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Anarcho-Communists, Platformism, and Dual Power: Innovation or Travesty?

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power discourse is concerned with government, with how to create and maintain a set of institutions that can pull the allegiance of the governed away from the existing state. Unless the partisans of dual power have worked out a radically different understanding of what power is, where its legitimacy comes from, how it is maintained, and — more importantly — how anarchists can possibly exercise it within a framework that is historically statist, the discussion of "anarchist dual power" is a mockery of the anarchist principle of being against government.

". . . When a revolutionary situation develops, counter-institutions have the potential of functioning as a real alternative to the existing structure and reliance on them becomes as normal as reliance on the old authoritarian institutions. This is when counter-institutions constitute dual power.

Dual power is a state of affairs in which people have created institutions that fulfill all the useful functions formerly provided by the state. The creation of a general state of dual power is a necessary requirement for a successful revolution. . . "

— *Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation New York Local Member Handbook*; June, 1997

". . . What we need is a theory of the state that starts with an empirical investigation of the origins of the state, the state as it actually exists today, the various experiences of revolutionary dual power, and post-revolutionary societies. . . "

— *After Winter Must Come Spring: a Self-Critical Evaluation of the Life and Death of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation* (New York); 2000

". . . A revolutionary strategy seeks to undermine the state by developing a dual power strategy. A dual power strategy is one that directly challenges institutions of power and at the same time, in some way, prefigures the new institutions we envision. A dual power strategy not only opposes the state, it also prepares us for the difficult questions that will arise in a revolutionary situation. . . [A] program to develop local Copwatch chapters could represent a dual power strategy, since monitoring the police undermines state power by disrupting the cops' ability to enforce class and color lines and also foreshadows a new society in which ordinary people take responsibility for ensuring the safety of their communities."

— *Bring The Ruckus* statement (Phoenix, AZ); Summer, 2001

". . . As anarchist communists, our strategy of transforming society is the establishment of dual power: creating alternative and

democratic institutions while simultaneously struggling against the established order. If we ever hope to succeed, anarchist actions cannot be random and uncoordinated. We should strive for strategic & tactical unity and coordination in all anarchist factions and affinity groups."

— *Alcatraz* magazine (Oakland, CA); February, 2002

". . . [W]e feel that it is necessary to develop a long term strategy, and to place all our actions in the framework of that strategy . . . this framework draws most heavily from the Platformist tradition [sic] within anarchism. This is not to say that one must, or even should, agree with the specifics of the original *Organization Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, but is rather a recognition of the importance of collective responsibility, discipline, and tactical unity which the Platformist tradition [sic] puts forward. Clearly then, the framework laid out in this document recognizes that many of those who today identify as 'anarchists' will strongly disagree with this most basic assumption, and therefore will find the entire framework less than satisfactory. However, our priority, as stated above, is the creation of a mass anarchist movement, and where we feel that building such a movement means alienating others who identify as anarchists, we should have no problem in doing so.

Further, it is necessary to clarify that this framework assumes that it is through the creation of dual power and a culture of resistance that a truly mass, working-class based, anarchist revolutionary movement will be born . . . "

— "Toward The Creation Of An Anarchist Movement: From Reactive Politics to Proactive Struggle" in *Barricada; Agitational Monthly of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists* [NEFAC] #16 (Boston, MA); April, 2002

"We want Dual Power. We seek to build popular power that can contest and replace state and capitalist power. We actively work to create a new world in the shell of the old — politically, culturally

Bolshevism. No actual General Union of Libertarian Communists was formed after the *Organizational Platform* was circulated. The project of creating a semi-clandestine militarized vanguard (complete with an executive committee) of anarcho-communists was soon after abandoned by the Russian exiles. For almost 70 years the document itself languished in relative obscurity, a curio from anarchist history, something to titillate the trivia-minded. What made it worth rediscovering?

The anarcho-communism of the Platformists is eerily similar to the authoritarian communism of various Leninist gangs. From a cursory examination of their published rhetoric, it is difficult not to conclude that they have taken the "successful" aspects of a Leninist program, a Leninist vision, and Lenino-Maoist organizing, and more or less removed or modified the vocabulary of the more obviously statist parts. The promoters of this hybridized anarchism — should it be called anarcho-Leninism? — draw on the *Platform* the same way that the writers of the *Platform* drew on Leninism. In doing this, the Platformists are in turn trying to reclaim a moment in anarchist history that had been largely (and well-deservedly) forgotten as an embarrassment. By fabricating a "Platformist tradition," they hope to give themselves an impeccable anarchist pedigree, allowing the discussion of "anarchist dual power" to occur without needing to justify such a contradictory concept. Unfortunately for them, however, there was never such a "Platformist tradition."

