial reasons restrict ourselves to organisations that are either 'platformist' or strike us as particularly important.

More recently we decided to join *International Libertarian Solidarity*. This however is a network intended to facilitate solidarity between different libertarian groups rather than an international of national sections.

On a less formal level we have contact with a number of organisations, including *NEFAC*, which are possible only because of access to the internet, sharing a common language and the travel of individual militants. Until the time when several really large platformist organisations

exist that have the resources to fund translation, travel and international conferences then much of our international work will depend on such informal contacts.

We have made one effort to formalise this a little bit through the setting up of an email list called 'Anarchist Platform'. This list is intended to allow militants of the different organisations (and those for whom there is no local organisation) to communicate news and ideas.

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Anarchist Federation (AF) – Britain & Ireland

This is an interview with Nick and Bonnie, two founding members of the Anarchist Federation (AF) from London. The AF has been around for nearly twenty years, and was instrumental in assisting with the early formation of NEFAC (and, of course, they continue to be a large influence on us!). Over the years the AF has made important contributions to anarcho-communist theory and practice within the English-speaking anarchist world, and, although they do not explicitly define themselves as a “platformist” group per se, there is a strong critical influence present in their organisational activity.

**interview by MaRK,
Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

Could you give a brief history of the Anarchist Federation? When did the group form? What was the political background of the founding members?

AF: The *Anarchist Federation*, or rather its precursor the *Anarchist Communist Federation*, formed in 1985, shortly after the last great miners’ strike. It coalesced around the *Libertarian Communist Discussion Group*, which distributed stocks of the “The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists”, left over from the days of the *Anarchist Workers Association (AWA)* and *Libertarian Communist Group (LCG)*. The emphasis was on building a platformist style organisation in Britain, and in building an organisation built on class struggle and anarchist communism. We rejected anarcho-syndicalism, and felt that *Class War* was too much into the stunt-politics built around a few strong personalities and too little theory and too much post-punk posing. Two of us had been active in French libertarian politics previous to the founding of the organisation. One was a veteran of the movement since 1966, who had been active in the *Anarchist Federation of Britain*, the *Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists* and its avatars, the *AWA* and *LCG*. Two of us initially had a brief history with leftist groups (primarily the *Socialist Workers Party*), and moved to libertarian politics as a result of our experiences. The *AF* emerged out of a merger of the *Libertarian Communist Discussion Group*, and the magazine ‘Virus’. ‘Virus’ then became our mouthpiece [later changing its name to ‘Organise!’], so we were then able to gather other militants around us and set up the *ACF*.

From the early development of the AF, there seems to have been a strong platformist influence in how you viewed questions of revolutionary organisation, however this seems less pronounced in more recent literature produced by the federation. Do you consider the AF to be an explicitly ‘platformist’ organisation? How influential would you say ‘platformism’ has been to the federation’s political development?

AF: No, the *AF* is not an explicitly “platformist” organisation. It is informed by its politics fairly significantly, and it acknowledges the main points of the Platform (tactical and theoretical unity, federalism, and collective responsibility). But, a lot has happened since 1926 the critiques

of capitalist society coming from the women's movement, the lessons to be learnt from the theory and practice of council communism, of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and its British counterpart *Solidarity*, the whole post 1926 experiences of French and Spanish anarchism *FCL*, *ORA*, *OCL* (first and second), *UTCL*, etc., and the failures of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, the *Friends of Durruti*, the experience of British libertarian organisations (pre-war with the *AntiParliamentary Communist Federation*, post-war with the *ORA*, *AWA*, *LCG* etc.) and we cannot run on the spot. We have to address capitalism as it is now and the relevant ways we can organise to fight it. But yes, the Platform is a significant and important document and any revolutionary anarchist organisation that is at all serious has to take account of it, without being obsessed by it.

The AF currently has active groups in England, Wales, Scotland, and now Ireland. How do these groups relate to each other? What level of co-ordination is there between localities? How much autonomy does each group have within your federated structure?

AF: Each group organises on a regional basis within the framework of the *AF*. There is a healthy discussion via our Internet List, our internal Bulletin, our Delegate Meetings and Conferences. There's been an 'Anarchist Dayschool' in Scotland, and one coming up in Ireland. There is autonomy for each section within the federalist structure and any area or group can obviously bring out its own publications and pamphlets (as indeed they do).

We thought the comments by a member of the Irish *WSM* regarding the *AF*'s internal organisation in the last 'Northeastern Anarchist' ["An Irish Anarchist In the Northeast: Reflections on the North American Anarchist Movement" by Chekov Feeney] were pretty crass and showed a distinct ignorance of the way we function. The *AF* structure is not at all like the *NEFAC* structure, where a number of collectives affiliate to the *NEFAC* federation. And to say that collectives and individuals affiliated to the *NEFAC* structure on a semi-member basis is like the *AF* structure is totally erroneous, because that doesn't happen. Each member has to agree with our ideas and is met by *AF* members before they join.

Of course, an organisation [*WSM*] with two branches that function in cities with populations of 150,000 (Cork) and 1.2 million (Dublin) can act in an apparently more cohesive way, especially when the Leninist movement in that country is not significantly larger than the anarchist movement. But we are faced with organising in many cities and are faced with a Leninist movement to be numbered in the thousands, who have certain hegemony over political mobilisations. We have become the largest anarchist organisation in Britain, and anyone can see who looks in depth that there is a cohesion and coherence to our politics and activities.

How do you view the current state of the anarchist movement (and broader 'anti-capitalist' milieu) in Britain and Ireland? How much impact or influence would you say the AF has had within the larger movement?

AF: The movement in Britain and Ireland is still immensely weak, still struggling to get out of the anarchist ghetto. There is still a strong anti-theoretical bias, and still an obsession with spectacular stunts in some quarters. Similarly, there is still a distinct anti-organisational prejudice among many, with some extolling the virtues of local organisation (as if local organisation and strong organisation on a territory were mutually exclusive!). There is still much work to be done, to reach say, the strength and implantation that anarchists have in France.

What is your political relationship to other class struggle anarchist organisations in Britain (Class War, Solidarity Federation) and Ireland (Workers Solidarity Movement, Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation)?

AF: Sure we work with other class struggle anarchists where and when we can, for instance *AF-Ireland* has recently produced a joint bulletin with the *AnarchoSyndicalist Federation*. But it's fair to say that apart from punctual collaborations (benefits, etc.) there's been not much collaboration even at the level of organising united blocs on demos. We've done our best in the past to make this come about, but there's only so much you can do if there is reluctance for this to happen.

There seems to be a strong council communist influence in some areas of the AF's politics, specifically around your critical position on trade unions and anarcho-syndicalism. What strategies of workplace resistance and self-organisation does the AF promote in place of traditional union strategies?

AF: Well, you printed our strategy on workplaces in the last issue of your magazine ["Workplace Resistance Groups"; NEA#5]. So let that speak for itself. Our position we feel to be correct and born out by experience (look at the recent maneuvers by the Fire Brigades Union to dampen down the firefighters struggle as a concrete example). We don't call on workers to leave the unions en bloc, but neither do we counsel anarchist militants taking positions in the unions. We found the recent articles in 'Northeastern Anarchist' on taking positions as organisers within the unions to be pretty appalling. You'll end up being totally taken over by the unions. Look what happened to Rose Pesotta and plenty of other anarchists who adopted this line in the past. They ended up keeping their anarchism quiet, supporting the war effort in World War II, and generally operating as a non-parliamentarian type of social democrat if you will. You have to offer specific anarchist communist politics in the struggle, not do the work of the unions for them. What matters is the autonomous organisation of the working class, and to think this can be done via the unions is an error.

What are some campaigns or struggles where the AF has made successful interventions? Current activity?

AF: Well we did a lot of work around the Poll Tax struggle at the time. We produced two pamphlets and a number of leaflets and stickers addressing that struggle. The Trotskyist organisation *Militant* had a grip on many areas of the struggle, but we feel we had some influence. Of course bringing out 'Resistance' on a monthly basis with an ever-increasing distribution and circulation allows us to influence people who have never come across anarchist ideas before, and there is a steady increase in requests for more information about us and revolutionary anarchist ideas in general as a result of this. We are doing a lot of anti-war work at the moment, and no doubt will do even more in the future.

The AF certainly played an active role in the formation and early development of NEFAC. What sort of international relations do you maintain with other anarchist groups around the world?

AF: We take international work extremely seriously and have a number of international secretaries in contact with many groups and organisations around the world. We joined the *International of Anarchist Federations* (IAF/IFA), and have attended all their congresses and international meetings

Finally, I can't help but ask why you decided to change the name of the federation (from Anarchist Communist Federation)?

AF: The name change did not mean we gave up our anarchist communist politics. We didn't change our Aims and Principles! Anyone who reads our publications will soon realise we put over an explicit anarchist communist viewpoint. It's not so much what you call yourselves as

a group or organisation, but what you do or say. We remain libertarian communists. The old name was a mouthful and you were mistaken for a weird amalgam of Stalinists and libertarians by those who didn't know any better and we wasted a lot of time explaining what we were about. We haven't degenerated into some vague libertarian position. It soon becomes apparent to those who come into contact with our ideas what we are about and we would say that we have introduced many to the ideas of anarchist communism for the first time.

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Alternative Libertaire (AL) – France

Alternative Libertaire is the third largest anarchist organisation in France today, after the syndicalist CNT-Vignoles and the synthesist Fédération Anarchiste (FA). Influenced by platformism, their chief aims are to further develop a class struggle anarchist tendency and to help the emergence of a large self-managed, anti-capitalist, working class movement. Alternative Libertaire has consistently nurtured a strong working relationship with NEFAC's Quebec Regional Union during the three short years of our federation's existence, be it through press exchanges, discussion on the internet or actual visits. Below is an English translation [thanks Nic! ed] of an interview with Laurent Scapin, the secretariat of international relations for Alternative Libertaire.

**interview by Nic,
Bête Noire (NEFAC-Montreal)**

When was Alternative Libertaire formed?

AL: *Alternative Libertaire* was formed in 1991, on the basis of the 'Manifeste pour une Alternative Libertaire' (which can be read at our website in French, English and Arabic). The goal was to create an organisation that could go beyond the small libertarian communist groups of the time. Consequently, two components were the principal contributors to the formation of *Alternative Libertaire*: *l'Union des Travailleurs Communistes-Libertaires* (UTCL), which was primarily made up of libertarian syndicalists, and *le Collectif Jeunes Libertaires* (CJL), a youth organisation.

Reading Alternative Libertaire (monthly magazine of the organisation) or Débattre (theoretical magazine), we see very few references to platformism. Does AL consider itself a platformist organisation as such?

AL: Arshinov's Platform and "platformism" are indeed a part of our "ideological baggage". But we're not attached to them in a dogmatic way. We think that part of the text, written in the 1920's, is now obsolete and is not adapted to the political realities we live with in France today. That is why we rarely make references to 'The Platform' or to platformism. We identify with the spirit of platformism, and say so, but we don't identify with every word written in the original platform! We are still convinced of the importance of anarchists being organised, and to also have a clear political and strategic line. To that effect, yes, we are platformists.

What areas of struggle is Alternative Libertaire most active in?

AL: A wide question, because the militants of *Alternative Libertaire* are active in many social movements. In unions, first, and in particular with the alternative unions of *Groupe des 10-Solidaires*. For us, the struggle of workers, direct victims of the capitalist system, remains central. Unionism, syndicalism and interventions in workplaces are thus fundamental. The rail workers of *Alternative Libertaire* produce a workplace bulletin, for example.

We are also present in many other movements: anti-fascist, anti-racist (including support for non-status immigrants), anti-sexist and anti-militarist (we are particularly involved in mobilisations against war: it's important to remember that *Alternative Libertaire* was constituted during the first Gulf War, so it's a big issue for us), ecological (against nuclear energy, for example), movements of the unemployed and precarious workers. Another important area of intervention is our international activity. It consists of international solidarity through our participation in the ILS (*International Libertarian Solidarity*) network, occasional support actions, and support for the anti-colonial struggle in Palestine. It also consists of our participation in the anti-globalisation movement. We are right now mobilising against the next G8 summit, which will take place in France in June 2003.

During the last French presidential elections, we heard that you called on the voting population to vote for Chirac (right) against Le Pen (far right), can you explain to us the context within which this choice was made?

AL: We didn't call to vote for Chirac. But we didn't call for abstention either. We called that not one voice, and in particular a worker's voice, be for Le Pen, which is totally different. We respect the autonomy of all local AL groups, and some took a position in favour of voting for Chirac, but that wasn't a majority position nationally. The militants of *Alternative Libertaire* are active and convinced anti-fascists, and we know that above all it is social struggles that can push back the far-right. That's mainly what we expressed, much more than on the fixed question in the second round of voting. A minority of militants from *Alternative Libertaire*, myself of them, think however that the ballot box can sometimes, when necessary, be an anti-fascist weapon, as during the last presidential elections.

Can we understand that you reject anti-electoralism, a traditional anarchist position?

AL: A position on elections is a totally secondary tactical decision compared to social struggles. It's quite surprising to see anarchists spending hours talking about elections when we give them so little importance. We think we have a non-dogmatic position about voting. Although we think nothing positive will come out of them for the exploited, we also think that very negative things can. We positioned ourselves on elections because we feel concerned by these issues. But we consider every situation, without any prior reasoning.

Considering unionism and syndicalism, there exist a wide variety of unions and syndicalist organisations in France (at least by North American standards). Does AL as an organisation have a particular preference for one type of unionism or do your members get involved with the union that make the most sense at their workplace?

AL: What's most important is the organisation of workers against the bosses. For us, a union is a tool of mass struggle that goes beyond political divergences (anarchists, Communists, and more importantly the large mass of non-politicised people). The militants of *Alternative Libertaire* are unionised in all kinds of labour organisations (*SUD* and other unions of the *US-G10*, *CNT-Vignoles*, *CGT*, *FO*, *CFDT*), in connection with what's going on the ground and within the company. We don't have any kind of union policy, and we scrupulously respect the autonomy of labour movements.

