Errico Malatesta and Nestor Makhno
About the Platform
1927–1929

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Errico Malatesta: A Project of Anarchist Organisation (1927)

I recently happened to come across a French pamphlet (in Italy today [1927], as is known, the non-fascist press cannot freely circulate), with the title *Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Project)*.

This is a project for anarchist organisation published under the name of a 'Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad' and it seems to be directed particularly at Russian comrades. But it deals with questions of equal interest to all anarchists; and it is, clear, including the language in which it is written, that it seeks the support of comrades worldwide. In any case it is worth examining, for the Russians as for everyone, whether the proposal put forward is in keeping with anarchist principles and whether implementation would truly serve the cause of anarchism.

The intentions of the comrades are excellent. They rightly lament the fact that until now the anarchists have not had an influence on political and social events in proportion to the theoretical and practical value of their doctrines, nor to their numbers, courage and spirit of self-sacrifice — and believe that the main reason for this relative failure is the lack of a large, serious and active organisation.

And thus far I could more or less agree.

Organisation, which after all only means cooperation and solidarity in practice, is a natural condition, necessary to the running of society; and it is an unavoidable fact which involves everyone, whether in human society in general or in any grouping of people joined by a common aim.

As human beings cannot live in isolation, indeed could not really become human beings and satisfy their moral and material needs unless they were part of society and cooperated with their fellows, it is inevitable that those who lack the means, or a sufficiently developed awareness, to organise freely with those with whom they share common interests and sentiments, must submit to the organisations set up by others, who generally form the ruling class or group and whose aim is to exploit the labour of others to their own advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small number of the privileged has always been the

outcome of the inability of the greater number of individuals to agree and to organise with other workers on production and enjoyment of rights and benefits and for defence against those who seek to exploit and oppress them.

Anarchism emerged as a response to this state of affairs, its basic principle being free organisation, set up and run according to the free agreement of its members without any kind of authority; that is, without anyone having the right to impose their will on others. And it is therefore obvious that anarchists should seek to apply to their personal and political lives this same principle upon which, they believe, the whole of human society should be based.

Judging by certain polemics it would seem that there are anarchists who spurn any form of organisation; but in fact the many, too many, discussions on this subject, even when obscured by questions of language or poisoned by personal issues, are concerned with the means and not the actual principle of organisation. Thus it happens that when those comrades who sound the most hostile to organisation want to really do something they organise just like the rest of us and often more effectively. The problem, I repeat, is entirely one of means.

Therefore I can only view with sympathy the initiative that our Russian comrades have taken, convinced as I am that a more general, more *united,* more enduring organisation than any that have so far been set up by anarchists — even if it did not manage to do away with all the mistakes and weaknesses that are perhaps inevitable in a movement like ours — which struggles on in the midst of the incomprehension, indifference and even the hostility of the majority — would undoubtedly be an important element of strength and success, a powerful means of gaining support for our ideas.

I believe it is necessary above all and urgent for anarchists to come to terms with one another and organise as much and as well as possible in order to be able to influence the direction the mass of the people take in their struggle for change and emancipation.

Today the major force for social transformation is the labour movement (union movement) and on its direction will largely depend the course events take and the objectives of the next revolution. Through the organisations set up for the defence of their interests the workers

authoritarian institutions and its coercive bodies, we must refuse to take part or to recognise it, rebelling against its impositions and demanding full autonomy for ourselves and for all the dissident minorities. In other words, we must remain in an actual or potential state of rebellion and, unable to win in the present, must at least prepare for the future.

Is this what you too mean by the part the anarchists should take in the preparation and carrying out of the revolution?

From what I know of you and your work I am inclined to believe that you do.

But, when I see that in the Union that you support there is an Executive Committee to give ideological and organisational direction to the association I am assailed by the doubt that you would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme of the revolution.

If this is so we are poles apart.

Your organisation, or your managerial organs, may be composed of anarchists but they would only become nothing other than a government. Believing, in completely good faith, that they are necessary to the triumph of the revolution, they would, as a priority, make sure that they were well placed enough and strong enough to impose their will. They would therefore create armed corps for material defence and a bureaucracy for carrying out their commands and in the process they would paralyse the popular movement and kill the revolution.

That is what, I believe, has happened to the Bolsheviks.

