

ON DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION

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Within the context of the debate that has taken place among our comrades from many lands regarding the Draft Platform of the General Union of Anarchists, published by the group of Russian anarchists abroad, I have been asked from several quarters to write a piece specifically devoted to the issue of the defense of the revolution. I shall strive to deal with it most diligently, but, before I do, I think I have a duty to inform comrades that this is not the central issue of the Draft Platform: the crux of it is the necessity of achieving the most consistent unity in our libertarian communist ranks. That portion asks only for amendment and completion before implementation. Otherwise, if we do not strive to marshal our forces, our movement will be condemned to succumb once and for all to the influences of liberals and opportunists who haunt our circles, if not outright speculators and political adventurers, who, at best, can prattle on and on but are incapable of fighting on the ground for the attainment of our great objectives. The latter can only happen if we carry along with us all who instinctively believe in the rightness of our struggle and who seek to achieve the widest possible freedom and independence through revolution, so as to build a new life and a new society, wherein the individual may at last and unimpeded exercise his creative drive on behalf of the general good.

As far as the specific issue of defense of the revolution goes, I shall be relying upon my first-hand experiences during the Russian revolution in the Ukraine, in the course of that unequal, but decisive struggle waged by the revolutionary movement of the Ukrainian toilers. Those experiences taught me, first, that defense of the revolution is directly bound up with its offensive against the Counterrevolution:

(...) secondly, its expansion and its intensity are at all times conditioned by the resistance of the counter-revolutionaries: thirdly, what follows from the above, namely that revolutionary actions are closely dependent on the political content, structure and organizational methods adopted by the armed revolutionary detachments, who are obliged to confront conventional, counter-revolutionary armies along a huge front.

In its fight against its enemies, the Russian revolution at first began by organizing Red Guard detachments under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. It was very quickly spotted that these failed to withstand the pressures from enemy troops, to be specific, the German, Austrian and Hungarian expeditionary corps, for the simple reason that, most of the time, they operated without any overall operational guide-lines. That is why the Bolsheviks turned in the spring of 1918 to the organization of a Red Army.

It was then that we issued the call to form "free battalions" of Ukrainian toilers. It quickly transpired that that organization was powerless to survive internal provocations of every sort, given that, without adequate vetting, political or social, it took in all volunteers provided only that they wanted to take up their weapons and fight. This was why the armed units established by that organization were treacherously delivered to the enemy, a fact that prevented it from seeing through its historical mission in the fight against the foreign counter-revolution.

However, following that initial set-back to the "free battalions" organization - which might be described as fighting units of the revolution's first line of defense - we did not lose our heads. The organization was somewhat overhauled in its format: the battalions were complemented by light partisan detachments of a mixed type, that is, comprising infantry and cavalry alike. The task of these detachments was to operate far behind the enemy's lines. This organization proved itself during its operations against the Austro-German expeditionary forces and the bands of the Hetman Skoropadsky, their ally, during the late summer and autumn of 1918.

Sticking to that form of organizing the defense of the revolution, the Ukrainian toilers were able to wrest from the clutches of the counter-revolutionaries the noose that the latter had thrown around the revolution in the Ukraine. What is more, not content with defending the revolution, they followed it through as fully as they could.

As the internal counter-revolution spread inside the country, it received aid from other countries, not just in the form of arms and munitions but also in the shape of troops. Despite that, our organization of the defense of the revolution also expanded in

size and at the same time, as the need arose, adopted a new format and more suitable fighting methods.

We know that the most perilous counter-revolutionary front at that time was manned by the army of General Denikin: however, the insurgent movement held its own against him for five to six months. A fair number of the best Denikinist commanders¹ came to grief against our units which had no weapons other than those taken from the enemy. Our organization made a large contribution to that: without trampling on the autonomy of the fighting units, it reorganized them into regiments and brigades coordinated by a common operational Staff. It is true that the establishment of the latter was feasible only thanks to the appreciation by the toiling revolutionary masses serving on the front lines facing the enemy as well as behind his lines, of the necessity of a single military command. Furthermore, still under the influence of our libertarian communist peasant group from Gulyai-Polye, the toilers also saw to it that every individual was awarded equal rights to take part in the construction of the new society, in every sphere, including the obligation to defend its gains.

Thus, whilst the Denikin front threatened the very life of the libertarian revolution which was being watched with a lively interest by the population at large, the revolutionary toilers came together on the basis of our organizational notion of defense of the revolution, making that their own and they bolstered the insurgent army with a regular influx of fresh combatants to relieve the wounded and the weary.

Elsewhere, the practical requirements of the struggle induced our movement to establish an operational and organizational Staff to share the oversight of all the fighting units. It is because of this practice that I find myself unable to subscribe to the view that revolutionary anarchists reject the need for such a Staff to oversee the armed

¹ Note: At that time, the Bolsheviks had no military unit in the Ukraine: not until much later did their first fighting units arrive from Russia whereupon they occupied a front parallel to ours, apparently striving to join up with the Ukrainian toilers, who were organized autonomously and above all without their statist supervision, but in fact they set to work in an underhand fashion to break them up and eliminate them for their own advantage. In order to encompass their goal, the Bolsheviks shrank from nothing, going so far as to directly sabotage the support they were pledged to provide in the form of munitions and shells: this at the very moment when we were mounting a broad offensive all along our front, the success of which hinged primarily upon the fire-power of our artillery and our machine-guns, when we were in fact tremendously short of munitions.

revolutionary struggle strategically. I am convinced that any revolutionary anarchist finding himself in the same circumstances as those I encountered in the civil war in the Ukraine will, of necessity, be impelled to do as we did. If, in the course of the coming authentic social revolution, there are anarchists who rebut these organizational principles, then in our movement we will have only empty chatters or dead-weight, harmful elements who will be rejected in short order.

In tackling the resolution of the matter of the revolution's defense, anarchists must unceasingly look to the social character of libertarian communism. Faced with a mass revolutionary movement, we have to acknowledge the need to organize that and endow it with means worthy of it, then throw ourselves into it whole-heartedly. Otherwise, if we appear to be dreamers and utopians, then we must not hamper the toilers' struggle, in particular those who follow the state socialists. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, anarchism is and remains a revolutionary social movement and that is why I am and always will be an advocate of its having a well articulated organization and support the establishment, come the revolution, of battalions, regiments, brigades and divisions designed to amalgamate, at certain times, into one common army, under a single regional command in the shape of supervisory organizational Staffs. The task of the latter will be, according to the requirements and conditions of the struggle, to draw up a federative operational plan, coordinating the actions of regional armies, so as to bring to a successful conclusion the fighting conducted on all fronts against the armed counter-revolution. The matter of the defense of the revolution is no easy matter: it may require very great organizational commitment from the revolutionary masses. Anarchists must realize that and stand by to assist them in that undertaking.

* Dielo Truda N° 25. The struggle against the state and other essays. MAKHNO, Nestor Ivanovich. Junho de 1927, pp. 13-14. Editado por Alexander Skirda. Ak Press, 1996.