We work in unions to impel struggle, and to push positions that are democratic and advance social change. That's why we are more comfortable in alternative and rank and file based unions like *SUD*.

About revolutionary organisations, what is your relationship with the other political anarchist organisations that are active in France? We are thinking particularly about the Fédération Anarchiste (FA)...

AL: Until two years ago, relations between the different French anarchist organisations were really tense, even prone to open conflict. But things have changed a lot. We now have cordial relations with the *Fédération Anarchiste*. We meet regularly, locally as well as federally. That's how we were able to make common proposals in preparation for the anti-G8 mobilisations in France next June.

Our relations are also much improved and have clearly increased with the *No Pasaran* network and *Organisation Communiste Libertaire (OCL)*, thanks to our international work. Our three organisations are members of the network *International Libertarian Solidarity* (www.ils-sil.org). We work really closely together on these issues, which allows us to create relationships of confidence and helps minimise conflicts.

A good example of these new relationships between anarchist organisations is "le Forum Libertaire de Montreuil" (the anarchist forum of Montreuil, which is an east Parisian suburb), which brings together *Alternative Libertaire*, la *Fédération Anarchiste* and the *CNT*. This forum is a common voice, and the first meeting last June brought together about a thousand people, which is a first for the anarchists in Montreuil.

Another initiative that was unthinkable a few years ago: *Alternative Libertaire*, la *Fédération Anarchiste*, le réseau *No Pasaran*, *CNT-Vignoles*, *l'Organisation Communiste Libertaire* et *l'Organisation Socialiste Libertaire* (Switzerland) met together to prepare opposition to G8 meetings, discussed openly and accepted to work as a whole in the same direction!

On the other hand, we can imagine that the heritage of a strong and organised anarchist movement (as it is the case in France) brings benefits to today's anarchist organisations. What is the influence of having worked with important theoreticians such as Daniel Guérin from the time of the Union des Travailleurs Communistes Libertaires (UTCL) or Georges Fontenis within AL today?

AL: We hold today a rich theoretical heritage. One of the past weaknesses of the anarchist movement has been to either perpetually reinvent the wheel by forgetting it's past, or refuse to get out of a sacred anarchist dogma, which doesn't permit advancement. People like Daniel Guérin broke with these vicious circles and made it possible to rethink our struggle along a non-sectarian basis. Unfortunately, for years this has been misunderstood by other components of the French anarchist movement...

You participate in the International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS), an international network of anarcho-communist and anarcho-syndicalist organisations that seeks to help the material development of the international anarchist movement, notably the Latin American movement. Can you explain briefly the projects of the ILS?

AL: The *International Libertarian Solidarity* network was formed in 2001 on the initiative of the Spanish *Confederation General del Trabajo (CGT)* to share reflections on our struggles, to network the international relations that everyone has bilaterally, and to support concrete projects of international solidarity that prove that anarchists can build on a day to day basis.

The current projects are supportive of South America. In Uruguay, we are helping the *FAU* finance a free space in Colon, and a truck for street propaganda. In Brazil, we're helping the *FAG* finance the construction of a community hall in Sepe Tiaraju, the creation of an anarchist press and the reconstruction of the warehouse for a co-operative of (steel) recycling workers. In

Argentina, we support our *OSL* comrades publication 'En la Calle'. Our network now has about twenty organisations and we've already given, together, many thousand dollars to our South American comrades.

Finally a big question. How do you see the future of the international anarchist movement?

AL: At the last *AL* conference, in November 2002, we've noticed a qualitative and quantitative progress of our organisation. We've moved one step ahead. However, we're still far away from bringing about the project of a true anarchist left, a revolutionary project that has a real political impact. But things are advancing politically. The formation of the ILS network, the capacity of the main French anarchist organisations to regroup and work in the same direction on the anti-G8 mobilisation are encouraging signs. But at the same time, we also see the limitations. We're lacking spaces of debate, to confront ideas, to elaborate collectively. You always progress better being numerous than alone.

It's not a question here of falling into bureaucratic slips. But if our tendency wants to profit from today's struggles and from the development of our ideas, we must invent new forms of common work.

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Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA) – Italy

Although smaller in numbers than the synthesis-oriented Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI), the Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA) has provided an important pole for class struggle anarchists in Italy for over fifteen years now. They are an explicitly platformist group, and maintain a high level of organisational discipline throughout the federation. Since our formation, those of us from NEFAC have kept semi-regular contact with the FdCA, and, incidentally, they were one of the groups whose organisational model we studied prior to our founding conference. Below is an interview with Donato Romito, the FdCA's international secretary. English translation by Nestor McNabb (A-Infos Collective, Rome).

**interview by MaRK,
Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

Anarcho-communism has a long history and tradition in Italy, going back to the 1870s, however it seems that most of today's anarchist groups trace their history to the struggles of 1968–69. Were any of the older anarcho-communist tendencies able to survive the period of fascist reaction and influence the newer generations of anarchist militants? Also, what is the specific history of 'platformist' tendencies in Italy?

FdCA: It was 1968–69 when the older members of the FdCA first appeared on the political scene, the years of the workers' and students' movements. Clearly they could not remain unaffected by the strong libertarian, but above all class, elements expressed in those movements. When they approached anarchism, they found there the *Federazione Anarchica Italiana* [*Italian Anarchist Federation, FAI*], a synthesis organisation, which apparently offered a space but which in reality was not an organisation but a collection of individuals of a rather individualist tendency. However, historical readings on Italian and international anarchism showed us that there was instead a continuous line of class-struggle, communist anarchism starting with the First International and proceeding through the social struggles in most parts of the world at the start of the twentieth century, the anti-Bolshevik and anti-Stalinist struggles not to mention the work carried out by anarchists both before and after the Russian Revolution, the Red Years in Italy, the Mexican Revolution and of course the Spanish Revolution.

In Italy, the continuity of anarchist communism was disturbed by various events, the most disastrous of which was without doubt the economic influence of that ItaloAmerican anti-organisation and non-classist anarchism linked with the journal "L'Adunata dei Refrattari" during the fascist and post-war period. One form of "rebellion" against that tendency which had taken over Italian anarchism during the 1950s was the creation of the organisationalist *Gruppi Anarchici di Azione Proletaria* [*Proletarian Action Anarchist Groups, GAAP*].

These groups had some excellent members, but fell apart after they were “kicked out” of the world of “official” anarchism by the *FAI*. Luckily, despite the “excommunications”, many of these comrades continued their class-struggle activity and when they were tracked down at the beginning of the Seventies, were able to pass on their experiences and provide a link between the two periods.

It should also be remembered that, at that time, we were geographically close to the French experience with the *Organisation Révolutionnaire Anarchiste (ORA)* and the Spanish groups who were reorganising against Francoism and, later, following the death of Franco. To sum up, it was the union of these forces which enabled the birth of territorial groups during the Seventies which could take up the reins of communist, class-struggle anarchism in Italy, and allow this tendency to enjoy greater visibility.

At the same time, a revision of the history of Italian anarchism was taking place. Starting with the excellent studies made by Masini (not by chance one of the most prominent militants in the *GAAP*) a series of studies were started, above all by our anarchist communist comrade Dadà. Her volume “L’anarchismo in Italia: fra movimento e partito” [“Anarchism in Italy: Between Movement and Party”] was a turning point in studies on Italian anarchism. It highlighted not only the communist basis of anarchism but also the original theorisation of the principle of “organisational dualism”¹ which had its highest level of theorisation in Italy during the First International, from Bakunin to certain correspondents such as Celso Cerretti, to whom Bakunin wrote a letter clarifying this question (republished together with a lot of other material in the book).

Regarding platformism in Italy, Dadà provided new material which brought new light to the history of anarchism which had up to that point been centred on the role of Malatesta, a synthesis mediator for all tendencies. With the publication of memoirs relating to the Paris meetings, it was discovered that Fabbri, Fedeli and others had been in contact with Arshinov. Even studies on the fascist period, both on the comrades in prison or confined and on those exiles who had fled death, demonstrated further the continuity between the communist, class struggle anarchism of a large part of the anarchist movement in the pre-fascist period and the debates of those years.

To simplify, it can be said that the choice of name of the *Federation of Anarchist Communists* had some significance, particularly in the light of the rediscovery of the previous attempts to found similar organisations the *Unione dei Comunisti Anarchici d’Italia* [Union of Anarchist Communists of Italy] in 1919 (which unfortunately melted into the synthetist *Unione Anarchica Italiana* [Italian Anarchist Union, *UAI*]) and the *Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici* [Federation of Anarchist Communists] in 1944 which unfortunately withdrew into the synthesis *FAI* [Federazione Anarchica Italiana]. The comrades of the anarchist communist tendency which rose again at the start of the ‘70s for the most part did not allow themselves to be drawn into the *FAI*, despite the polemics which this organisation often stirred up in an attempt to discourage their attempts at organisation, and the result is a project which has lasted right up to the present day.

When did the FdCA first form? What social movements or anarchist groups did the original founding members come out of?

FdCA: The FdCA was born in 1986 when the *Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica* [Revolutionary Anarchist Organisation, *ORA*] united with the *Unione Comunisti Anarchici Toscana* [Tuscan Union of Anarchist Communists, *UCAT*]. *ORA* had been in existence for 10 years and had

¹ The original Italian expression is “dualismo organizzativa” and refers to anarchist membership in both specific anarchist organisations and general, mass labour organisations. [Translator’s Notes]

sections in several regions of Italy. *UCAT* had been active in Tuscany for 5–6 years. The *FdCA* is the most recent and most successful Italian anarchist communist organisation since 1986.

How is the federation organised?

FdCA: The *FdCA* is a federation of militants, and sections are formed by several militants in the same town. As an organisation, the *FdCA* is founded on shared ideological elements. There is, therefore, unity on theory, unity on basic strategy and political strategy and general agreement on tactics. Debate is ongoing as far as political strategy and tactics are concerned, which influences the definition of the organisation's program. The political activity of militants is governed by the principle of collective responsibility. The decision-making body is the National Congress, where decisions are made on our political theses, on our press, our internal bodies (such as editorial teams, various committees) and where we elect the Council of Delegates which runs the organisation between congresses and which respects the decisions of congress. Comrades are elected to the Council of Delegates on both a territorial basis and a political basis. The Council of Delegates then elects a National Secretariat which has the task of representing the organisation and co-ordinating the activities of the federation.

In what areas of struggle is the federation active? How would you say that 'platformism' informs your activity within these struggles?

FdCA: The *FdCA* is active above all in the areas of the unions, anti-militarism, environmentalism, the fight for self-managed social spaces and the anti-globalisation movement.

Platformism characterises our activity in four different ways: (1) a strong class-struggle and unity-of-class approach to the struggles; **(2)** careful, detailed analysis of those in struggle and the state of the struggle; **(3)** the search for common, collective policies as a result of debate within the sections; **(4)** our application of the organisational principle of multiple membership, whereby we draw clear distinctions between the tasks and roles of the proletariat's mass organisations and the political organisations of anarchist communists, where confusion and overlapping between the two is avoided and where the activities of anarchist communist militants are informed by this.

What is the FdCA's relationship to the organised Italian workers' movement (the COBAS, the anarcho-syndicalist USI or mainstream trade unions)?

FdCA: Most *FdCA* militants are active within the labour movement, both within the *CGIL*² and in the radical grass-roots unions³. Today, the working class is divided between three traditional unions and five or six grassroots unions. We are not interested in a war between unions as class unity is a fundamental aspect of our strategy and something which goes beyond fidelity to any particular trade union. This is why we try to promote co-ordination committees of delegates, territorial coordination and co-ordination of libertarian union activists: to achieve a more radical syndicalism with libertarian principles. Several of these grassroots unions contain "cobas" in their name⁴, but they differ from the *COBAS Confederation* which in our opinion is a somewhat confused collection of union, political and cultural layers. Then there is the *USI [Unione Sindacale Italiana]*, which maintains its ideological identity as an anarchist union.

How about other anarchist groups such as the FAI?

² The largest confederate trade union in Italy, traditionally linked with the Italian Communist Party. [Translator's Notes]

³ Sometimes known as "base unions", like *CIB Unicobas*, *RdB*, *Sincobas*, etc. [Translator's Notes]

⁴ "Cobas" is an abbreviation of the Italian "comitato di base", or base committee. [Translator's Notes]

FdCA: As we indicated earlier, dealing with the *FAI* has always been difficult. Although it is numerically larger and has its press (the weekly ‘*Umanita Nuova*’), the *FAI* has always been distant from class struggle and the workers’ movement. Recently, however, it has begun to pay more attention to labour issues and a series of debates and common initiatives have been developed between the *FAI* and the *FdCA*.

Italy has a history of extra-parliamentary groups (including anarchists and autonomists) which have carried out armed actions against the State. How do you view these isolated “direct actions” carried out by individuals or small groups? Is there a place for this type of activity within the revolutionary project?

FdCA: Anarchist communists have always rejected armed struggle as the expression of elitist, clandestine, self-appointed vanguards which are detached from the very proletariat they are trying to provide an example of how things should be done. In this way, they create a truly authoritarian relationship between the so-called leading vanguard and the working class. Political assassinations can destroy in moments years and years of unglorious work in the class struggle.

Of course, Italy is one of those countries where the State has always made an instrument of armed struggle, turning it to its advantage, provoking it, or simply allowing it to take place. The Italian State even “used” the dramatic events in Genoa in 2001, with the complicity of the Black Bloc, particularly its foreign elements. In a revolutionary context there can only be room for the armed struggle of the working class, wherever the physical survival of the class and the revolution is threatened. In recent months the road, railway and port blocks by those Fiat workers threatened with redundancy have attracted widespread popular support. These are of course illegal actions carried out by thousands of workers who, for the time being, have managed to impede any repressive action on the part of the State.

When repression does strike, as with the post-Genoa investigations, mass mobilisations have been the response, leading to the release of the comrades who were arrested.

Does the FdCA maintain international ties with other platformist groups?

FdCA: Sure, we have stable relationships with most of the organisations for whom the Platform was an inspiration, both in Europe and further afield. We consider the AP list to be most useful for international debate and on the occasion of Genoa 2001 we promoted a meeting between Platformist organisations. We believe that an international network of co-operation between anarchist communist organisations would be a most valuable tool. At the moment, the *FdCA* is part of the *International Libertarian Solidarity* (ILS) project together with other libertarian political groups and class struggle unions.

