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The Utopian's Relationship with M1AA

Ron Tabor

June 28, 2015

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Eds. note: Utopian readers will recall that in 2012 The Utopian and the First of May Anarchist Alliance (M1AA, or M1) issued a statement of affiliation (The Utopian vol. 11, 2012). In various ways, this relationship did not develop fruitfully. Recently, in preparation for an M1 conference scheduled for July 2015 (specifically prompted by a request by David M. of M1 to the group listserv for comments on a variety of issues), Ron Tabor of The Utopian sent a statement of differences, concurred in by three other Utopian supporters affiliated with M1. In response, M1 requested statements regarding these individuals' intention to remain or not remain in the group. Below is a brief group statement sent in response, together with Ron's original statement of differences.

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June 28, 2015

To the members and supporters of M1:

In light of the considerations raised in Ron's letter to David M., and posted by David to the M1 list on June 23, *The Utopian* considers the "Joint Statement on Affiliation of M1 and *The Utopian*," dated Sept. 3, 2012, no longer operative, and the undersigned no longer regard ourselves as members or supporters of M1. We wish M1 well in its future efforts. We are open to continuing collaboration on specific projects either organizationally or individually.

Ron T., Mike E., Chris H., Mary R.

Dear David,

Thanks for your email.

I will not be replying to the questions you posed, although they are good ones. I think, in fact, that it would be best if the members of M1 attempted to answer the questions themselves. Moreover, I

currently have no plans to attend M1's conference. Let me try to explain why.

On one level, the issue is that M1 has made little effort to demonstrate that I and other people involved in the *Utopian* have an integral role to play in the organization. M1 seems to have defined itself simply as a network of activists, as opposed to an organization that, in addition to its practical activities, takes political discussion and debate seriously. In the years of M1's existence (and even before), other members of the *Utopian* and I have made numerous attempts to engage in political discussion, specifically by writing documents and articles that have articulated our points of view on a number of questions. Yet, these documents and articles have rarely, if ever, received replies, let alone evoked an on-going discussion. The history of the Nature of the Period document that I prepared for the first M1 conference is illustrative.

I wrote the document at the specific request of Kieran. I completed it five or six months before the conference, but roughly two months passed before the existence of the document was even acknowledged, and nobody wrote anything in response to it, either in agreement or disagreement. It was obvious to me (from the deafening silence the document evoked) that people in M1 disagreed with my analysis and predictions, but nobody wrote a counter-document. Nobody even wrote up comments, criticisms, or questions. There was nothing. The same thing happened at the conference itself. Although it was clear that people were (at the very least) uncomfortable with my position, nobody came out and said, "I disagree with Ron's analysis and prognosis. Here's what I think is going to happen in the next period."

This dynamic (if it can be called that) was repeated in the case of almost everything I wrote. The partial exception, the document on Syria, proves the rule. Aside from some snipes in emails at what people thought was my agreement with Samuel Huntington's thesis on the Clash of Civilizations, the only response was Kieran's amendments, which I mistakenly accepted as friendly (in the in-

Of course, M1 has the right to define itself and conduct its affairs as its members wish. If it wants to define itself as a network of activists who are not really concerned about political issues, who do not want to have thorough discussions to explore their political differences lest they provoke dissatisfaction and hard feelings — and might even (God forbid!) lead to some people leaving the group and/or the organization being criticized by other groups on the left — it has the right to do so. But it should at least be clear that this is what it is doing and not pretend otherwise. Political activism only makes sense in the context of a revolutionary analysis of the global and national situations and guided by a democratically worked out and agreed-upon strategy. Short of that, activism adds up to little beyond liberal do-goodism and reformism, and is certainly not revolutionary.

Given all this, I no longer feel myself to be in political solidarity with M1. However, I do not feel hostile to the organization and wish to remain on friendly terms with it and its members.

Very best wishes,

Ron

Concurred in by Chris and Mary (New York), and by Mike E. (Detroit).

and less capitulatory, analysis than did people who call themselves anarchists. Here, too, the question needs to be asked: where was the document laying out M1's position on this question? I remember a bunch of emails, and I remember a list of points drawn up by Kieran, which was supposed to be turned into a detailed and worked-out statement by Xtn, but I never saw a completed resolution. I never saw any kind of discussion of such a document, and I never noticed such a document being put to a vote. M1 seems to have slid, semi-consciously, into a position, on the spurious assumption that everybody agreed with the analysis (and the illusions) being promulgated among the left. Even as a supporter, I never had the opportunity to cast an advisory vote against a political stance that I consider to be a colossal sellout of anarchist principles. And yet, M1 held two forums publicizing its analysis and position (whatever they are) on the issue.