The creation of "anarchist dual power" by the descendants and disciples of Love & Rage goes against the ideas of a more recognizable anarchism (that is, one not directly influenced by Leninist ideas). The fans of this "anarchist dual power" have adopted a, shall we say, unique perspective on the issue of dual power. Historically the term dual power has been used as a way of understanding the class-based tensions that lead either to periods of reaction or political (i.e. statist) revolution. It is clearly meant to describe a condition of loyalty split between an existing state and a state-in-formation. As the L&R Member Handbook correctly states (as quoted above): "Dual power is a state of affairs in which people have created institutions that fulfill all the useful functions formerly provided by the state." How this "state of affairs" can be anti-statist is never explained — for the unspectacularly simple reason that it cannot be explained within an anti-statist conceptual model. The entire dual

the Bolsheviks. They wanted to out-Bolshevize the Bolsheviks, in the hopes of winning the next round of the struggle. It was for these reasons that the *Platform* was publicly condemned by ex-Makhnovists (including Voline), anarcho-communists (like Malatesta), and others as being a sectarian attempt to create an anarchist program with a Bolshevik organizational structure. The *Platform* project was unsuccessful.

There is a nagging question in this organizational discussion: why have the promoters of formally structured membership organizations taken an example from a historically unimportant document, an example of unrivalled ineffectiveness? Why have they not used as a model the most "successful" anarchist mass organization — the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation)? From the time of its official founding in 1927, the FAI was feared by government agents, and cheered by a majority of Spanish anarchists. In the decade of their revolutionary activity the members of the FAI made many mistakes, most notably the entry of some of its members into the Catalan and Spanish governments in 1936. Despite that extremely serious lapse in judgment, the fact remains that the FAI was a real and functioning anarchist federation, and commanded a lot of respect both inside and outside the Spanish anarchist movement. A practical issue that makes the FAI a better example of anarchist organization is that it was based on real affinity groups, developed as an extension of members' familiarity and solidarity with each other. This is in stark contrast to the *Platform* model, which proposes a pre-existing structure that collectives are supposed to join; it puts the cart before the horse, creating a federative project where there may be no need and no interest in creating a federation in the first place. Members of the FAI had known and been active with each other for many years before they decided to create the Federation, mostly as a response to legal repression against the broader anarchist movement during the 1920s. Its members maintained their ties to a traditional and recognizable form of anarchism. After it was allowed to operate openly, only its reformist rivals condemned it as being anarcho-Bolshevik; other anarchists sometimes condemned it for being too liberal (i.e. generous to its enemies).

The *Platform*, on the other hand, did not result in anything concrete, other than its condemnation from almost all contemporary anarchist activists and writers as a call for some bizarre hybrid of anarchism and

> and economically. We do this by both challenging and confronting oppressive institutions and establishing our own liberatory ones."
>
> — Announcement of the formation of the Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives (FRAC) (East Lansing, MI); August, 2002

"I do not think that word means what you think it means."

— Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride*

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My use of quotes from each of these projects has nothing to do with whether or not they are large or influential in terms of numbers of members or supporters, but with the fact that they have published statements where the term *dual power* has made a prominent appearance. The discussion of what actually constitutes this dual power is sparse; when it does occur, it is either vague or unintentionally funny. It is my intention to examine what the term might mean to those self-described anarchists who use it and why it is used by this particular constellation of anarcho-communists.

What is "anarchist dual power"?

Various projects have been suggested as examples of incipient dual power. There are a few questions that I feel must be answered in order for any real discussion to take place between the partisans of this odd formulation and those who remain skeptical of its relevance to anarchist theory and practice. Are the examples of "anarchist dual power" just anarchist-operated alternatives to current non-revolutionary projects? Are they counter-institutions that replace current non-revolutionary projects with more "democratic" control? Do any of them have the potential prestige, influence, or notoriety to challenge the smooth operation of capitalism and the state? Then there's the question of centralization versus diffusion; is bigger better, or is more better? Do these projects require copies, or do they inspire others that are better and more relevant?

Are they examples of direct action and self-organization, or do they come with leaders and directors (sometimes called "influential militants" or "revolutionary nuclei")? Are they used to recruit followers and/or cadre, or are they used to promote solidarity and mutual aid?