What is some of the current activity of the federation? Future plans?

FdCA: Each *FdCA* section has its own activities in relation to the territory it is part of, as the Federation views itself as a political force in relation to the movements and other political groups. In the short term, we will obviously be busy with the anti-militarist campaign against the war in Iraq. Our policy is to build mass anti-militarist committees which operate according to libertarian principles where there can be the greatest possible participation of all those who oppose war, armies and capitalism.

On the union front, we will be working in the fight against the law which seeks to permit the freedom of dismissal for the bosses, together with the fight connected with the renewal of national work contracts in various sectors involving nearly five million workers. We will be part of the movement in defence of non-religious, pluralist, state education against the reform of the education secretary. Although we are part of the anti-globalisation movement, we do not take

part in the Social Forums. We are organising our 3rd National meeting in June (you are all invited, by the way!). Then for the future, our most ambitious project is the usual one to develop and nurture the Federation.

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Organisace Revolučních Anarchistu – Solidarita (ORAS) – Czech Republic

With the collapse of Soviet Communism and growing dissatisfaction with capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe, a new generation of revolutionaries from former Soviet-Bloc countries has come to embrace anarchism. NEFAC has maintained fairly close relations with Organisace Revolučních Anarchistu Solidarita, a relatively young organisation with a similar political orientation to ourselves from the Czech Republic. This is an interview with Vadim Barák and Jindrich Lukas, two active militants from ORAS. Part of this interview was originally conducted in 1998, and printed in Red & Black Revolution #4 (theoretical magazine of the Workers Solidarity Movement). Additional questions appear here for the first time. Since this interview was published, ORAS has split. The arguments and contradictions in ORAS that are plainly visible in the interview, have led to a split between those who now identify primarily as left communists and council communists, and those who still identify themselves as platformist anarcho-communists. Attached to the end of this interview is a statement from a new group, the Anarcho-Komunist Alternative (AKA), made up of the platformist side of the split.

**interview by Kevin Doyle
(WSM-Cork)
& MaRK,
Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

What sort of history do anarchist ideas have in the Czech Republic?

ORAS: Anarchism started here in the 1880s as a youth section of a patriotic and liberal movement against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. When the *Social Democratic Party* was established, its left wing was represented by libertarian socialists, but after several years they were forced to break away. Until WWI the most powerful libertarian current was anarcho-syndicalism. A stronghold of Czech anarcho-syndicalism was in the Northern Bohemian mining regions. Anarcho-syndicalists were soon organising their own union federation, the *Czech General Union Federation* (the CGUF). Repression by the state strangled the CGUF in 1908, but could not destroy the syndicalist spirit among workers and new syndicalist unions like the *Regional Miners Unity* were formed.

By 1914, the *Federation of Czech Anarcho-Communists* (the FCAC) was also well established among Czech workers. Syndicalists and anarchists published a lot of papers such as ‘The Proletarian’. Anarchists established some consumers’ coops. During WW1 there was a general clampdown on the Czech libertarian movement a lot of militants were either jailed or marched to the front; many were killed. Unlike syndicalism, the FCAC survived the war.

In 1918, on 14th October, the *FCAC*'s militants, together with left Social Democrats, organised a 24-hour general strike that in fact marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's domination of our nation. This event made Czech nationalist politicians, who did not want to break away from the empire until that moment, start negotiations with the empire about our independence. Strikers were demanding our right to national independence and a creation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. After a day the strike was called off by the Social Democratic leadership. On October 28th, ordinary people mainly in Prague rose up again to finish off the decaying Austro-Hungarian authorities.

At that time the leading anarcho-communist intellectuals were already moving towards Leninism. One of them became an MP in the parliament of the new republic and another was a minister of the first government. On the other hand it tells a lot about anarcho-communist influence at the time. In 1918 the anarcho-communists became the left wing of the *Czechoslovak Socialist Party* (the *CSSP*). In 1923, anarcho-communists were expelled from the *CSSP* and their leaders manoeuvred them into a last step before an open unification with the *Communist Party (CP)*, which had already been established in 1921 by left Social Democrats and left anarcho-communists, who openly converted to Bolshevism (in fact they were the first here to translate Lenin's works.) This last step led to the formation of the *Independent Socialist Party* (the *ISP*). In 1925 the *ISP*, despite resistance from the last remnants of syndicalism the *Association of Czechoslovak Miners*, which was tied to the anarchocommunists abandoned federalism and other anarchist principles and joined the *CP*.

Was there anarchist activity in Czechoslovakia in the lead up to the Velvet Revolution (1989)?

ORAS: Yes, there was an anarchist minority in an illegal party called the *Left Alternative (LA)*. This party was very small and composed mainly of intellectuals and students who belonged to various currents of democratic and revolutionary socialism. They opposed the Communist regime and pursued a program of socialism based on workers' self-management and direct democracy. As freedom of speech and association did not exist, the *LA* remained confined to being a more or less discussion group, not an organisation active among working class people.

During the Velvet Revolution the *LA* gained some credibility among ordinary people, and in Prague the centre of the revolution it made significant steps to becoming a real working class alternative. In the first local elections, 10,000 people voted for the *LA* in Prague. But by then the revolution had been usurped by careerist dissident intellectuals and former Communist bureaucrats. They took over a movement of Citizens' Forums and the state apparatus, and by means of a massive propaganda campaign succeeded in persuading people that we could not have socialism with democracy that the only way was the western 'market economy' idea.

This new situation saw the *LA* once more in a position of isolated discussion circles. This time it was fatal. Some of its leading figures were moving towards a pro-market position, sectarianism occurred and in the end its internal conflicts destroyed it. ***Tell us a little about your formation. Is Solidarita a completely new organisation or did you develop from another organisation?***

ORAS: *Solidarita* developed from the *Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF)*, whose roots reach to the *LA*. After 1990, in a time of the greatest illusions about the market economy and consequently the greatest isolation of the left (no matter whether pro-market or socialist), the *ASF* sank into a deep sectarianism and dogmatism which it has not recovered from yet.

But after this interval, there was a change: The first union struggles occurred; students fought back against the introduction of fees for education at universities; there was more and more support among people for environmentalist campaigns; in general the discontent of the working population was growing. A minority in the *ASF* did its best to be involved in this ferment and tried to translate its experience from those struggles into an internal debate in the *ASF*. That debate should have changed the *ASF* into an active and effective libertarian organisation. However, the majority in the *ASF* refused to discuss our proposals and we had to leave. Since that time (1996), *Solidarita* has been working to build itself. Our theoretical and organisational development is not finished yet. Through continuous involvement in local as well as national struggles of workers and young people, and through discussions, we are accumulating experience and clarifying our ideas. We describe ourselves either as anarcho-syndicalists or libertarian socialists.

How has “platformism” influenced Solidarita-ORA and informed your group’s activity?

ORAS: In the second half of the 1990s we accepted the platformist tradition of anarcho-communism as the best one offered by anarchism: for both its emphasis on class struggle and pro-organisational direction, as well as for its orientation towards the working class rather than the activists’ ghetto.

However, the self-reflection of our functioning has reminded us that our group lacks deeper, critical discussions which would allow us to look for the most coherent theory/praxis; this self-reflection has influenced further functioning of *ORAS*.

The discussions, which we have tried to develop since then, concern the fundamental questions such as “What is Capital?”, “What precisely is the fundamental contradiction of capitalism?”, “Are unions possible weapons of the working class for communisation of society?”, “What are the possibilities and limits of revolutionary minority in non-revolutionary times?”, “How can we involve ourselves in day-to-day class struggles and still keep our revolutionary attitudes?”. These are practical questions for us, which we as proletarians within the (libertarian) communist tendency ask ourselves and which spring from certain experiences of ours experiences that we gain from the class struggles and workplaces and from the “activist” involvement with the anarchist movement. We believe that not burdening ourselves with difficult critical debate for the benefit of “political realism” and “action in the here and now” does not pay off. However, we also think that becoming “revolutionary” academics would not be the right path to take.

The Platform indeed was not the Bible for us; it meant the beginning and not the end of revolutionary theory (also, we take into account that it is concerned with building mass organisation in revolutionary times). We started to search also for another sources of inspiration: we have returned to Marx and have absorbed influences of left communism, Situationism, council communism and autonomist Marxism. We understand them not as some petrified sets of doctrine, one of which we could accept separately or mix them all mechanically, but we regard them as the historical expressions of proletarian movement to which we can relate. And we think that this process has to be continuous. That means that while some of us are inclined rather towards the “pure platformism” and others would rather call themselves simply “communists”. We refuse to blindly adhere to any ideology. On this level we strive for the theoretical reflection of a real movement of the proletariat.

What is the relationship between Solidarita and other anarchist groups active in the Czech Republic and Slovakia? Is there much collaboration? Are there any formal anarchist networks between the various former Eastern Bloc countries?

ORAS: Our relationship with other anarchist groups seems to be relatively good. On some actions we co-operate with the *Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation (CSAF)*, *March 8th Feminist Group (FS8B)*, *Anti-Fascist Action (AFA)*, *Federation of Social Anarchists (FSA)*, and *Reclaim the Streets! (UL!)*. Also, to various extents, some of our members and supporters collaborate with *AFA*, and we distribute some of the materials of all these groups.

As for the formal anarchist networks between Eastern European countries, there does not seem to be any. Rather it is more of an informal, though organised, exchange of information through mailing lists (alter-EE mailing list, for instance) and occasional visits. Also an international anarchist magazine “Abolishing the Borders From Below” should be meant as a tool for an exchange of information.

What is Solidarita’s position relative to the unions? Do you favour the formation of new syndicalist unions?

ORAS: Despite all the problems with the present unions, we believe in working inside them. We believe they are real working class organisations. Within them we argue for a syndicalist alternative of combative and democratic unions run ‘by workers for workers’, where all delegates would be immediately recallable so that workers would control their own struggles. Unions should be active not only in a workplace, but also in communities. They should take part in struggle against racism and fascism, in environmental campaigns. Their final goal should be transformation of this society of market dictatorship into a libertarian socialist society of social justice, workers’ self-management and grassroots democracy.

That kind of union can come into existence only through our active participation in present day unions and through a rank and file movement in these unions for control over their organisations and fights.

How is Solidarita involved in workplace struggles? I have read reports about the “Workers Actions Groups” you have formed in various factories. What is the strategy behind these groups? How effective have they been in advancing militancy and self-organisation among workers?

ORAS: Now we are involved in workplace struggles mainly as individuals, who work on a particular job. Thus some of our members practice absenteeism, sabotage, slow work, or occasionally participate in some collective attempts at resistance (for example, an attempt of cleaning workers to fight for shorter hours and higher pay). As *ORAS* we have occasionally tried to intervene in factories, where mass layoffs have occurred.

Examples of an older form of this kind of intervention are “Workers Action Groups” (WAG). Actually, we took this idea from striking Czech miners from the Kohi-noor mine, who spontaneously developed a practice where the most radical workers acted as an informal group, which in some kind started and/or prolonged the struggle. As this was in the time of relatively widespread industrial unrest, in which unions proved to play fully on the side of the capitalists, we tried to voice this particular miner’s tactic (independent of unions, and to some extent even an anti-unionist position) to other workers, who felt that under the leadership of unions they were losing. In two cases we were to some extent successful, because a kind of WAGs was established and they tried to put up resistance. In the Zetor tractor factory three workers of the 8-member WAG handed out leaflets calling for a general workers assembly to be held at a particular hour. This assembly in front of company headquarters was attended by about 1,000 of their workmates. However, as this idea of the resistance outside and against unions had not organically originated from their previous struggle (as in the case of miners), but had come as a mediated experience

from an outside group, they were not able to develop this situation any further. WAG was intimidated by joint efforts of unions and management, and gathered workers were not prepared to do anything themselves. An important factor in this definitely also was that workers themselves sensed that under objective conditions than they have no chance of accomplishing any significant victory. Even the miners were able only to put off the closure of their pit. To some extent (and with the same outcome) WAGs also contributed in the case of Zetor, and an aircraft factory LET Kunovice, where workers self-organisation finished after a spontaneous demo.

From these experiences we concluded that although under some conditions a revolutionary group can inspire workers self-organisation, it cannot move the particular struggle of workers any further if the workers do not do this themselves, on the basis of their own experience and perception of their own conditions. Thus in a next case of mass layoffs (Flextronics Brno moving its operations to China), we just made a leaflet describing individual forms of a passive resistance against layoffs, explaining them as a latent form of class struggle. We knew that workers themselves realistically do not believe in a possibility to prevent the relocation of the plant and do not even strive for preserving those shit-jobs. That is why we just tried to contribute to their self-awareness and express our own conclusions derived from their experience with multi-national capital.

What is some of the current activity of Solidarita? Future plans?

ORAS: We have been able to launch discussions and reading groups (most recently around Dauvé's 'Eclipse and Re-Emergence of Communist Movement') with relative success. These have aroused the interest of new people, who take part in them along with us and that is positive.

One of our most important contemporary projects is 'Alarm: The Internet Magazine of Libertarian Communism'. As we note in the mission statement, its aim "is not to make a counterweight to official newspapers: we just want to express our everyday experience of life in the capitalist society, its reflections and the anarchistcommunist tendency, which is an expression of this experience: tendency, which rejects present private capitalism in the same way as state capitalism, which ruled the Eastern bloc before 1989, as arbitrary forms taken by the dictatorship of capital." 'Alarm' contains news from class struggles all over the world and from struggles of the anarchist movement and other anti-capitalist minorities, as well as important contributions to the development of revolutionary theory. Besides this we irregularly publish a paper called 'Solidarity' aimed primarily at proletarians, and some pamphlets.

Our Prague collective is also involved with running an info-café called "Mole's Column", which costs us a lot of energy, time and money. In this way we would like to express our gratitude to all foreign comrades, who have sent contributions for this project, as well as to those who send their press materials to reading room/library, which will be the part of the info-café (Troploin, Loren Goldner, *Alternative Libertaire*, *WSM*, *NEFAC*, *ICG*, *Internationalist Perspectives*, etc.). And again I have to mention our comrades, who work with *AFA* and try to develop a communist critique of anti-fascism and search for communist ways of struggle against fascism.