There it is. I believe that the important thing is not the victory of our plans, our projects, our utopias, which in any case need the confirmation of experience and can be modified by experience, developed and adapted to the real moral and material conditions of the age and place. What matters most is that the people. men and women lose the sheeplike instincts and habits which thousands of years of slavery have instilled in them, and learn to think and act freely. And it is to this great work of moral liberation that the anarchists must specially dedicate themselves.

I thank you for the attention you have given to my letter and, in the hope of hearing from you further, send you my cordial greetings.

You will understand that I am far from thinking that the anarchists should be satisfied with being the simple auxiliaries of other revolutionaries who, not being anarchists, naturally aspire to become the government.

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

Today we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and coordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system; and we must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised, and perhaps unorganisable, masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in short, prepare, and prepare ourselves, morally and materially, for the revolutionary act which will open the way to the future.

And then, in the revolution, we must take an energetic part (if possible before and more effectively than the others) in the essential material struggle and drive it to the utmost limit in destroying all the repressive forces of the State. We must encourage the workers to take possession of the means of production (land, mines, factories and workshops, means of transport, etc.) and of stocks of manufactured goods; to organise immediately, on their own, an equitable distribution of consumer goods, and at the same time supply products for trade between communes and regions and for the continuation and intensification of production and all services useful to the public. We must, in all ways possible and according to local circumstances and opportunities, promote action by the workers' associations, the cooperatives, the voluntary groups — to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian powers, new governments, opposing them with violence if necessary, but above all rendering them useless. And where we do not find sufficient consensus among the people and cannot prevent the re-establishment of the State with its

develop an awareness of the oppression they suffer and the antagonism that divides them from the bosses and as a result begin to aspire to a better life, become accustomed to collective struggle and solidarity and win those improvements that are possible within the capitalist and state regime. Then, when the conflict goes beyond compromise, revolution or reaction follows. The anarchists must recognise the usefulness and importance of the union movement; they must support its development and make it one of the levers in their action, doing all they can to ensure that, by cooperating with other forces for progress, it will open the way to a social revolution that brings to an end the class system, and to complete freedom, equality, peace and solidarity for everybody.

But it would be a great and a fatal mistake to believe, as many do, that the labour movement can and should, of its own volition, and by its very nature, lead to such a revolution. On the contrary, all movements based on material and immediate interests (and a big labour movement can do nothing else) if they lack the stimulus, the drive, the concerted effort of people of ideas, tend inevitably to adapt to circumstances, they foster a spirit of conservatism and fear of change in those who manage to obtain better working conditions, and often end up creating new and privileged classes, and serving to uphold and consolidate the system we would seek to destroy.

Hence there is an impelling need for specifically anarchist organisations which, both from within and outside the unions, struggle for the achievement of anarchism and seek to sterilise all the germs of degeneration and reaction.

But it is obvious that in order to achieve their ends, anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, remain in harmony with the principles of anarchism; that is, they must know how to blend the free action of individuals with the necessity and the joy of cooperation which serve to develop the awareness and initiative of their members and a means of education for the environment in which they operate and of a moral and material preparation for the future we desire.

Does the project under discussion satisfy these demands?

It seems to me that it does not. Instead of arousing in anarchists a greater desire for organisation, it seems deliberately designed to reinforce the prejudice of those comrades who believe that to organise means to

submit to leaders and belong to an authoritarian, centralising body that suffocates any attempt at free initiative. And in fact it contains precisely those proposals that some, in the face of evident truths and despite our protests, insist on attributing to all anarchists who are described as organisers. Let us examine the Project.

First of all, it seems to me a mistake — and in any case impossible to realise — to believe that all anarchists can be grouped together in one 'General Union' — that is, in the words of the Project, In a *single*, active revolutionary body.

We anarchists can all say that we are of the same party, if by the word 'party' we mean all who are *on the same side*, that is, who share the same general aspirations and who, in one way or another, struggle for the same ends against common adversaries and enemies. But this does not mean it is possible — or even desirable — for all of us to be gathered into one specific association. There are too many differences of environment and conditions of struggle; too many possible ways of action to choose among, and also too many differences of temperament and personal incompatibilities for a *General Union*, if taken seriously, not to become, instead of a means for coordinating and reviewing the efforts of all, an obstacle to individual activity and perhaps also a cause of more bitter internal strife.