Bring The Ruckus champions Copwatch, while others propose extending Independent Media Centers, micropower radio stations, zines, Food Not Bombs. Infoshops, cafes, performance spaces, and other hangouts are sometimes mentioned in the context of "the creation of dual power." Barter networks, worker collectives, food co-ops, independent unions, and squats also get brought up on occasion. These self-organized projects exist currently for providing mutual aid and support to various communities around the world. They are alternative infrastructures for taking care of the needs of antiauthoritarians trying to eke out some kind of decent living. Creating and maintaining an antiauthoritarian infrastructure of autonomous institutions is good practice for making and carrying out some important decisions in our lives, but it's impossible for me to believe that these projects could have the potential to challenge the loyalty of non-subculture people toward the state. Until people's allegiance to the state begins to shift toward these or other alternative or counter-institutions, there's nothing that even remotely resembles dual power in the works. Indeed, until the state feels threatened by these independent institutions, those who sit in the places of real power will continue to ignore them. Either that or they will silently cheer them on because voluntarism is more efficient (and less expensive to them) than welfare programs. Using the term dual power to describe Food Not Bombs, or your local infoshop, or even your local autonomous union, is a parody of history.

> "What constitutes the essence of dual power? We must pause upon this question, for an illumination of it has never appeared in historic literature . . . a class, deprived of power, inevitably strives to some extent to swerve the governmental course in its favor. This does not as yet mean, however, that two or more powers are ruling in society . . . The two-power regime arises only out of irreconcilable class conflicts — is possible, therefore, only in a revolutionary

Having learned nothing from the previous attempts to create national or continental anarchist federations, L&R — immediately after it formed — began to lose members through attrition, and the group split not once, but twice; the final split fractured the membership in three directions. Like most similar organizations, at a certain point the tension between ideological flexibility and conformity came to a head, with many feeling that the organizational model chosen and used by L&R after the first split had become incompatible with anarchist ideas. Others decided that the problem was not with the organizational model, but with the anarchism, and they descended into Maoism. Indeed, well before the final split (it could be argued from its very inception), L&R looked and sounded more and more like a Marxist-Leninist outfit with a circle-A clumsily slapped over a hammer-and-sickle. This is the legacy that L&R has left to groups like NEFAC and Bring The Ruckus, both of which include former members of L&R.

NEFAC is a champion of the *Platform*. Regardless of their criticisms of specifics (what is not included in it), NEFAC members find the overall idea of a highly structured organization with written bylaws and other formal disciplinary measures to be a positive development for anarchists. The *Platform* was written by several veterans and supporters of the Makhnovist insurgent army of the Ukraine, which was active from 1918–1921. Having successfully beaten the Whites (counter-revolutionaries fighting for the restoration of the monarchy and private capitalism), the Ukrainian anarchists had to face Trotsky's Red Army. The Makhnovists were finally defeated. Makhno and several of his general staff eventually escaped to Paris, where, after a number of years of recovering and establishing contacts with other anarchist exiles from the Soviet Union, they began a project that culminated in the publication and circulation of the *Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*. In this document, they attempted to explain and understand the reasons for their loss in particular, and the more general loss of an antiauthoritarian people's revolution to the Bolsheviks. They decided that among the main causes were that the anarchists were not disciplined and dedicated (and ruthless?) enough. As a result, they attempted to emulate the political formation of the victorious Bolsheviks (democratic centralism, an untouchable central committee) without using the terminology of

Socialist League. The RSL had been flirting with anarchists as early as '83, when they began having comradely relations with the New York chapter of the Workers' Solidarity Alliance, an anarcho-syndicalist group. L&R took over all the resources of the RSL, including their newspaper (*The Torch*). This capital extraction allowed them to create a new kind of anarchism — one that was heavily influenced by a mixture of traditional Leninism, New Leftist identity politics, and anti-imperialism. They called it "revolutionary anarchism" and sometimes referred to their ideas as "anarcho-communism" even though they had little to do with the theories and ideas of Kropotkin, Malatesta, Goldman, and others.

They were constantly working on their Statement of Principles, which was meant to show their distinctions from other anarchist and Leninist tendencies. Fewer and fewer individuals worked on the statement, feeding rumors of a small group of influential cadre who were *really* in control; the many other pseudonyms of "Ned Day" were seen as a cover for the dearth of diverse voices. The specter of democratic centralism was spreading. There had been similar speculation from the very beginning. At the conference where the name of the project and their newspaper was decided, some participants had the feeling that the decisions had been made prior to the actual conference, that the conference was used as a public rubberstamp to create a false democratic face for the organization. The strong influence of Bolshevism is clear. One participant at the founding conference even went so far as to suggest that they name the paper *The Torch*.