Recently we were involved in a campaign and protests against NATO summit, which took place in Prague in November 2002. As *ORAS*, we have not been involved with the organisers' collective for the whole time, but in accordance with our capacities we helped out with some specific activities. In the Moravian region we made a speaking tour explaining our position towards NATO, refusing capitalist wars and peace and arguing for "No War But The Class War" and in the same spirit we co-organised a smaller anti-NATO gathering in Brno. We also participated in the protests themselves, in the Medical Group and in the self-organisation of demonstrators

against police provocateurs and capitalist media. We were also bringing topical news from the streets in “Alarm”.

As for the future plans, we are determined to further develop revolutionary theory and search for new modes of intervention in class struggles, although we have no illusions that this will be anything other than a very challenging process.

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AKA – Anarcho-Komunist Alternative

A founding declaration

We are a small, newly established group of revolutionary anarchists, who feel the need of further active co-operation after our resignation from the *Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists – Solidarity*.

Our ascending discontent with the current trends in this organisation and interpersonal disagreements prompted our resignation. It is over a year that the issue of revolutionary theory and practice have been discussed in *Solidarity* and nowadays *ORAS* is finally leaving the positions of anarcho-communism, which was entirely confirmed at the last *ORAS* conference in Prague. There several members of *ORAS* clearly expressed that they no more consider themselves to be anarchists and that they believe the anarchist movement to be anti-revolutionary. Such movements as the left communism and the communism nowadays inspire *ORAS*. For that reason a fraction of members from Brno, Uh. Hradiste and Prerovsko left *ORAS* in protest and founded the *Anarcho-Communist Alternative*. We did so for several reasons:

Although the ideas of the left communism or the council communism can be inspiring in many cases, we object to the refusal of the platform tradition in anarchist movement as of the directions to form the tactics of a revolutionary organisation, which is being rejected by a number of left communists and said to be contra revolutionary. Furthermore we disagree with the refusal of political activism and the syndical elements in the worker’s struggle. We still believe the anarchist organisation to be an ideological “vanguard” that associates the most libertarian-conscious part of the working class and also to be the helper and the mastermind of the organisation of workers in the struggle against capitalism. With our unionisation we can contribute to the limitation of the authoritarian ideologies such as bolshevism and its scions, fascism and nationalist socialism

We don’t reject activism, according to us it has still been one of the best ways to spread revolutionary ideas among workers, but at the same time we don’t think it to be the only way. We will continue to support the trade union struggle, as though with emphasis put on its independence and the promotion of solidarity and autonomy principles. That is because we don’t think the organising at workplaces has outlived its usefulness. There are still many possibilities of radical trade union activities in both our country and the world. It is true, that these are reformist, but only thanks to the struggle for partial elements the work class can gain revolutionary consciousness and learn self-unionising.

We don't feel ourselves to be anarcho-syndicalists, autonomes, ecoprimitivists, or anarcho-individualists. We are anarcho-communists and that is why we consider the revolutionary anarchist organisation important. Temporarily, we plan this new project as a propagandist collective of the people, who want to spread the ideas of the class struggle with all their forces (by means of brochures, leaflets, magazines and public activities) and to develop theoretical discuss that can later lead to a more profiled anarchist organisation based on platformist principles.

We want to continue in everything that we consider positive, which was started in the times of still "anarchist" *Solidarity* and in which we participated actively.

The 12 of April 2003
The founding members of
Anarcho-Komunist Alternative

aka-cz@email.cz

Bikisha Media Collective (BMC) – South Africa

South Africa is a country where platformist influence has had a huge impact on the burgeoning anarchist movement. The Bikisha Media Collective is a young platformist organisation that formed out of the remnants of the Workers Solidarity Federation, which dissolved in 1999. They have a very active presence in numerous social movements and popular struggles, and continue to provide an inspiring example of what can be accomplished when anarchists get organised. Those of us from NEFAC have always maintained good relations with comrades from the BMC, and we are very pleased to be able to include them in this series. Below is an interview with Michael Schmidt, who is the group's international secretary.

**interview by MaRK,
Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

Could you start by giving a general history of class struggle anarchism in South Africa?

BMC: The first known anarchist activity in southern Africa occurred in the 1870s when the black flag flew over the Kimberley diamond diggings during an industrial dispute. It is thought that several exiled Communards participated in this uprising. Between 1896 and 1905, anarchist militants deported from Portugal spent time in jails in Mozambique. It was there, in the early days of the 20th Century, that the anarchist printer Jose Estevam, having been released from prison, established the first known anarchist organisation in the region, the *Revolutionary League* (RL) of Lourenco-Marques, a city which today is the capital Maputo.

Anarchism emerged in late nineteenth-century South Africa, notably through the pioneer work of Henry Glasse. It was only in the early 1900s that the movement began to assume a more organised form.

The *Social Democratic Federation*, founded in Cape Town, included anarchists as well as other leftists, ranging from radicals to reformists (the founder of the *SDF*, Wilfrid Harrison, described himself as a philosophical anarchist). ‘The Voice of Labour’, a weekly radical labour paper, started in 1908 or so and began to cover anarcho-syndicalist and anarchist ideas with increasing frequency, and in 1910 two specifically *IWW*-style organisations emerged: the *IWW* and the *Socialist Labour Party*, each of which identified with a different faction in the *IWW* split in the US and elsewhere over “political action.” Needless to say, they were quite hostile to one another!

In 1915, a far more significant development took place: the founding of the *International Socialist League* (*ISL*), which brought together the veterans of the bythen defunct *IWW* and *SLP* as well as a radical anti-war group that had emerged within, and had left, the rightwing *South African Labour Party*. The *ISL* soon adopted an *IWW* approach; never calling themselves anarchists, they were committed to a revolutionary industrial unionism that would unite South African workers across race, ethnicity and skill.

At the time, South Africa's workforce was divided racially, with most skilled jobs being the preserve of whites, unskilled labour undertaken by blacks (under indenture contracts and strict controls over movement and residence), with Indians, Coloureds ("mixed-race", a large group) and poor whites falling somewhere in the middle.

The *ISL* tried (without much success, although *ISL* militants became leading radical unionists in Witwatersrand unions), to reform white craft unions in an *IWW* direction, whilst also beginning attempts at unionising other workers: in 1917 the *ISL* helped found the *Industrial Workers of Africa* (*IWA*, originally called the *IWW* but changed after a month or so) in Johannesburg, this being the first trade union for black workers in South African history and probably the first in British colonial Africa; that same year it also founded the *Indian Workers Industrial Union* in Durban; in 1919 it founded two unions in Kimberly, mainly based amongst the predominantly coloured workforce there, these being the *Clothing Workers Industrial Union*, which also emerged in other centres, and the *Horse Drivers Union*.

Another *IWW* aligned group, the *Industrial Socialist League* (*IndSL*), which took a strictly anti-electoral line (the *ISL* saw elections as a platform for propaganda), emerged independently in Cape Town in 1918 as a split from what its founders saw as a passive, propaganda-only *SDF*. They launched a monthly paper entitled, ironically, *The Bolshevik* (a term that at that time was synonymous with "insurrectionist"). The *IndSL* also formed a union, mainly amongst coloured factory workers, called the *Sweet and Jam Workers Industrial Union*. Like their counterparts in the *ISL*, *IndSL* members became very prominent in the Cape mainstream union federation, but with little effect in terms of winning the organisations as a whole to anarcho-syndicalism. The formation of unions amongst blacks, coloureds and Indians from 1917 onwards marked an important step forward for the South African anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists. The *IWW* and *SLP* had, before World War I, actively opposed racial prejudice amongst white workers, and preached inter-racial unionism, but remained entirely, it seems, based amongst whites.

The main body of *ISL* and *IndSL* members were also whites, mainly working class as well, with a large number of East European Jews as well as Scots, and Irish represented. However, with the unions formed from 1917, the overall racial composition of the anarcho-syndicalist "movement" (as opposed to specific groups like the *ISL* and *IndSL*) changed radically.

The leading black, coloured and Indian workers in these unions adopted anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and either joined the *ISL*, or took these ideas with them into the *African National Congress*, which on the Witwatersrand had, by 1918, a significant anarcho-syndicalist presence in its leadership, whose views were made felt in the 1918–19 period in particular. For the *ISL*, the *IndSL* and the militants in the unions associated with these organisations, revolutionary industrial unions were seen as serving several complementary functions: uniting workers across race and combating prejudice; providing the basis for mass campaigns against racial laws; and laying the basis for a "general lockout of the capitalist class" and worker selfmanagement.

In 1921, the *ISL*, *SDF* and *IndSL* all played a leading role in founding the *Communist Party of SA*. This marked the death knell of the "first wave" of anarchist organising in South Africa. Although some key figures in the *CPSA* continued to hold syndicalist and anti-racist views, such as Percy Fisher. The huge purges that took place in the Party in the 1930s, the weight of Stalinist ideas, boosted by the immense prestige of the USSR, and the rise of Trotskyism and Black Nationalism all contributed to the decline of libertarian currents. *CPSA* expellees with a libertarian background tended to become Trots (e.g. Frank Glass from the Cape) or move into nationalism (e.g. Johnny Gomas from Kimberly).

It is notable that many of the black, coloured and Indian militants in the *ISL* and *IndSL*-linked unions, joined the CPSA. The *IWA* became absorbed into a new black general union, the *ICU*, founded in 1921 (a successor to an organisation of the same name founded in Cape Town in 1919 which had variously co-operated and competed with the *IWA* section there on the Cape Town docks).

The *ICU* did adopt a version of the *IWW* preamble, and the rhetoric of the general strike, but cannot be considered more than quasi-syndicalist: the revolutionary general strike jostled with nationalist millenarianism, Garveyism and traditional ideologies in an unstable (and terribly organised) union melange that survived until the 1940s, but was effectively dead by the late 1920s.

Following the collapse of the *ICU*, anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism maintained only a twilight existence in the shadow of Stalinism and Black Nationalism. During the Spanish Revolution of 1936–1939, several South Africans fought on the side of the republic against the fascists, as part of the 40,000 volunteers from 53 nations who defended the republic, but it is not known if any of them were specifically anarchist. Research will be done into this aspect.

Although some anarchist materials were available in South Africa in later years for instance, through the radical Vanguard Books in Johannesburg and although some anarchist materials were banned after 1950 (in terms of the sweeping “Suppression of Communism Act,” which also banned the *CPSA*), it was only in the 1980s that the beginnings of a new wave, a “second wave” of organised anarchist activism began.

Following the adoption of the armed struggle in South Africa in 1961 by the *ANC*’s armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (*MK*), several libertarians joined in the fight. At least one anarchist, Thomas Meyer, a white teacher of black students in the far north of the country, is known to have joined *MK* as an anarchist and was involved in smuggling materials into South Africa from neighbouring Botswana.

There was a revival of interest in anarchism among student groups in 1968 as a result of the French Revolt of that year which saw students provoke a national crisis that saw 10-million workers go out on strike, many towns become self-managing and the near-collapse of General Charles de Gaulle’s regime. At the then whites-only University of the Witwatersrand, for instance, three students ran on an anarchist ticket for the Students’ Representative Council in 1968 and one was elected, but their understanding of anarchism tended to be chaotic and was overshadowed by the Trotskyists and other authoritarian Communist groups.

From the 1973 Durban strikes onwards, the black trade union movement, which had been moribund since the late 1920s (excluding the 1946 miner’s strike) was revived and syndicalist elements again developed. Leading revolutionary syndicalists at this time included Rick Turner, who was assassinated in 1978, apparently by an apartheid death squad.

By the time the *Congress of South African Trade Unions* (*COSATU*) was founded in 1985, syndicalism, usually termed the “workerist” tendency, was very powerful. Vigorous debates took place within *COSATU* between the syndicalists and the *SACP*-aligned “populists” who wanted it to ally with the cross-class nationalist *ANC*. Although the populists won the argument, syndicalism remained strong within *COSATU* at the time.

In the 1980s, white, and to a lesser extent, Indian youth involved in the punk subculture played a role in the revival of anarchism, whilst there were also individual black anarchists in a number of townships. ‘Zines were the main form of anarchist writing at this stage, and analyses of the South African situation were rather weak, with ‘zines reflecting the punk subculture for the most part. The “movement” at this stage had no organisational form, no platforms and no noticeable

effect on the big struggles of the period, but did form part of the anti-militarist, anti-racist culture of resistance.

In 1992, two years before apartheid came to an end, but while neo-fascism, state-sponsored death-squad activity, military conscription and murderous largescale battles between the nationalist “liberation movements” like the *ANC* were common, an organised group, called the *Anarchist Revolutionary Movement (ARM)* was formed. But it was not very coherent and so not very effective. A large section of the organisation remained within the counter-cultural ghetto; however, an *ARM* section at the University of the Witwatersrand campus which included people associated with the ‘Revolt’ zine, produced in 1992 consciously focused on work in the student movement and had some success in recruiting an integrated membership, and developing an analysis of South African capitalism that sought to link the struggle against apartheid to the struggle against capitalism, arguing for a workers democracy rather than a bourgeois post-colonial regime. It produced a once-off magazine ‘Unrest’.

In retrospect the student section of *ARM* was somewhat too dogmatic and extremist. In 1995, following the 1994 all-race general election that brought the *ANC* to power, the *ARM* became the *Workers Solidarity Federation (WSF)*, which grew by 1999 to around 40 members, around 80% of them black and working class. The *WSF* was influenced deeply by the platformism of the *Workers Solidarity Movement* in Ireland, and developed a rigorous set of position papers and materials, which we carry online today under our “literature” section of the *Zabalaza* website. The theoretical work of the *WSF* marked an enormous step forward for South African anarchism and continues to provide the basic framework of ideas for current organised South African anarchists. The *WSF* was originally based in Johannesburg but soon linked up with anarchists in Durban and Cape Town, becoming the first national anarchist organisation since the 1910s. The *WSF* produced the journal ‘Workers’ Solidarity’, which incorporated Unrest. It came out twice a year.