As an example, how could one organise in the same way and with the same group a public association set up to make propaganda and agitation, publicly and a secret society restricted by the political conditions of the country in which it operates to conceal from the enemy its plans, methods and members? How could the *educationalists*, who believe that propaganda and example suffice for the gradual transformation of individuals and thus of society, adopt the same tactics as the *revolutionaries*, who are convinced of the need to destroy by violence a status quo that is maintained by violence and to create, in the face of the violence of the oppressors, the necessary conditions for the free dissemination of propaganda and the practical application of the conquered ideals? And how to keep together some people who, for particular reasons, do not get on with; and respect one another and could never be equally good and useful militants for anarchism?

leave the association when emerging differences of opinion or changed circumstances or conflict over preferred methods make cooperation impossible or inappropriate. Just as I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.

Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among the members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts, in my view, to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached.

The really important question that you raise in your letter concerns the function (*le role*) of the anarchists in the social movement and the way they mean to carry it out. This is a matter of basics, of the raison d'etre of anarchism and one needs to be quite clear as to what one means.

You ask if the anarchists should (in the revolutionary movement and communistic organisation of society) assume a directional and therefore responsible role, or limit themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries.

Your question leaves me perplexed, because it lacks precision. It is possible to direct through advice and example, leaving the people — provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves — to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods.

In which way would you want to direct?

We are anarchists because we believe that government (any government) is an evil, and that it is not possible to gain liberty, solidarity and justice without liberty. We cannot therefore aspire to government and we must do everything possible to prevent others — classes, parties or individuals — from taking power and becoming governments.

The responsibility of the leaders, a notion by which it seems to me that you want to guarantee that the public are protected from their abuses and errors, means nothing to me. Those in power are not truly responsible except when faced with a revolution, and we cannot make the revolution every day, and generally it is only made after the government has already done all the evil it can.

up a resistance to invasion. I know that throughout the ages governments have in various ways threatened with and applied the system of collective responsibility to put a brake on the rebels, demand taxes, etc. And I understand that this could be an effective means of intimidation and oppression.

But how can people who fight for liberty and justice talk of collective responsibility when they can only be concerned with moral responsibility, whether or not material sanctions follow?!!!

If, for example, in a conflict with an armed enemy force the man beside me acts as a coward, he may do harm to me and to everyone, but the shame can only be his for lacking the courage to sustain the role he took upon himself. If in a conspiracy a co-conspirator betrays and sends his companions to prison, are the betrayed the ones responsible for the betrayal?

The 'Platform' said: 'The whole Union is responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.'

Can this be reconciled with the principles of autonomy and free initiative which the anarchists profess? I answered then: 'If the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they see fit? How can it be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Thus, the Union and through it the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything before having obtained the go-ahead, permission from the committee. And then, can an individual accept responsibility for the action of a collectivity before knowing what the latter will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves?'

Certainly I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and cooperates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to coordinate his actions with those of his fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others and, thus, the common cause; and respect the agreements that have been made — except when wishing sincerely to

Besides, even the authors of the Project (*Platforme*) declare as 'inept' any idea of creating an organisation which gathers together the representatives of the different tendencies in anarchism. Such an organisation, they say, 'incorporating heterogeneous elements, both on a theoretical and practical level, would be no more than a mechanical collection (assemblage) of individuals who conceive all questions concerning the anarchist movement from a different point of view and would inevitably break up as soon as they were put to the test of events and real life.'

That's fine. But then, if they recognise the existence of different tendencies they will surely have to leave them the right to organise in their own fashion and work for anarchy in the way that seems best to them. Or will they claim the right to expel, to *excommunicate* from anarchism all those who do not accept their programme? Certainly they say they 'want to assemble in a single organisation' all the *sound elements* of the libertarian movement; and naturally they will tend to judge as *sound* only those who think as they do. But what will they do with the elements that are *not sound*?

Of course, among those who describe themselves as anarchists there are, as in any human groupings, elements of varying worth; and what is worse, there are some who spread ideas in the name of anarchism which have very little to do with anarchism. But how to avoid the problem? *Anarchist truth* cannot and must not become the monopoly of one individual or committee; nor can it depend on the decisions of real or fictitious majorities. All that is necessary — and sufficient — is for everyone to have and to exercise the widest freedom of criticism and for each one of us to maintain their own ideas and choose for themselves their own comrades. In the last resort the facts will decide who was right.