3. As these two examples suggest (at least to me), M1 does not take political discussion and debate seriously. It does not know how, and does not seem interested in learning how, to have a real political discussion, one that leads to political clarity and the development of worked out positions. Equally important, these examples reveal an internal life and structure that cannot seriously be called democratic. M1 came out with positions (one by default, the other explicitly) on two crucial political questions without the membership having a chance to fully discuss and debate the issues. M1's "positions" on these issues did not even represent a consensus. This is not democratic functioning; it doesn't even meet the standards of a serious Leninist organization, let alone an anarchist one. Although it was not intended as such, this type of functioning needs to be called what it is — bureaucratic. These positions were arrived at how? decided by whom? and on what basis?

terests of producing a document that would be broadly acceptable to the members of M1). Notably, one of the amendments deleted my discussion of the tactic of military/tactical support (and particularly my description of its use by the Bolsheviks during the summer of 1917). There was no discussion of the document as a whole; there was no discussion of the reasons why Kieran proposed the amendments; there was not even a specific discussion of the tactic of military/tactical support, which was later to emerge as a point of contention in the organization (in regard to the events in Ukraine, of which more below). (In a nutshell, I believe the military/tactical support idea is a crucial tool in the revolutionary arsenal in that it allows us to support the content of a given struggle — here the right of a nation or people to self-determination — while enabling us to criticize, and even to oppose, the specific policies and program of its leadership.)

My pique at this situation reflects a broader political position. The sad fact is that I no longer feel myself to be in political agreement with M1. I can summarize my main concerns in three points.

1. M1 failed to come out with a strong position in defense of Ukraine, at a time when the Ukrainian people were (and still are) being subjected to the efforts by the Russian imperialists to dismember, if not utterly destroy, the country. In fact, M1 failed to come out with ANY position at all, even a wishy-washy one! And this, when it was absolutely essential to do so, when the vast majority of the left capitulated to the Russians, explicitly or implicitly, and completely sold out the Ukrainians. Specifically, much if not most of the Marxist left came out in full support of Russian aggression, on the grounds that the Russians were merely resisting the eastward expansion of NATO. (What is NATO doing now to help the Ukrainians? And what will NATO do if the Russians threaten Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia?) Meanwhile, most of the anarchist

milieu dodged the issue by taking a “plague on both your houses” standpoint. While superficially “revolutionary”, this position is, in fact, a capitulation to the Russians. When a powerful imperialist country attacks a weak, vulnerable nation, to be “neutral” or to be “against both sides” is to support, even abet, the imperialist aggression. And it is particularly unbecoming for people living in a country whose national independence has never been seriously threatened and which, moreover, has attacked, conquered, invaded, murdered, intervened in, and generally oppressed peoples and nations around the world, to tell the people of an invaded country that their national independence, so hard fought for and so recently won, is not worth defending. M1 ought to be ashamed of itself! And it was not as if M1 lacked the resources to address the issue. Despite working long hours under an oppressive schedule, Mike E. did an incredible amount of research and wrote up trenchant, and very detailed, analyses of the situation in Ukraine, along with recommendations about the tactics that anarchists might use both to defend the Ukrainians’ right to national self-determination and to promote the anarchist cause. And where were the responses, aside from some random carps and doubts thrown out in some emails? Where was the document that laid out an alternative position? Where was the document that said, “I agree with Mike, except for x, y, and z”? Where was any document?

2. M1 committed the apparently opposite error in regard to the national liberation struggle of the Kurds. The position that M1 wound up promoting entailed capitulating to, and spreading illusions about, what is going on among the Kurds, in general, and the nature and role of the PKK, in particular. It is certainly important to defend and popularize the Kurds’ struggle, but it is not good, and it is particularly unfortu-

nate for anarchists, to obscure the nature of the PKK and to dress it up as some sort of libertarian, even anarchist, organization. The PKK is, and has been for over 30 years, a hard-core Stalinist/Maoist group, complete with a cult of personality of its leader (Abdullah Ocalan), that has followed, and is continuing to follow, the prototypical Stalinist/Maoist two-stage theory, first national liberation, then (if at all) a “socialist” revolution. The fact that Ocalan has claimed to have read Murray Bookchin and is now advocating local autonomy and organizing women’s militias does not, by itself, prove that the PKK has changed its spots and is now carrying out an anarchist or proto-anarchist revolution. Until there is definite proof that the PKK has seriously reevaluated its past (which would include, at the very least, a discussion of the role, and a repudiation and probably the expulsion, of its long-time leader), there are no grounds for parading the PKK and Ocalan as libertarians. (The boss orders us to be democratic!) And just because impressionable leftists come back from tours of the area telling uplifting stories about the PKK-led struggle is no reason to jump on the bandwagon. The same thing happened in the 1930s in Russia under Stalin (even at the time of forced collectivization and the purge trials!), and in China, Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam. Stalinist leaderships are very adept at manipulating the minds of “socialist tourists” to get them to see what they (the Stalinists) want them to see and believe what they want them to believe. Moreover, however impressive women’s militias may be (assuming they really are under women’s leadership, and not just at the local level), there is nothing intrinsically socialist, let alone anarchist, about them; they are totally consistent with a bourgeois-democratic, even a Stalinist, revolution. It is particularly telling (and embarrassing) that the Trotskyists (the Bureau of the Fourth International, in their publication, “International Viewpoint”) came out with a more insightful,