In the early 1990s, the *Durban Anarchist Federation (DAF)* was formed, consisting of three groups: a propaganda collective, a green collective and a “riot grrl” collective. The propaganda collective was initially known as the *Anarchist Awareness League*, then later *Land & Freedom* and throughout the 1990s, it published the journal ‘Freedom’ which was in English with some articles in Zulu. *Land & Freedom* continues today as *Zabalaza Books (ZB)*. The *DAF* initially worked alongside the *WSF*, but declined an invitation to join it, being far more affinity-based, but a Durban section of the *WSF* was established. The *DAF* transformed into the *Anarchist Workers’ Group (AWG)* in the late 1990s but the *AWG* collapsed several months later because of internal political and personal differences. I would personally say its collapse came about because it repudiated platformism, relying on weak friendship-based affinity group organising. In practice, what happened was that when members had a falling out, the *AWG* fell apart because their political “cement” was not strong enough.

The *WSF* was involved in workers’ marches, student occupations, and propaganda work; it even flirted with the notion of forming a union at one stage! However, it saw itself as a specific political group, and not a union, such as the *IWW* or *CNT*. *WSF* saw itself more as an *FAI*, and in general aimed to work within existing unions, rather than form new red unions. It also maintained extensive international links, including with anarchists in other African countries, but until the recent signing up with the *International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS)* we had no contact with Latin American groups, mainly due to language barriers. Thanks to our involvement with the *ILS*, this is now changing and we see it as important because conditions for organisations like

the *FAG* in Brazil are far more similar to those in South Africa than those of European or North American organisations.

In August 1998, following a talk given in Lusaka, Zambia, by myself to an audience of about 40 members of the Marxist-Leninist Socialist Caucus and the University of Zambia Cuba Friendship Association, the *Anarchist & Workers' Solidarity Movement (AWSM)* was established by self-taught anarchist Wilstar Choongo. It was the first known anarchist group in Central Africa since the hey-day of the anarcho-syndicalist influenced *Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU)* which peaked at 100,000 members in 1927 with a section in Zambia. The *AWSM* consisted of both worker and student members. Close relations were maintained between the *AWSM* and the *WSF*, but the former appears to have collapsed in mid-1999 following Choongo's death by malaria.

In 1999, the *WSF* was dissolved for a range of reasons, the foremost of which were: weak internal education, leading to a degree of organisational ineffectiveness; the view that it was premature to launch a specific anarchist political organisation, as our small numbers trapped us in the classic ghetto of the far left (an organisation that starts small remains small because it is too small to attract serious attention as an alternative for workers; a Catch-22 situation); and the fact that objective conditions had yet to change within the working class. Over the past two years, those objective conditions have now changed, with the class now starting to mobilise against the neo-liberal regime of the *ANC*.

How did the Bikisha Media Collective first form?

BMC: The ex-*WSF* militants chose to focus on building anarchists rather than building an organisation. In other words, the strategic focus shifted from trying to win people to an organisation, and instead to the broadest possible diffusion of relevant anarchist materials and literature to the widest layer of workers, with an emphasis on the black unemployed youth. The groundwork for future anarchist action could be laid in this way. In 1999, two projects (not organisations) were prioritised: *Bikisha Media Collective*, founded in 1999, and *Zabalaza Books*, which was already established in Durban which worked closely together to produce and distribute a wide range of pamphlets and materials, and, more recently, a journal called 'Zabalaza' (issue #4 of which is currently in production).

Militants were expected to be involved in the class struggle: for instance, *Bikisha* affiliated to the *Anti-Privatization Forum (APF)* in Johannesburg, and the *Zabalaza Action Group* to the *Concerned Citizens' Forum (CCF)* in Durban. The main objective of the projects is to provide theoretical and practical support for the emergent social movements.

How would you say 'platformism' has influenced your activity?

BMC: Platformism has proven to be a vital instrument in welding together an organisation of hardcore class-war anarchists over the past decade. It has given us the organisational and intellectual tools necessary to take on the tasks we have and to stay the distance. During the *WSF* days it enabled us to analyse the South African transition in a non-sentimental light and to focus on practical activism.

Since the founding of the *BMC*, with the Workers' Library & Museum, we managed to carve out an independent anti-governmental space in very hostile circumstances (*ANC* and *SACP* opposition, financial bankruptcy and corruption). This not only helped establish us as serious, hard-working, practical and constructive activists that communists and others were forced to take seriously despite our small size, but located us at the heart of the new social movements when they developed later. I believe platformism was vital to ensuring we kept cool, focused and self-disciplined enough to weather the storms and reach the point we are at now: ready to

form a regional anarchist federation based among the black poor, at the barricades of the social movements.

You define yourselves foremost as a propaganda group. Are there any plans to eventually link up with other South African anarchist groups and developing into a more formal anarchist federation?

BMC: We have all been linked from the outset into a regional anarchist network and cooperate on a number of different projects. Many projects have cross-membership. Briefly, the main elements of the regional network are:

1. *Bikisha Media Collective* (Cape Town & Johannesburg propagandists & activists: ran the Workers' Library & Museum in Johannesburg, produces new works on anarchism applied to local conditions; fights against housing evictions, water & electricity cut-offs; some involvement in workers' radio)
2. *Zabalaza Books* (Johannesburg publishers and producers of anarchist pamphlets, flyers, books & T-shirts, publishes Freedom, runs the zabalaza.net website)
3. *Zabalaza Action Group* (Umlazi, Durban township militants: built the anarcho-syndicalist *Workers' Council*; runs workshops at the Workers' College, fights evictions & cut-offs)
4. *Workers' Council* (Durban rank & file network of 60 workers belonging to different trade unions)
5. *Forest City Collective* (Johannesburg urban ecology group involved in anti-militarism and self-defence)
6. *Shesha Action Group* (Soweto township study group and community food garden)
7. *People's Library* (Soweto township tooland book-lending library, study group and community food garden)
8. *Anarchist Black Cross* (regional class war prisoner & refugee/immigrant support, runs the non-sectarian Anti-Repression Network and publishes Black Alert)
9. *Red & Black Forum* (Johannesburg quarterly anarchist discussion group for people interested in anarchist perspectives on social issues)

In addition, there is the *Smithfield Study Group* (rural group based in the Free State, fighting farm evictions and neo-Nazi farmers. Their emphasis on fascism rather than the capitalist state as the primary enemy makes them the sole local group with a substantial difference to us). There are also individual anarchists in centres like Khayelitsha (Cape Town township), Pretoria and the Johannesburg inner city that we connect with.

Our regional membership including all groups, for your interest, is about 122 black, 13 white, 1 Indian, 1 coloured, of which a minority of about a quarter are women, a distinct weakness at this stage, which we believe will change as we get more involved in the social movements. The "racial" spread pretty much reflects the national population. Most are unemployed urban black youth, but one of our oldest active members is a 42-year-old Class of '76 township militant.

Experience, clarity of anarchist theory/practice and enthusiasm varies, but we have some really tireless fire-brands who will literally walk for four hours to reach a meeting! Members are mostly working class and come from a variety of political backgrounds, including the *SACP*, Trotskyist tendencies, *PAC*, *ANC* and even the *IFP*. We have Christian, Muslim and atheist members. We have no armed wing, but our collective military experience is notable: we have members who during apartheid were army conscripts and others who were township militiamen.

On December 16, 2002, at Soweto, the *BMC*, the *Zabalaza Action Group (ZAG)*, *Zabalaza Books (ZB)* and the *Anarchist Black Cross (ABC-SA)* proposed at a meeting with the *Shesha Action Group (SAG)* and the *People's Library (PL)* the founding of a regional anarchist federation to be named the *Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF)*. The name reflects the powerful attraction of egalitarian communism in South Africa. The *ZACF* was proposed because of the rapid expansion of the anarchist movement in South Africa, in the townships of Gauteng, Durban and Cape Town in particular (the movement tripled over the past year); the need to coordinate between these groups in order to effectively engage with the dynamic new social movements in both urban and rural areas; the need to unite the southern African anarchist movement, based on clear (anti-)political, tactical and strategic lines in order to provide a home to genuine grassroots revolutionaries; and the need for an effective anarchist strategy for combating capitalist exploitation and state repression and to inject anti-authoritarian politics into the social movements.

We do not wish to merely build an organisation for its own ends, but a) because history shows us that specific anarchist organisations are required to form an ideological/practical centre of gravity to weld militant grassroots forces into a libertarian weapon against the elites, even those within the social movements; b) that at times of rapid growth, anarchist education and co-ordination is vital in order to present a solid challenge to Marxist-Leninists and other opportunists on the ground.

The proposal includes the following:

PRINCIPLES: That the *ZACF* be founded on revolutionary anarchist-communist principles. By anarchism we mean opposition to all forms of authority, be they social, political or economic and by communist we mean a mode of production and distribution based on the principle "from each according to ability, to each according to need". That the federation stands for direct democracy, functional equality, horizontal federalism, workers' self-management, and revolutionary anti-capitalism and antistatism. That the *ZACF* base itself on the proud fighting tradition of more than 140 years of anarchist-communist history and on those anarchists like Thomas Thibedi, Bernard Sigamoney, Kapan Reuben and Talbot Williams who founded the revolutionary syndicalist unions in South Africa in 1917–1919. That the federation base itself on the 1927 'Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists': federalism, tactical and theoretical unity, and collective action and responsibility.

STRUCTURE: That the *ZACF* be a horizontal federation of anarchist projects, groups and individuals, networked together in common revolutionary anarchist cause. That each group, project and individual retain its autonomy of action, so long as it is not deemed by a majority of the federation to be in contradiction of federation or anarchist principles. [I envisage that the functions of the various groups publishing, prisoner support etc will continue under the *ZACF*]. That the federation decides at its annual congresses on joint projects and that it maintain constant contact with all members to ensure efficient co-ordination of all aims.

MEMBERSHIP: That membership of the *ZACF* be restricted to reliable, convinced anarchist revolutionaries who agree to abide by the federation's principles and who are active in the radical

social movements. That membership be on an individual basis [by invitation only, I propose], but that a group that has all its members join be confirmed as a member section of the federation.

FUNCTIONS: That the primary functions of the *ZACF* be to a) provide theoretical and practical support to revolutionary working class autonomous organisation and to defend the class against political opportunists; b) provide theoretical and material support to the broader anarchist, autonomist and anti-authoritarian left movement in the region; c) maintain regular continental and international contacts with the global revolutionary anarchist movement.

CONGRESSES: That the *ZACF* should hold regional congresses once a year which will set the entire federation's tactics and strategy for the forthcoming year. That a majority of the federation can call an emergency regional congress within a month if needed. That sub-regional meetings be held in the main centres of activity four times a year or more frequently as required. That the founding congress establishes the rules of decision-making at congresses and meetings (including what is meant by terms like "majority"), so long as they conform to anarchist and platformist principles. That decision-making be as far as possible by consensus. That congress can elect immediately-recallable commissions to cover federation projects such as printing its journal. That groups and projects convene their own meetings as frequently as they deem necessary to ensure efficient operations.

Anarchists and anarchist groups from across the country are currently being polled on the proposal with the intention to draw up a draft constitution for debate at the founding congress of the *ZACF* later this year, possibly around May Day.

What are some of the main difficulties of class struggle organising in postapartheid South Africa?

BMC: There are two sets of problems; practical and political. Practical problems include the extreme poverty of the people (75% of all homes don't have food security, hence the anarchist community food gardens). This means that our activists and those they work with are often hungry and too broke to pay for transport and telephones, which in turn makes networking and meeting difficult. Poverty also means that practical projects are delayed because of a lack of funds and that *BMC* and *ZB* (which have employed members) have had to provide things such as building materials or tools. Another practical problem is the migrant labour system, combined with traditional duties which urban sons & daughters often have to perform at home in the rural areas. This means comrades sometimes simply disappear for months on end, not having been able to phone to alert us, only to reappear in some distant part of the country.

Political problems include the aggressive attitude of the ruling neo-liberal *ANC*, which is in government with the social-democratic *SACP* and Zulu chauvinist *IFP* towards the "ultra-left". This has involved over 500 arrests last year, many of them pre-emptive, police attacks on peaceful marches, assaults on comrades in jail by police, the threatened or actual deportation of foreign-born activists, demonisation of the social movements in the mainstream media, and spying and harassment by National Intelligence Agency spooks. Another political problem is the demobilisation and demoralisation of civil society: the *ANC*-aligned *COSATU* has had its militants silenced by internal gagging orders and its militant unions rendered ineffective by gerry-mandering, that the mass-based alternative structures (people's militia, street committees, radical civics, rank & file worker networks) have largely been disbanded, often by the *ANC* which feared grassroots opposition. A third political problem is the "saviour" status of the liberation movements, especially the *ANC* and particularly that of Nelson Mandela among poor South Africans, with capitalist media choirs singing their praises.

Fortunately the new social movements have grown out of and away from these authoritarian parties, usually around nuclei of hardened street activists. Fourthly, there is the usual game being played by the Trotskyists the largest active political left faction who are attempting to monopolise and command the new social movements, transforming them into a Workers' Party. Fortunately, there is much rank & file opposition to this opportunism. Finally, unlike Latin America, we have no elder anarchist movement to rely on for experience. All the other liberation movements in the region were and are authoritarian. It is difficult to spread the anarchist message in a country that has forgotten its anarchist past. The advantage of this is we are starting from scratch and do not have to deal with lunatic fringe terrorist or primitivist factions. More broadly speaking, South Africa's level of development by comparison to its neighbours puts it in a position where its social-political resistance is forced to develop in a virtual vacuum, with similar movements in neighbouring countries which have tiny industrial proletariats forced by necessity to also be tiny.

What sort of international relations does the BMC maintain?