Let us therefore put aside the idea of bringing together *all* anarchists into a single organisation and look at this *General Union* which the Russians propose to us for what it really is — namely the Union of a particular fraction of anarchists; and let us see whether the organisational method proposed conforms with anarchist methods and principles and if it could thereby help to bring about the triumph of anarchism.

Once again, it seems to me that it cannot.

I am not doubting the sincerity of the anarchist proposals of those Russian comrades. They want to bring about anarchist communism and are seeking the means of doing so as quickly as possible. But it is not enough to want something; one also has to adopt suitable means; to get to a certain place one must take the right path or end up somewhere else. Their organisation, being typically authoritarian, far from helping to bring about the victory of anarchist communism, to which they aspire, could only falsify the anarchist spirit and lead to consequences that go against their intentions.

In fact, their *General Union* appears to consist of so many partial organisations with *secretariats* which *ideologically* direct the political and technical work; and to coordinate the activities of all the member organisations there is a *Union Executive Committee* whose task is to carry out the decisions of the Union and to oversee the 'ideological and organisational conduct of the organisations in conformity with the ideology and general strategy of the Union.'

Is this anarchist? This, in my view, is a government and a church. True, there are no police or bayonets, no faithful flock to accept the dictated *ideology*; but this only means that their government would be an impotent and impossible government and their church a nursery for heresies and schisms. The spirit, the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist.

Listen if this is not true.

> 'The executive organ of the general libertarian movement — the anarchist Union — will introduce into its ranks the principle of collective responsibility; the whole Union will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member; and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.'

And following this, which is the absolute negation of any individual independence and freedom of initiative and action, the proponents, remembering that they are anarchists, call themselves federalists and thunder against centralisation, 'the inevitable results of which', they say,

Errico Malatesta: In reply to *About the Platform* (1929)

Dear Comrade

I have finally seen the letter you sent me more than a year ago, about my criticism of the Project for organising a General Union of anarchists, published by a group of Russian anarchists abroad and known in our movement by the name of 'Platform'.

Knowing my situation as you do, you will certainly have understood why I did not reply.

I cannot take part as I would like in discussion of the questions which interest us most, because censorship prevents me from receiving either the publications that are considered subversive or the letters which deal with political and social topics, and only after long intervals and by fortunate chance do I hear the dying echo of what the comrades say and do. Thus, I knew that the 'Platform' and my criticism of it had been widely discussed, but I knew little or nothing about what had been said; and your letter is the first written document on the subject that I have managed to see.

If we could correspond freely, I would ask you, before entering into the discussion, to clarify your views which, perhaps owing to an imperfect translation of the Russian into French, seem to me to be in part somewhat obscure. But things being as they are, I will reply to what I have understood, and hope that I shall then be able to see your response.

You are surprised that I do not accept the principle of collective responsibility, which you believe to be a fundamental principle that guides, and must guide the revolutionaries of the past, present and future.

For my part, I wonder what that notion of collective responsibility can ever mean from the lips of an anarchist.

I know that the military are in the habit of decimating corps of rebellious soldiers or soldiers who have behaved badly in the face of the enemy by shooting at them indiscriminately. I know that the army chiefs have no scruples about destroying villages or cities and massacring an entire population, including children, because someone attempted to put

5. What do the anarchists mean by *institutions to be established* with a view to guaranteeing the free development of society?
6. Can anarchism, in the communist society it conceives, do without social institutions? If yes, by what means? If no, which should it recognise and use and with what names bring them into being? Should the anarchists take on a leading function, therefore one of responsibility, or should they limit themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries?

Your reply, dear Malatesta, would be of great importance to me for two reasons. It would allow me better to understand your way of seeing things as regards the questions of organising the anarchist forces and the movement in general. And — let us be frank — your opinion is immediately accepted by most anarchists and sympathisers without any discussion, as that of an experienced militant who has remained all his life firmly faithful to his libertarian ideal. It therefore depends to a certain extent on your attitude whether a full study of the urgent questions which this epoch poses to our movement will be undertaken, and therefore whether its development will be slowed down or take a new leap forward. By remaining in the stagnation of the past and present our movement will gain nothing. On the contrary, it is vital that in view of the events that loom before us it should have every chance to carry out its functions.

I set great store by your reply.

1928

with revolutionary greetings

Nestor Makhno

'are the enslavement and mechanisation of the life of society and of the parties.'

But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?