Hooked into the opportunist politics of anti-imperialism, members of L&R were expected to be supportive of the national liberation movements of oppressed peoples in their struggles to create new states. This generates its own contradictions; but in one of the later incarnations of the Statement, the organization came out in favor of "weaker states" in their struggles against "stronger states." Especially galling at that time (of Operation Desert Shield followed by the Gulf Massacre of 1990–91) was that this was clearly a reference to Iraq — this even after the revelations of the previous mass gassings of Kurds, among other atrocities perpetrated by this "weaker state." Such was their commitment to anti-statism, the cornerstone of anarchism.

epoch, and constitutes one of its fundamental elements." Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*

"The basic question of every revolution is that of state power. Unless this question is understood, there can be no intelligent participation in the revolution, not to speak of guidance of the revolution. The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a *dual power*. . . Nobody previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power. What is that dual power? Alongside the . . . government of the bourgeoisie, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing — the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies . . . The fundamental characteristics of this [dual power] are:

- the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas . . . ;
- the replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, by the direct arming of the whole people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants *themselves*, by the armed people *themselves*;
- officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves or at least placed under special control . . . "

Lenin, *Pravda* April 9, 1917

Lenin and Trotsky were the ones who originally used the term, so we must look at what they said about it and how they meant it. For these two theorists of Bolshevism, dual power is a condition of revolutionary tension, where the allegiance of the population is split between bourgeois (or non-bourgeois) rule and the incipient governing power of "the people" (through their deputies in the soviets). A general arming of "the people" is a central characteristic of such a revolutionary moment. For Lenin

and Trotsky, the term dual power is used as a descriptive category rather than a strategy; looking back on the revolution in Petrograd in 1905, in which the first soviet (council) came into existence spontaneously, Trotsky formulated the term to describe the situation. For Leninists, dual power is the ultimate revolutionary conflict, when the state must fight to survive: overt challenges to its ability to govern are made by councils that, as well as commanding the loyalty of a majority of the population, have the ability to execute and enforce their decisions.

The two main factors leading to a divergent loyalty to each government in Russia in 1917 were domestic and foreign policy. Domestically, the Provisional Government had a difficult time solving the conflicts between workers and owners and between peasants and landlords; being bourgeois, its members wanted the resolution to be based on legal and peaceful compromise. The more radical members of the soviets, factory committees, and peasant committees were interested in worker control and expropriation of property — hence some tension. Externally, the Provisional Government was committed to continuing Russian military involvement in the First World War, while the Bolsheviks were split between those who wanted to conclude a separate peace (Lenin) and those who wanted to widen the war into a general European revolutionary class war (Trotsky). This was the second, and arguably the more crucial, tension that existed between the Provisional Government and the growing power of the Bolshevik-dominated soviets. Incidentally, the decision-making process was not one of the causes of the tension. The soviets could have been what they eventually became within a year — rubber stamping organs of Bolshevik dictatorship over the workers — and still constituted organs of dual power so long as their members were armed and willing to confront the police and military formations still loyal to the bourgeois state.

Dual power in its original sense, then, is not a program or even a strategy, but a *description* of a transitional political tension and conflict that must be resolved. The Bolsheviks knew that their periodicals didn't constitute organs of dual power; they knew that their meeting-places didn't; they knew that their legal aid committees didn't; they knew that all of their self-help groups didn't. They were clear that the organs of dual power were the soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers, which

were making and executing decisions on production and distribution of goods and services, ownership and control of factories and land, and how to deal with an imperialist war. As authoritarians and statists, they were equally clear that these organs needed to be guided and ultimately controlled by them in order to create the necessary infrastructure for a new "workers' government." The Bolsheviks understood that this tension must inevitably end either in revolution or reaction. The situation of dual power must end with the state crushing the (more or less) independent power of counter-institutions based on an armed population, or the successful taking over/replacement of the state by "the people" and their counter-institutions.

I have no objections to the adoption of non-anarchist ideas, models, or vocabulary to anarchist theory and practice; many aspects of anarchism would be impossible to describe without Marxist language and ideas. However, it is usually clear from the context of their usage that when anarchists say certain things that are also said by Marxists, their meanings are different: "revolution," for example. Language changes through time, but the insinuation of the term dual power into anarchist discourse is a sign of muddled thinking and creeping Leninism, the unfortunate legacy of Love & Rage and similar groupings. Its use by those who call themselves anarchists to describe a situation that is supposed to be anarchist is ahistorical and therefore inaccurate. Its use by Revolutionary Anarchists is vague (at best), confusing — and confused — and too far outside the realm of normative anarchism to accept. Anyone with even a basic grasp of radical history will be able to recognize this. It is a borrowed term with a borrowed history; that history cannot be separated from the term.

Love & Rage and the influence and legacy of Leninism

The Love & Rage project began in the late 1980s when the desire for a mass anarchist federation coincided with the supposed defection to anarchism of all members of the New York-based Trotskyist Revolutionary