BMC: We have had intermittent contact with the *Awareness League (AL)* in Nigeria, whose book 'African Anarchism' we have kindly been allowed to reprint in a cheaper edition for southern Africa, and have recently made contact with comrades in the *Anti-Capitalist Convergence of Kenya (ACCK)*, a newly-formed joint anarchist and socialist network. But overall, anarchist contacts are few and far between in Africa and war, poor communications, poverty and migrant labour make maintaining contacts difficult. The *CNT-Vignoles* and the *IWA-AIT* cover most groups in Francophone countries such as Morocco and Burkina Faso. *Bikisha's* militants have involved themselves in at least one international event a year, believing practical internationalism to be vital to the successful creation of a co-ordinated global anarchist movement.

At home, we have participated in the mass protests against the bourgeois-capitalist events of the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in August 2001 and in the protests against the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in August 2002. We have maintained close links with, in particular, the *SAC* (Sweden), the *CNT-Vignoles* (France), the *Fédération Anarchiste* (France/Belgium), the *WSM* (Ireland), the *CGT* (Spain) and *NEFAC* (USA/Canada). *Bikisha* and *Zabalaza Books* were both signatories to the international platformist/anarcho-communist statements issued at some of the anti-globalisation actions in recent years and sent delegates to the "Other Future" international anarchist gathering in Paris, France, in April/May 2000, the anti-Eurotop anarchist congress in Gothenburg, Sweden, organised by the *SAC* in June 2001, and *ILS* meeting at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2003. It was at the "Other Future" event in Paris that *Bikisha* took part in the international discussions that suggested the forming of a new network to link the large anarcho-syndicalist unions that fell outside the *IWA-AIT* and smaller anarchist political groups such as ourselves that fell outside the *IAF-IFA*. *Bikisha* and *Zabalaza Books* endorsed the founding of *International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS)* in Madrid, Spain, in May 2001, and today, both organisations, plus the *Zabalaza Action Group* based in Durban, are members of the *ILS*. Our approach has always been deliberately non-sectarian towards all genuine anarchist formations, so we remain on friendly terms with, for instance, both the *IWA-AIT* and the expelled anarcho-syndicalist organisations now grouped under the *ILS*.

What are your future plans for the group?

BMC: Specifically, in the African context, our objectives are to:

1. Write new anarchist pamphlets that analyse the challenges facing the southern African working class, peasantry and poor and which provide anarchist solutions to these;
2. Provide these theoretical materials to the emerging social movements, and in particular to fight against the attempts of the Marxist-Leninists in the Social Movements Indaba and the Landless People's Movement to transform these formations into a Workers' Party, that tried-and-failed authoritarian non-option;
3. Provide practical support to the emerging social movements, by liberating those jailed, broadcasting information about social struggles, working in community gardens, providing material aid like building materials, participating in actions against the police and other thugs sub-contracted by the state;
4. Network all Anglophone anarchist groups on the continent, help them with materials and enable them to contribute discussion pieces to our journal, with a view to not only producing new African anti-authoritarian practices, but practical inter-continental solidarity;
5. Establish the *Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF)* as the *ILS* representative in South Africa. The *ZACF* would probably also seek membership of the *International of Anarchist Federations (IAF)*;
6. By doing all of the above, re-establish South Africa's recently-lost fighting tradition of grassroots militancy township militia, street committees, autonomous civics, rank & file syndicalist networks, the very popular organisations that brought apartheid to its knees in order to meet the challenges of the domestic and global neo-liberal regimes. From this strong, horizontally federated base, the South African poor would have the ability to launch a social revolution that would outflank our bourgeois communists and resonate across Africa and the world.

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Federação Anarquista Gaúcha (FAG) – Brazil

The Federação Anarquista Gaúcha has been around since 1995, and is named after the “gaucho” region of southern Brazil, namely in the state of Rio Grande do Sur where this organisation is from. The capital city, Porto Alegre, is well known for its annual hosting of the World Social Forum (WSF). I was in Brazil at last year’s WSF and got to meet a few FAG members, and in that short amount of time was very impressed with the organisational work and dedication of the group, who were simultaneously hosting the Jornadas Anarquistas Conference during the WSF, and continuing with their own work. Below is an interview with Luciana, the FAG’s international secretary. Translation by Tony.

**interview by Red Sonja
(NEFAC-Boston)**

The FAG, in its formation, was influenced by the Uruguayan FAU, and is currently a part of the SIL (International Libertarian Solidarity). What anarchist groups do you work with closely in South America? Has the SIL been a beneficial international network for groups in the southern hemisphere? What kind of solidarity work is necessary from the anarchist groups in North America and Europe?

FAG: The FAG maintains relations with various Brazilian and Latin American groups through the internet and regular mail with newsletters and bulletins. In Latin America, we maintain relations more frequently with OSL from Argentina, CUAC from Chile, the Libertarian Youth from Bolivia, Indigenes Community Flores Magon de Oaxaca from Mexico, Quilombo Libertaria from Bolivia, and of course the FAU in Uruguay, with whom we have an organic relation.

In Brazil we have a direct relation with Anarchist Federation Cabocla from Belem do Para (north of Brazil Amazonia), Libertarian Struggle from São Paulo, Student Movement from Mato Grosso do Sul, Libertarian Construction Goiana from Goiana, Quilombo Cecilia from Bahia and lots more. All the Brazilians here mentioned adhere to “specifismo.”

To the FAG, the ILS was a big landmark to overcome sectarianism and begin building solidarity through some basic principles shared by both “specifismo” and anarcho-syndicalism, or through other anarchists and revolutionaries that are part of ILS. The class solidarity, direct struggle and intervention in the social movements represents a big gap where the global dominant class tries to fragment the revolutionary will. We have received solidarity from organisations like SAC (Sweden), Apoyo Mutuo (Spain), the French sections of ILS (*Alternative Libertaire, No Pasaran, OCL*), the OSL from Switzerland, and the FAU itself.

We think that the type of support that Latin American organisations need the most is good structure and political support in their campaigns for the liberation of political prisoners and other campaigns where we can count on international solidarity. Structurally, every organisation

in the peripheral countries has problems: it is a great effort to make a simple newsletter. Here in Brazil our big need is without a doubt a printing press.

Does the FAG adhere to “specifismo” like the FAU in Uruguay? This seems to be a brand of platformism particular to the southern cone of South America. Could you elaborate on the differences and what influence each has in the principles of FAG?

FAG: Today, “specifismo” is more a practice than a theory. *FAU* and *FAG* have tried very hard to build the definition of the same theory. Before they got to know platformism, the *FAU* started to elaborate on “specifismo.” Not too long ago we got access to the text of Dielo Trouda, and the first translation was done to Brazilian Portuguese texts of Russian anarchists serves as a base, showing the need for anarchists to organise themselves. To act as anarchists inside the social movements, maintaining a distance of discussion and development of politics this Malatesta also talks about.

This section of the text is the most important to us. Today, the “specifismo” covers the following concepts: Structured anarchist organisation in a federal manner, such as a delegation system and executive proceeding, functional so that it can be spread in a large geographic area without the need of assemblies and frequent meetings; practice and theory directed to this era and for a place where the organisation is implemented; anarchist organisation concentrated to the Principles of Declaration, Organic Charts and Strategies directed to the General Strategies. Exact strategies are the short-term objectives of the organisation, and the General Strategies are the long-term objectives. Our action, in conjunction with the social movements, is balanced to the differences of political-ideological on a social level.

On the political-ideological level (political groups, including the *FAG*) should enhance the social and popular movements, but without trying to make it “anarchist”, more militant. The social movement should not have a political ideology, the role should be to unite and not belong to a political party. In social movements it is possible to unite militants and build a unified base, which is not possible in an ideological level.

Because we know that we are not going to make the revolution by ourselves, we need to be aware that we need to unite with other political forces without losing our identity. This identity is the anarchist organisation, and is the avenue by which we want to build unity with other political forces in the social movement. The *FAG* has structures in the nucleuses in neighbourhoods and cities where it acts, and those nucleuses contain autonomous tactics but not strategies. The strategy and the work plan are frequently re-evaluated and readjusted within the analysis of the whole in our Federal Association, bringing together delegates from each nucleus.

The FAG has developed some relationship with “rank and file” of the MST (Movimiento Sem Terra Brazilian landless movement), a group which is truly a reflection of Brazil’s particular political climate. In what other ways is FAG trying to put forward an anarchist agenda and alternative given the particular situation of Brazil?

FAG: We have contacts with *MST* but we are not members of *MST*. *MST* is without a doubt the biggest and the most combative popular movement from Brazil, although, it is a tool of organisation for the farmers. *FAG* concentrates its activities in the urban zones of south Brazil. In the urban zones, the struggle to bring the workers together has not been accomplished, like the *MST* has done in the rural areas. The *MST* has tried to create alternatives for the struggles in the city but has not been able to accomplish this. We believe that with the big unemployment rate in Brazil, the oppressed urban class in large part is not concentrated in factories but rather in small towns, villages and slums. 70% of our people live with miserable jobs, what we call “bicos”. They

are construction workers, “camelôs” (street vendors), trash collectors, maids, security guards, repair workers, etc. Therefore leaving the majority of the population away from factories; they work nearby where they live and start families.

Therefore the *FAG* acts in their peripheral communities through what we call “espaços solidários” (solidarity territories), the Popular Resistance Committees. These territories have the mission to bring the people together to fight for their rights, work for the community, little by little, discussion and action will build an understanding of popular power and self-esteem. We live in villages, slums and projects, and as residents we get other residents for the struggle, local gatherings, to educate mutually and go for a drink together.

From the simplest activities to the complicated ones, we build what we call “tecido social” that today it is worn out by the fragmentation of the oppressed class. The committees have the role of speaking and building relationships not only between the residents but also between the popular organisations in the region: Mothers’ Clubs, Community Radios, Soccer Clubs, Cultural Groups, Neighbourhood Associations, Unions, etc. This way we try to form a solidarity group between all the organisations in the community, increasing strength mutually in direction of the struggle. We also act in Student Associations in Universities, with a group of students that work in social movements, and we also intervene in the *Independent Media Centre (IMC)*. We do this in order to give them more popular character and to make them a truly popular movement. Also we support local radio stations, and we avoid just putting bunch of information over the internet because only 3% of the population has access. Beyond the work at the social level, there is also the work on the ideological level. The *FAG* holds frequent debates in our headquarters, and does graffiti, murals, and other public activities that express our anarchist ideology and our position against the government.

How does a revolutionary anarchist organisation relate to the social democratic power of the Workers Party (PT)? This will always be a contradiction anarchists face: we hope for a growing left movement, and a general shift left, yet we will simultaneously be in opposition to these forces which maintain liberal and/or authoritarian tenets. Does the FAG hope to be the “thorn in the side” of the PT which provokes them to move farther Left? Or does the FAG hope to siphon off the more radical support of the PT into anarchist ranks?

FAG: The *PT* is a very fragmented party. In the social movements like the *MST* and *MTD (The Unemployment Movement)* there are valuable militants that belong to *PT* who are completely disappointed with the course that the party has taken. However, because they do not see an alternative yet, they still believe that the *PT* can change to the real left. There are also others who are disappointed and are gathering strength to build a new workers party with a more revolutionary character based on Marxist-Leninism and Trotskyism.

In our opinion, the *PT* is today the official left party of the country that needs to exist to legitimise a false and corrupt democracy, was helped by the Brazilian bourgeois to win the presidential elections. They are the only political party able to create a social pact that calms down the social conflicts, calming down the *MST*, shutting up the hungry and miserable without force (at least for the moment). We can observe this with our long experience of the *PT* in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul. What the *PT* is able to do is to calm down the social conflicts with the phrase of “estamos todos governando” (“We are all governing”) and planning social projects that will quiet down those movements that are most combative. Misery and unemployment are still the same, with the disguise that we are all participating, everything will get better. One way the

PT does this is to participate in bureaucratic channels of popular participation where the “hungry” population sits down to dispute a miserable 10% of the government budget. If the demand is approved by popular vote, it still has to be approved by the executive. In turn the executive alleges lack of funds and rejects the project, postponing the promise project for three years.

The popular movement from Porto Alegre and the State as a whole, today is the most lawful and controlled institution in the country. This is the meaning of the “conscious citizen” of the PT.

Does the FAG maintain an open forum with other anarchists in Brazil, especially those who are detractors of platformist and “especifista” ideas? How can organised anarchists offer dialogue with those other anarchist tendencies, hopefully persuading them to our position, yet maintain an even course in our organising work?

FAG: We maintain a relationship with groups and organisations of “specifismo” which we call FAO (*Forum of Organised Anarchism*) that started in Belém do Pará in 2002. Before that, we had what we called *National Co-ordination of the Organised Anarchists* but due to the difficulty of travel and the number of meetings, was not able to sustain itself.

In fact, we have tried various ways of national organising and have not found the best way. Our country is very big and the price to travel is not accessible. It is easier for us to go by regions, like us from Cone Sul, the people from Centre West, East and North, but because there are not many of us “especifistas” that were able to maintain the work through the years, we feel the need to get together.

We also feel the need to have space to meet and educate people and let groups know our experiences in case they would like to form anarchist organisations. For this, the FAO formed which is a once a year event. We are going to do an FAO Assembly now during the WSF because it is easier for our “companheiros” from other states to come to Porto Alegre for free.

Another open space for educating which is open to the anarchist of all tendencies and also militants with other ideologies are the ‘Jornadas Anarquistas’, where we can expose our work. The opportunity to gather a large number of people from our country to talk about FAG, “specifismo” and to create new organisations is rare. The Internet has its limitations, therefore making it hard for our “companheiros” to take advantage of our accomplishments and learn from our mistakes in the same manner that it is hard for us to take advantage of the experiences of other groups and organisations.

What kind of contradictions has FAG faced in dealing with such issues as sexism and racism? Do we need to have a united class based revolutionary movement, or is there room for others to organise separately in class-based anarchism?

FAG: Theoretically, we are building a new concept of social class. We believe that the struggle for social class still exists, but the concept that class is based only on economical level is not a true reality today, both in Latin America and the rest of the world. We have been discussing and seen in practice that the oppressed class is composed of different factors, not only economic; social factors, ideologies, geographical, political, gender, ethnicity, these factors, or some of these factors combined, define who is the oppressed and who is the oppressor. In the social and political level, we believe that a discussion about gender and ethnicity is absolutely necessary but we must have a discussion and practice that does not isolate us within. This way, the different oppressions are identified, but they should communicate between themselves and not create more separation of the people that are already very much separated by capitalism. This destroys solidarity and co-

operation. Men should discuss and act regarding the oppression of women. Whites, Indigenous peoples, Blacks and Asians should co-ordinate actions about ethnic discrimination.