Moreover, the authors of the Project say that it is the 'Union' which proposes and disposes. But when they refer to the wishes of the Union do they perhaps also refer to the wishes of all the members? If so, for the Union to function it would need everyone always to have the same opinion on all questions. So if it is normal that everyone should be in agreement on the general and fundamental principles, because otherwise they would not be and remain united, it cannot be assumed that thinking beings will all and always be of the same opinion on what needs to be done in the different circumstance and on the choice of persons to whom to entrust executive and directional responsibilities.

In reality — as it emerges from the text of the Project itself — the will of the Union can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the *Executive Committee* and decide on all the important questions. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups, and these representatives would decide on what to do, as ever by a majority of votes. So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by the majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority.

Furthermore it should be pointed out that, given the conditions in which anarchists live and struggle, their congresses are even less truly representative than the bourgeois parliaments. And their control over

the executive bodies, if these have authoritarian powers, is rarely opportune and effective. In practice anarchist congresses are attended by whoever wishes and can, whoever has enough money and who has not been prevented by police measures. There are as many present who represent only themselves or a small number of friends as there are those truly representing the opinions and desires of a large collective. And unless precautions are taken against possible traitors and spies — indeed, because of the need for those very precautions — it is impossible to make a serious check on the representatives and the value of their mandate.

In any case this all comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism .

It is well known that anarchists do not accept majority government (*democracy*), any more than they accept government by the few (*aristocracy*, *oligarchy*, or dictatorship by one class or party) nor that of one individual (*autocracy*, *monarchy* or personal dictatorship).

Thousands of times anarchists have criticised so-called majority government, which anyway in practise always leads to domination by a small minority.

Do we need to repeat all this yet again for our Russian comrades?

Certainly anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need to adapt to the wishes of the many. And usually, in the interests of living peacefully together and under conditions of equality, it is necessary for everyone to be motivated by a spirit of concord, tolerance and compromise. But such adaptation on the one hand by one group must on the other be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm. This is an ideal which, perhaps, in daily life in general, is difficult to attain in entirety, but it is a fact that in every human grouping anarchy is that much nearer where agreement between majority and minority is free and spontaneous and exempt from any imposition that does not derive from the natural order of things.

experience of the revolutionary battles of the past leads me to believe that no matter what the order of revolutionary events may be, one needs to give out serious directives, both ideological and tactical. This means that only a collective spirit, sound and devoted to anarchism, could express the requirements of the moment, through a collectively responsible will. None of us has the right to dodge that element of responsibility. On the contrary, if it has been until now overlooked among the ranks of the anarchists, it needs now to become, for us, communist anarchists, an article of our theoretical and practical programme.

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

I will not, in this letter, dwell on the other parts of your article against the 'Platform' project, such as the part where you see 'a church and an authority without police'. I will express only my surprise to see you use such an argument in the course of your criticism. I have given much thought to it and cannot accept your opinion.

No, you are not right. And because I am not in agreement with your confutation, using arguments that are too facile, I believe I am entitled to ask you:

1. Should anarchism take some responsibility in the struggle of the workers against their oppressors, capitalism, and its servant the State? If not, can you say why? If yes, must the anarchists work towards allowing their movement to exert influence on the same basis as the existing social order?
2. Can anarchism, in the state of disorganisation in which it finds itself at the moment, exert any influence, ideological and practical, on social affairs and the struggle of the working class?
3. What are the means that anarchism should adopt outside the revolution and what are the means of which it can dispose to prove and affirm its constructive concepts?
4. Does anarchism need its own permanent organisations, closely tied among themselves by unity of goal and action to attain its ends?

Nestor Makhno: About the 'Platform' (1928)

Dear Comrade Malatesta,

I have read your response to the project for an 'Organisational Platform of a General Union of Anarchists', a project published by the group of Russian anarchists abroad.

My impression is that either you have misunderstood the project for the 'Platform' or your refusal to recognise collective responsibility in revolutionary action and the directional function that the anarchist forces must take up, stems from a deep conviction about anarchism that leads you to disregard that principle of responsibility.

Yet, it is a fundamental principle, which guides each one of us in our way of understanding the anarchist idea, in our determination that it should penetrate to the masses, in its spirit of sacrifice. It is thanks to this that a man can choose the revolutionary way and ignore others. Without it no revolutionary could have the necessary strength or will or intelligence to bear the spectacle of social misery, and even less fight against it. It is through the inspiration of collective responsibility that the revolutionaries of all epochs and all schools have united their forces; it is upon this that they based their hope that their partial revolts — revolts which opened the path for the oppressed — were not in vain, that the exploited would understand their aspirations, would extract from them the applications suitable for the time and would use them to find new paths toward their emancipation.