Is there any parallel to the Argentine model of assemblies that could take hold in Brazil in the event of an economic downturn? And what is FAG's opinion of anarchist involvement in the Argentine situation?

FAG: It is very possible to have a crisis in Brazil like in Argentina; it is in our assessment for the new year. One of our comrades went to Argentina for a meeting of popular movements and was very impressed with what is being developed by the people. The "solidarity spaces" that we try to do here, is being done there with intent of class independency (independency from political parties, governments and business people). At this point they hate the politicians, including the ones from the left, that are always expelled from the assemblies, except the ones that work together with the people. Those who are not side-by-side or working daily at the picket lines and in the solidarity spaces are immediately expelled and ridiculed.

What the people are building in Argentina is an example for the other Latin American countries that are still sleeping like Brazil. We believe that this situation is an example for any anarchist organisation to use to create a strategy for building a parallel power. In our opinion, what is missing in Argentina is a project of popular power, a strategy, so that a social transformation takes place. There is spontaneity by the people, but there is not (one or more) political groups that are able to fight or build a project to manage the country in every level, building dual power.

We do not have information of the actions of our Argentine *companheiros* in the popular movements from there, what we have is reports from the social movements only, but not from the anarchists in these movements. We would like to know more about the actions taken, like how the anarchist organisation survives all the social demands, where they are integrated, if they are building 'popular power', how they work with the other leftist movements. We would like to have all this information because it would be educational for us as we most likely will go through similar situations in the near future and we are very much interested in work at the social level with the movements where our Argentine *companheiros* are integrated.

It has been noted that the World Social Forum has become increasingly watered down with liberal politics. The WSF seems both a boon and a hindrance to FAG as an organisation in your home state of Rio Grande do Sul. How has the group continued to maintain a level of participation in the Forum? Will there be another Jornadas Anarquistas in 2003?

FAG: Our criticism towards the WSF is still the same: it is a propaganda forum for the leftist governments, where they try to obtain political and structural support at the international level for their humanitarian projects of capitalism (national-development), by using the social movements as a front for the supposed "democracy and popular participation". *FAG* will not participate in any shape or form in the WSF this year. We are organising from the popular organisations where we are integrated, the Latin American Gathering of Autonomous Popular Organisations. That will take place during the WSF, but it is not part of the program or the structure of the WSF. It is a gathering of combative organisations that are positioned against the dependency of the political parties, governments, and corporations and will discuss the different actions that we can build from our active locations. *FAG* will be present through committees of popular resistance, student groups, *IMC* and the *Trash Collectors Movement*, these are the social organisations where we are integrated and are organising the Gathering. We have organised interventions in the World Social Forum Rally with our own forces that will act in a distinguished manner, trying to express our criticism to WSF.

We will also have the second edition of the 'Jornadas Anarquistas' as propaganda of our ideas of organised anarchism and social integration. In this year's 'Jornadas' we will have the opening of workshops, and if groups are willing to offer workshops and talk about their experiences, they will have the opportunity for this.

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Congreso de Unificación Anarco-Comunista (CUAC) – Chile

Anarchism has had a tremendous resurgence in post-Pinochet Chile. One of the most active groups today is the Congreso de Unificación Anarco-Comunista (CUAC), a relatively young organisation with strong platformist influence. The CUAC formed around the same time as NEFAC. Our respective organisations have shared a similar path of growth and development over the past three years, and comradely relations continue to exist between us. Below is an interview with Jose Antonio Gutierrez, the CUAC's internal secretary, and Juan, the group's general secretary.

**interview by MaRK,
Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

Could you begin with a short history of anarchism in Chile?

CUAC: Anarchism in Chile has a long tradition. By the early 1890s, there was a great number of workers' organisations being formed. In some cases the organisations held strong links with the former artisans movement, but in others there was a sharp opposition between the new class struggle organisations and the mutualist ideology of the artisans. It is in this context that the first anarchist articles and ideas start to appear, towards 1897, when in the workers press you could read articles of Kropotkin. That year, the *Socialist Union* was formed, and though it was not explicitly anarchist, it is here that the nucleus of anarchism starts to gather. In 1898 the first declared anarchist paper appears, called *El Rebelde*, and that year the anarchists start organising new kinds of workers unions for the class struggle; they called them *Sociedades de Resistencia*.

So anarchism in Chile had a strictly working class origin, involved since its very beginning in the mass movement and the workers organisations, to such a point, that even the official history has to admit that the parents of the workers movement in Chile are the anarchists, because it was their societies for resistance that evolved into the unions. Another important aspect of the anarchism here is that it was a local movement. In Argentina, for instance, the core of the movement on its early years were Italian and Spanish immigrants, but in Chile the immigration was little and had a small impact over the newborn socialist movement. It is true that anarchism arrived through Argentine influence but the militants here who got the message, were Chilean born.

By the turn of the century the societies for resistance were multiplying, among dockworkers, coal miners, nitrate miners, carpenters, shoemakers, printers, and construction workers. By 1903, the first important strike of the century, of the dockworkers in Valparaiso, was led by the anarchists and their organisations. Another important movement was to occur in 1905, that was a general protest and strike in Santiago, against the rising cost of living, and particularly on the cost of the meat; also this year, a first attempt to federate the revolutionary unions was made, and the *FTCh (Chilean Workers Federation)* was born, however it was short-lived because of the harsh

repression. In 1906, in the north, another general strike erupted. All of these movements and all of the minor strikes as well, to constantly face the most brutal repression of the armed forces, and the number of dead are counted by hundreds. But the worst of the crimes against the people in those years, and a hard beat against anarchism was the Santa Maria School slaughter. This took place in the north, in Iquique; December 21, 1907. The nitrate workers, led by known anarchists, went on a strike from their mines in the pampa (a grasslands region in South America), to the nearest city of Iquique, where they were all shot with artillery, leaving an uncertain number of dead workers, somewhere between 2000 and 3600. Their crime was to ask for better wages, and to be paid in cash, and not with *fichas* (a type of private currency, not legal tender) that were exchanged for products in the warehouses of the patron (boss).

After this, the anarchist movement had ups and downs, and by 1914 the *FORCh* was formed, that lasted for a short amount of time, but set the foundations for the important Chilean section of the *IWW*, in 1919, that had around 20,000 members. Also, in those years the anarchist had formed the *League of the Rent*, that gathered the people from poor neighbourhoods (*conventillos*) demanding better housing, laying the foundations for the important community movements to come. As well, they were involved in founding the *Students Federation*, *FECh*, having an important presence by the end of that decade. Both the *FECh* and the *IWW*, as well as the whole anarchist movement were fiercely punished for their revolutionary courage in 1920, with new imprisonments, slaughter, raids and destruction of workers halls.

In Punta Arenas, the extreme south of our country, the *FOM*, of a strong anarchist influence was punished as well, the same year that in the Argentine Patagonia the *FORA* workers were massacred. But the movement was too strong to be beaten down just by repression. So they used a more subtle tactic: in 1925 the unions became legal, and the anarchists didn't know what to do, while the authoritarian communists entered the legalised unions and started getting the influence they were formerly denied by the resistance unions. For long the anarchist movement was handicapped by a dogmatic approach and was progressively losing influence.

Another important problem in the decline of Chilean anarchism was the Ibañez coup in 1927: by then, all the revolutionary movement was pursued and smashed, and the anarchist movement was dismantled through a program of "union cleansing". Though unions were illegal before 1925, anarchists never had to face a long time of clandestinity: and political organisations can survive clandestinity, but that is much harder to unions. Despite this, some groups like "Siempre!" were active in clandestinity and some clandestine issues of the construction workers paper could appear. In 1931 Ibañez was overthrown through mass action, and the new *CGT* was formed to bring together what was left of the anarchist movement. The *IWW* continued to exist as well. Some loose propaganda groups were formed and an Anarchist Federation was established. But many leading anarchists, seeing the need of a revolutionary political organisation besides the unions. They were unable to solve this problem within anarchism, so they joined forces with some leftists and revolutionary Marxists to form the *Chilean Socialist Party*, that rejected bitterly both the Third International and the second one.

Since then, the anarchist movement kept losing influence, except for the shoemakers, beakers, some construction trades, brick makers, and printers, until the end of 1940s, when a new generation of anarcho-syndicalists started working directly in the legal unions, and thus broke their long isolation. This way, 1949 saw the first popular strike in so long with a strong anarchist influence. Then in 1950, the *Movement for the Unity of the Workers (MUNT)* was formed, an anarcho-syndicalist organisation with this new approach. This was fundamental to form a single

workers federation for 1953, that was called *CUT (Unique Workers Central)*, whose declaration of principles was partly redacted by anarchists, and which had some anarchists in the national secretary.

The break came in 1955, when a two day general strike put the anarchists and communists face to face: the president was about to give up his government, and the anarchists were demanding the *CUT* to take control of the economic situation; on the other hand, the communists said that it was necessary to establish dialogue with the authorities. In the end, the division led the strike to nothing, and the anarchists left. By the end of the decade the *Libertarian Movement July 7th (ML77)* was formed, and they started for the first time, giving a serious thought to anarchist organisation. Then the *Movement of Revolutionary Force (MFR)* was formed in the early sixties to gather revolutionary tendencies, with a strong presence of the anarchists. Unable to organise before, and in a time of really big leftist parties, anarchism soon was forgotten, but not its practice, that was present in the beginning of the movement and survived through its life.

Thus, we can see a strong movement for popular power with a strong libertarian influence, during the Popular Unity government (1970–1973) some experiences were made from the rank and file, like Industrial Networks and Committees for Consumption, that were rudimentary forms of self-management, that were both the product of the spontaneous libertarian tendencies in the people, but were better understood also as the expression of a libertarian tradition and practices that survived the very anarchist movement.

With the systematic suppression of leftwing movements during the era of Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–1990), was the anarchist movement able to survive and directly influence the newer generations of militants, or were anarchist ideas "rediscovered" once this period of reaction ended?

CUAC: During the dictatorship, there was some anarchist activity, as well as some activity of anarchists in various movements and groups. However, this activity was very limited and obscured by the huge traditional parties of the left and by the fact that we couldn't be more than a bunch of comrades in a really massive movement. In the middle seventies, some anarchists took part in what was called the early *Resistencia*, around the *MRP (Movement of Popular Resistance)*, that was organised by the *MIR*, and it was in this wave of activity, that by the late seventies a resistance group with some anarchist influence was created. This was called *Brigadas Populares (Popular Brigades)*. This activity wasn't ideological, and we couldn't tell the presence of anarchists there if we didn't know the comrades that were actually involved there.

By the early 1980s, as the movement against the dictatorship started to push forward, the anarchist propaganda started to see the light again. We should remember the role that many of our old comrades played in this. Comrades long time gone, like Aliste. But we should like to mention a comrade that was crucial for the revival of the libertarian practices in our country: comrade Jose Ego Aguirre, whose recent death, on December 15th of the last year struck us all with a deep sorrow. This comrade alone used to stand outside schools, factories and universities, to give anarchist propaganda to the workers or students that were coming out. Thus, he formed an anarchist group of students in the early '80s to start printing out some propaganda and to help the struggle in the schools, a very active segment of society against the dictator. This group, of about seventeen students was founded in 1981 by the CNI, the political police, during a meeting and they were all imprisoned to be interrogated, by Guaton Romo, a famous hangman of Pinochet, in charge of the tortures. One of the students that was there, told us that, as the Pinochet regime declared a war against "Marxism", they didn't know what to do when they started talking about

anarchism, ecology and other things they haven't heard in their lives. So after a while they released them, after giving them a good battering, having used electricity on them, and having tortured viciously Ego Aguirre, then already an old man, in order they "learnt" they shouldn't get in trouble. But they didn't. So the anarchist propaganda kept on going and was specifically welcomed among the youth; many young anarchists started participating actively in the human rights movement, anti-militarist movement and in the movements against torture.

Also, in the communities (*poblaciones*), where the movement of resistance was strong, you find some anarchists in the *MIR* and even later in the *FPMR* (*Patriotic Front "Manuel Rodriguez"*, that started as the armed branch of the Chilean *CP* and then, in 1987, split), involved in the struggle of resistance. Among university students, you find that the first anarchist collectives start to emerge: the group *Jose Domingo Gomez Rojas* (named after a Chilean anarchist student who died in 1920 in a madhouse as a product of three weeks of non-stop brutal torture) was formed in Universidad de Chile in 1983, the year that the massive national protest against the dictatorship started to occur.

The *RIA*, an anarchist group in the Catholic University, won the elections of the federation of students in 1984. Even before, in 1980, when the student federation in the Universidad de Chile took its first steps to organise clandestinely, the paper of the students 'Despertar' (Awakening), reproduced articles on the anarchist students of the 20s, which shows a renewed interest in libertarian ideas. This serves to demonstrate that the growing of the anarchist movement then, in the nineties, has deep roots in the struggle against the dictatorship, and that the emergence of the first collectives can be traced to the development of a vast mass movement of direct action between 1983 and 1986.

The first anarchist paper to appear during dictatorship was 'HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD', in Santiago, 1985, that continued to be published until 1988, with the international help of Latin American anarchist exiles in France linked to the FA. It was useful to bring together the survivors of the old generation of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists from the past decades, and it had really good analysis on the course of the struggles in Chile.

Unfortunately, the resources were scarce, the conditions to produce it difficult, and the number of issues limited so it had little impact outside the very anarchist movement. By 1988 other papers started to appear: in Concepcion, appeared *El Acrata*, linked to the TASYs, a social centre of great importance in that city, that brought together unions and community organisations; a year later, in 1989, in Santiago, started to appear 'Accion Directa', produced by people that participated in 'HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD', plus a good number of young comrades that were getting close to the movement in the last time. So then you can see that the old movement was merging with the new one, of young people that was disappointed with the old political methods, and with the traditional parties and how they allied the so-called "transition to democracy" with the dictator.

What happened in the early 1990s was a virtual "boom" of anarchist ideas and practices, that make it seem like a rediscovery, but it is actually well linked to what happened in the 1980s. This "boom" was produced by an interest in new methods of organisation by many young people, by new perspectives of how society should be after revolution (these two factors could be attributed to the previous anarchist propaganda) and by the very failures and mistakes of the leftist parties to bring about the so much promised changes in society, what many of their old social basis of support regarded as "treason". But also, there is something else that makes the movement seems to appear in the nineties from nowhere, and is the sharp contrast between the context in the eighties and nineties: previously the anarchist movement was immersed in a huge mass

movement, when in the '90s, the mass movement was drastically reduced by the democratic mirage.

So the anarchist seemed to be more in the whole popular movement, in relative terms, even though their numbers could be similar. Also, the anarchist represented an exception to the general "rule" of the moment: while all of the leftist parties were losing militants in numbers of thousands and entering a phase of crisis, anarchism was healthy and getting new militants everywhere. So that phenomenon also helps to give the impression that the movement appeared from nowhere in the nineties, and gives a certain credit to the "rediscovery" idea on Chilean anarchism. But the truth is that it was part of a whole and single process that started in the early '80s.

When did the CUAC form? What was the political background of the founding members?

CUAC: Though the *CUAC* was officially formed November 29, 1999, at the end of the First Chilean Anarcho-Communist Congress, the process that led to its birth started a couple of years before. In the beginning of the 1990s, when the mirage of the new democratically elected government had vanished, a good lot of the youth came to anarchism disappointed by the traditional parties and their authoritarian structures, by the democracy that didn't really look like they promised years ago, but it seemed more like the right of the people to elect a new dictator every six years, and by the way everything remained the same, and most of the dictatorship institutions remained untouched.

Many in this new generation of anarchists came from some of the strongest parties in the left: communists, socialists (that used to be more radical than the *CP*, and didn't join the international social democracy until the early nineties), and from the *MIR (Movement of Revolutionary Left)*. With the time, and with the deepening of the crisis of the leftist parties in the early '90s, more and more young with no previous political militancy started to join the anarchist milieu. By the mid '90s, many started to think in a more serious manner about the issue of the organisation, about the need to start organising anarchists in such a way to make our activity in the popular ranks a fruitful one. By that time (1994), many attempts to organise anarchists were made, but all of them failed. The year 1997, for instance, there was held an anarchist conference in Santiago, organised by comrades from Temuco which tried to form the "National Anarchist Movement", but it resulted to be a complete disaster because of the inability of those who attended the conference to come to an agreement about the most basic issues. Since then we knew that it was impossible to bring all those claiming to be "anarchists", just because of that fact, into one organisation. So we started to reflect about our failed organisational attempts and started to draw conclusions from our own experience.

Some groups were formed that tried to be an answer to that organisational problem we were facing; with time, by the beginning of 1999, people from these groups started talking and thinking about the possibility of coming together in one organisation, that was more than merely "one-organisation-plus-another", but which meant a decisive step forward in our very understanding of the anarchist movement until then, to start thinking of it as a mature political force to be immersed in the popular struggles and that saw itself as a real tool in the struggle of the exploited. For that it was necessary to lose fear to the supposed "corruption" inherent to organisation; it was necessary to fight for building an organisation able to have a concrete intervention in the mass movement.

The comrades from a group called *COMUNITANCIA* (made of a mixture of the words “communism” and “militancy”) started making reflections about the need of a specific anarchist organisation in the country that could think anarchism for our current reality. That was also an interest for the people of the paper *HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD*, that was working about the basic ideas for the revolutionary organisation, and also for comrades that were organised in their communities (poblaciones), in both Villa Francia and Pudahuel, two popular areas of Santiago, with a long leftist and revolutionary tradition. So as we were coming to agreements, we decided to merge into one organisation; but for that purpose to be successful, we thought of not making the same mistakes from the past. We decided to organise a Congress (conference) to join efforts and organisations. So we started preparing documents for discussion to be available some weeks before the Congress (about propaganda, unions, organisation, immediate history of our movement, etc.), we published both the ‘Manifesto of the Libertarian Communists’ of Georges Fontenis and ‘The Platform’ of the Dielo Trouda group. As we knew it was impossible to organise the whole lot claiming to be anarchists, we decided to put some “conditions” to those to participate, as it was to involve more people than those in the organising groups. Those conditions were: having the will to get organised, to understand anarchism as a product of class struggle, to have actual involvement in the popular movement, and to understand the need for social revolution (with all the implications of it). Also, the very name given to the Conference “Congreso Anarco-Comunista” was to serve as a filter. So the day of the Conference came, it lasted for two days (28th and 29th) and in the end, we had our brand new organisation. Our analysis of our previous failures and our solutions to succeed this time proved to be successful.

About the political background of our militants, as we’ve said, a good number of them come from previous militancy in traditional parties of the Chilean left, like the *MIR*, the *Communist Party* and the *Socialist Party* of the eighties. Others come from the new movement of the mid-nineties and others come from actual work of the organisation, like students or community work.

How is the group organised? Are there active chapters in different cities?

CUAC: The *CUAC* is organised under federative principles; however, it is only one single organisation. The basis of our organisation is the work in fronts, and currently we are active on the Students’ Front and Poblaciones’ Front; the Union Front is about to become active again. It is in the front where the militants have more of their organisational life, because this is where they develop and carry the actual policies of the organisation. There they have the assemblies for the discussion of the general problems and resolutions and tasks for the *CUAC*. Every front has delegates that represent their discussion to the meeting of the Council (concejo), that is assisted by the delegates and the secretariat.

In the cities apart from Santiago, the only active branch is Valparaiso, a town near Santiago. But there are close links to some groups in Concepcion (*Asamblea de Convergencia Libertaria*), Chillan and Temuco (*Movimiento Libertario Joaquin Murieta*) and we hope for the future to establish more formal links with those groups, in order to build a national libertarian front.

The CUAC is an anarcho-communist group, with strong platformist influence. How did members of your organisation first become interested in platformist ideas and methods of organisation? What led to this theoretical development?

CUAC: As we already mentioned, we evolved close to the platformist tradition because of our own experience, and the difficulties and failures we previously faced in giving an organisational shape to the movement. We started thinking of our need to get organised in a serious way and we arrived to very similar conclusions to those in the platform, without having any knowledge of

its existence, for it was virtually unknown in the Spanish speaking movement. But hand in hand with our reflections on organisation, that arose from our own experience and were surprisingly “platformist.” Though we ignored this, we also understood fully the need to distance ourselves from those who weren’t clear about the revolutionary tradition of anarchism: thus, we saw the need to understand anarchism as a class struggle revolutionary theory, that needs to be absolutely involved in the mass movement, and not to be isolated only among a bunch of “owners of the truth”. This is important to mention, because all too often platformism is reduced to a “recipe” for organisation, when, in reality, is more than that.

As Arshinov points out in his article “The old and new in anarchism”, the organisational part is only ONE aspect of ‘The Platform’. ‘The Platform’ is more than a document on organisation: it is a summary of the most basic and general aspects of class struggle and revolutionary anarchism, and its organisational part is derived naturally from this understanding of anarchism. One cannot accept wholeheartedly its organisational method and reject bitterly its other aspects, because one explains the other.

So we arrived at “platformist” opinions through our own practice and without knowing the existence of such a document. So it wasn’t really a surprise that we assumed it as soon as we had notice of it, and that the organisation, as soon as it formed, familiarised itself to it and had a wide acceptance of platformism as our anarchist tradition. But it might be interesting how we got to know a text that was not available in any Spanish translation and was absolutely unknown for us. It was only thanks to a mistake that we knew about it: comrades in ‘HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD’ paper, ordered a pamphlet to England, the one was not available by the moment. So instead of the one we had ordered, we received the ‘Manifesto of the Libertarian Communists’ of Georges Fontenis, and we were really delighted to see that our reflections weren’t so “original” and that there were other comrades who drew, from their own experience, conclusions similar to us. We translated this text immediately into Spanish, sent it to the printshop and started its distribution. And because of Fontenis’ text, we got a notion that it was an anarchist tradition, and that there existed ‘The Platform’.

Thanks to a comrade from the ‘Black Flag’ magazine (UK) and from the people of the *WSM*, we got a copy of ‘The Platform’, the one we translated as well into Spanish (presumably for the first time) and published in ‘HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD’ paper. This is how we realised of the existence of the platformist tradition. Although in Spanish we almost never have used this expression; fortunately, there is a strong association in Chile by the libertarian movement of the word “anarcho-communist” with our methods and principles, that are platformist, so instead of platformist, it is said plainly anarcho-communists.

The platformist positions have been of a paramount importance in the movement, even beyond the very *CUAC*, and are started to get accepted more and more by others in the movement. Since the *CUAC* was formed, the anarchist movement in Chile has grown and has got definitely more mature. We believe that is no coincidence, and that is because of the serious work inside of the popular movement what is a positive effect of new libertarian methods. Probably there was no other way for anarchism to grow and to succeed in organising, platformism as a needed development in the local movement. But what is certainly undeniable is that our organisation, thanks to our positive aspects, and despite some mistakes, has made a great deal in showing the anarchist organisation for the struggle as a real possibility, although we are far from satisfied and believe that there is still much more to be done. Our organisational state is still weak, we are still not enough as we’d like, and we would like to have more presence in different social struggles.

What areas of struggle is the CUAC active? Do you feel that having an organised anarchist group has helped you be more effective in gaining anarchist influence within these struggles?

CUAC: Our organisation is active at different levels: it is active on university students problems, participating in students unions and in campaigns against the privatisation of universities that has led to some strikes and occupations; it is active in the popular neighbourhoods, participating in educational activity and popular radio programs, in community organisation and in different local problems; and has some activity in unions, that faced some problems and currently we are doing our efforts to start that work again in an organised way.

Of course the organisation has been of great importance, and thanks to that we have been able to multiply the anarchist influence, to give it some coherence and to have a concrete presence with proposals and practical policies. Also, the organisation brings more maturity and makes your opinion one you can give some credit to. And not only the organisation has been of use or help to the very anarchists, also we believe, it has been of use to the people who we are working with, because a serious anarchist movement is needed in the struggle, and in society.

When we are discussing getting organised, and some so-called anarchists make a big deal because they are afraid of organisations, and you see them so reluctant to organise, so messed up with abstract philosophy, so scared of changing society, it is a bit disheartening. We need a movement to change society, that's the important task and we should never lose sight of that. And to change society we need organisation, and thus we have to learn to work with other people and lose the complex of being the centre of the universe. These "comrades" are the ones who give merit to the authoritarian's claims that one cannot supposedly get organised in a libertarian way. And if we have fear to organise, in the end we will be helping capitalism in not playing a mature role in the struggle, and the authoritarians, will once again be the only option left.

What are some future plans for the CUAC?

CUAC: This year, in fact, our organisation has made many plans. But as the most important thing, we hope to expand and strengthen our current struggles, and to become active in new social realities, rallying the inactive anarcho-communists, to open new fronts for our struggle. On the other hand, we need to keep on working on the activity and organisational structure of the CUAC, for the growing process we are going through, and to continue adapting our tool, that is, our political organisation, in the face of the challenges of the agitation and the popular movement, that we will have to deal with due to this ongoing crisis. We are not going to wait to be caught by surprise, but we should rather be well organised and on guard.

We are also going to help, with all of our efforts, in the unity of the Chilean anarchist movement, thanks to the positive signals given by most of the anarchist organisations to develop the links of solidarity, based mainly upon a common class-struggle practice, springing out from the concrete fights. Thus, we hope to be paving the road for an Anarcho-Communist Federation in Chile. And we can't be blind. We know that strengthening our local work, together with the growth of other organisations in Latin America and the rest of the world, are striving to the same goal: a red and black international!!

Repression is still a strong reality in Chile, with street demonstrations routinely attacked by police. Given this political climate, what sort of future do you see for anarchism in Chile?

CUAC: It is the truth that repression over the last while unveils, once again, the role played by the military dictatorship in the neo-liberal adjustment that is now strangling us. Because, even

though the terror yesterday was complete and persistent, today under the Concertacion (coalition of government), we have seen nothing but a masked dictatorship, manipulating the news, with censorship, political persecution and murder, under a progressive and even leftist aesthetic of our president Ricardo Lagos. That is a threat, because every fair protest of our people against their plans, they call terrorism, we suffer from the legal repression from the Constitution made under Pinochet's regime. This way, we see that neo-liberalism in Chile has had different stages, and we understand Pinochet's regime as one more of the puppet governments settled by the yankee imperialism, and that the current one is not going to change the repressive apparatus, but instead, will make it more and more perfect. As an example, let's cite the case of the murder of a young Mapuche fighter, called Alex Lemun, in November 2002. Alex perished under police guns while participating in the occupation of the lands of his ancestors. Cynically, the Home Secretary expressed his "regret for what happened", but at the same time threatened saying that no action outside our current norms and constitution will be tolerated, and if necessary, they will use all their force. One week later, without any serious information in the news, we were visited by USA Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, because of the Fifth Conference of Defence Secretaries of the Americas, in which, despite all their platitudes about defence, it was agreed the co-ordination of the hemispheric repression to suffocate the popular struggles in America. Then, what happened to Lemun, wasn't it a signal of obedience to the plans of the Pentagon, represented by Rumsfeld?

Well, this is only a glimpse of the repressive situation nowadays in Chile, and the answers should not be found somewhere else than in the collective action of the very affected, the people. Because, in spite of the insecurity, of the constant siege, of the fear to the reaction, we know that if we isolate ourselves from the masses, if we behave like a gang, we are going to be giving the chance to those in power to dismantle our organisation. And specially because our principal aim is the generation of the popular power, through all the activity we do in opening solidarity networks, for the people to organise and come together, we should stay there, obviously not leaving the problems of the resistance, of security, of the revolutionary violence to the "metaphysics"; but knowing, at the same time that the answers will come from the heart of our activity. The future of the *CUAC* is determined by its own principles, and in the end, by the maturity of anarchism as such.

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