You yourself, dear Malatesta, recognise the individual responsibility of the anarchist revolutionary. And what is more, you have lent your support to it throughout your life as a militant. At least that is how I have understood your writings on anarchism. But you deny the necessity and usefulness of collective responsibility as regards the tendencies and actions of the anarchist movement as a whole. Collective responsibility alarms you; so you reject it.

For myself, who has acquired the habit of fully facing up to the realities of our movement, your denial of collective responsibility strikes me not only as without basis but dangerous for the social revolution, in which you would do well to take account of experience when it comes to fighting a decisive battle against all our enemies at once. Now my

So if anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern human society in general — in which individuals are nonetheless constrained to accept certain restrictions, since they cannot isolate themselves without renouncing the conditions of human life — and if they want everything to be done by the free agreement of all, how is it possible for them to adopt the idea of government by majority in their essentially free and voluntary associations and begin to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?

It is understandable that non-anarchists would find Anarchy, defined as a free organisation without the rule of the majority over the minority, or vice versa, an unrealisable utopia, or one realisable only in a distant future; but it is inconceivable that anyone who professes to anarchist ideas and wants to make Anarchy, or at least seriously approach its realisation — today rather than tomorrow — should disown the basic principles of anarchism in the very act of proposing to fight for its victory.

In my view, an anarchist organisation must be founded on a very different basis from the one proposed by those Russian comrades.

Full autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord between those who believe it useful to unite in cooperating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be built and designed. Then the groups, the federations of groups, the federations of federations, the meetings, the congresses, the correspondence committees and so forth. But all this must be done freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed, and with the sole view of giving greater effect to efforts which, in isolation, would be either impossible or ineffective. Thus congresses of an anarchist organisation, though suffering as representative bodies from all the abovementioned imperfections, are free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal relationships among the most active comrades, to coordinate and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means of taking action,

to acquaint all on the situation in the various regions and the action most urgently needed in each; to formulate the various opinions current among the anarchists and draw up some kind of statistics from them — and their decisions are not obligatory rules but suggestions, recommendations, proposals to be submitted to all involved, and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them, and for as long as they accept them.

The administrative bodies which they nominate — Correspondence Commission, etc. — have no executive powers, have no directive powers, unless on behalf of those who ask for and approve such initiatives, and have no authority to impose their own views — which they can certainly maintain and propagate as groups of comrades, but cannot present as the official opinion of the organisation. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals which groups and individuals communicate to them; and they serve — for those who require such a service — to facilitate relations between the groups and cooperation between those who agree on the various initiatives. Whoever wants to is free to correspond with whomsoever he wishes, or to use the services of other committees nominated by special groups.

In an anarchist organisation the individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others. In any case a given organisation lasts for as long as the reasons for union remain greater than the reasons for dissent. When they are no longer so, then the organisation is dissolved and makes way for other, more homogeneous groups.

Clearly, the duration, the permanence of an organisation depends on how successful it has been in the long struggle we must wage, and it is natural that any institution instinctively seeks to last indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the consequence of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continual changes of circumstances. When it is no longer able to accomplish a useful task it is better that it should die.

Those Russian comrades will perhaps find that an organisation like the one I propose and similar to the ones that have existed, more or less satisfactorily at various times, is not very efficient.

I understand. Those comrades are obsessed with the success of the Bolsheviks in their country and, like the Bolsheviks, would like to gather the anarchists together in a sort of disciplined army which, under the ideological and practical direction of a few leaders, would march solidly to the attack of the existing regimes, and after having won a material victory would direct the constitution of a new society. And perhaps it is true that under such a system, were it possible that anarchists would involve themselves in it, and if the leaders were men of imagination, our material effectiveness would be greater. But with what results? Would what happened to socialism and communism in Russia not happen to anarchism?

Those comrades are anxious for success as we are too. But to live and to succeed we don't have to repudiate the reasons for living and alter the character of the victory to come.

We want to fight and win, but as anarchists — for Anarchy.

Malatesta

Il Risveglio (Geneva),

October 1927