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## **ARGUMENTS FROM ERRICO MALATESTA**

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by Andrew Blackmore, a member of the Workers  
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*All texts by Malatesta taken from “Malatesta: His Life & Ideas”  
ed. Vernon Richards. London: Freedom Press, 1993.*



# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MALATESTA

*Talk Given by Andrew Blackmore, a member of the Workers Solidarity Movement (Ireland) on 23 November, 1994. This is a talk given to WSM meetings. As such it represents the author's opinion alone and may be deliberately provocative in order to start discussion. Also it maybe in a note form and has not been edited.*

Malatesta was one of the famous anarchists of the 19th century. He lived 79 years. Not as much is known of him as for example Bakunin or Kropotkin for a few reasons. He never kept a diary, he was Italian, and he was very active and continually hopping from one country to another, which meant he never kept a store of his own writings. For these reasons he has not been an attractive person to study and write about, because the work would be too hard.

For nearly sixty years, Malatesta was active in the anarchist movement as an agitator and as a propagandist. He was one of the movements most respected members as well as remaining to the end one of its most controversial. He was active in many parts of the world, as well as the editor of a number of Italian anarchist journals including the daily Umanita Nova (1920-22). Nearly half his life was spent in exile and his impact is evidenced by the fact that he spent more than ten years in prison, mainly awaiting trial. The last six years of his life were spent under house arrest.

## HIS HEALTH

Malatesta was a sick man. He had a weak respiratory system throughout his life and was subject to regular bronchial attacks. In the last few weeks of his life he developed bronchial pneumonia which finally finished him off, despite being given 1500 litres of oxygen in his last five hours. He died on Friday, 22nd July 1932.

Sixty years earlier, when Malatesta first met Bakunin, he had been so sick that he was spitting blood. He arrived at Bakunin's house with a feverish cough and Bakunin had put him to bed and told him to sleep. When Bakunin thought Malatesta was asleep, he said to his friends who were in the room "What a shame that he should be so sick: we shall lose him very soon; he won't last more than six months." (In fact, Malatesta was to outlive Bakunin by over fifty years.)

His sickness was to remain with him throughout his life and finally kill him.

## HIS BIRTH

But to get back to the beginning. Errico Malatesta was born in Santa Maria

slaves and because of the force of example-put into effect as many of our ideas as we can, refuse to recognise the new government and keep alive resistance and seek that those localities where our ideas are received with sympathy should constitute themselves into anarchist communities, rejecting all governmental interference and establishing free agreements with other communities which want to live their own lives.

We shall have to, above all, oppose with every means the re-establishment of the police and the armed forces, and use any opportunity to incite workers in non anarchist localities to take advantage of the absence of repressive forces to implement the most far reaching demands that we can induce them to make.

And however things may go, to continue the struggle against the possessing class and the rulers without respite, having always in mind the complete economic, political and moral emancipation of all mankind.

## 5. CONCLUSION

What we want, therefore, is the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man; we want men united as brothers by a conscious and desired solidarity, all cooperating voluntarily for the well-being of all: we want society to be constituted for the purpose of supplying everybody with the means for achieving the maximum well-being, the maximum possible moral and spiritual development; we want bread, freedom, love, and science for everybody.

And in order to achieve these all-important ends, it is necessary in our opinion that the means of production should be at the disposal of everybody and that no man, or groups of men, should be in a position to oblige others to submit to their will or to exercise their influence other than through the power of reason and by example.

Therefore: expropriation of landowners and capitalists for the benefit of all; and abolition of government.

And while waiting for the day when this can be achieved: the propagation of our ideas; unceasing struggle, violent or non-violent depending on the circumstances, against government and against the boss class to conquer as much freedom and well-being as we can for the benefit of everybody.

who wanted to would obey it, and it would no longer be the law, but a simple series of suggestions which all would be free to accept or reject. Governments have this power, however, and use it through the law, to strengthen their power, as well as to serve the interests of the ruling classes, by oppressing and exploiting the workers.

The only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it. Conflict may be open or latent; but it always exists since the government does not pay attention to discontent and popular resistance except when it is faced with the danger of insurrection.

When the people meekly submit to the law, or their protests are feeble and confined to words, the government studies its own interests and ignores the needs of the people; when the protests are lively, insistent, threatening, the government, depending on whether it is more or less understanding, gives way or resorts to repression. But one always comes back to insurrection, for if the government does not give way, the people will end by rebelling; and if the government does give way, then the people gain confidence in themselves and make ever increasing demands, until such time as the incompatibility between freedom and authority becomes clear and the violent struggle is engaged.

It is therefore necessary to be prepared, morally and materially, so that when this does happen the people will emerge victorious.

A successful insurrection is the most potent factor in the emancipation of the people, for once the yoke has been shaken off, the people are free to provide themselves with those institutions which they think best, and the time lag between passing the law and the degree of civilisation which the mass of the population has attained, is breached in one leap. The insurrection determines the revolution, that is, the speedy emergence of the latent forces built up during the "evolutionary" period.

Everything depends on what the people are capable of wanting.

In past insurrections unaware of the real reasons for their misfortunes, they have always wanted very little, and have obtained very little.

What will they want in the next insurrection?

The answer, in part, depends on our propaganda and what efforts we put into it.

We shall have to push the people to expropriate the bosses and put all goods in common and organise their daily lives themselves, through freely constituted associations, without waiting for orders from outside and refusing to nominate or recognise any government or constituted body in whatever guise (constituent, dictatorship, etc.) even in a provisional capacity, which ascribes to itself the right to lay down the law and impose with force its will on others.

And if the mass of the population will not respond to our appeal we must—in the name of the right we have to be free even if others wish to remain

Capua Vetere in the province of Caserta, Italy, on December 14, 1853. There are a number of sources which claim that he was of aristocratic descent, but my source, which is Freedom Press does not think this is true. He was, anyway, the son of a modest to rich landowner.

By the time of Malatesta's first meeting with Bakunin, which as I already said was in 1872, when Malatesta was 19, Malatesta's mother, father and a brother and sister had all died from chest complaints. So it was a sick family.

His first political act was at the tender age of 14, when he sent a "threatening and insolent" letter to the King, Victor Emmanuel II complaining about a local injustice. He was arrested, but his father got him out and sent him to a special school to cure him of his strange ideas.

At that time he was a republican and applied to join the Universal Republican Alliance. This was the Republican movement which was led by Mazzini who was to create the new Italian Republic. Malatesta's membership was turned down on the grounds that he was too socialistic and that he would probably not last long, but would leave and join the International.

Malatesta, who had not then heard of the International, (by the way this is the First International), went on to find out more about it.

Two years later when he was 16, he was again arrested at a demo and sentenced in Naples. He was kicked out of his college, the University of Naples for a year.

The year after was 1871, the year of the Paris Commune. Malatesta joined the International a few months later. He not only joined himself, but persuaded many of his friends to join, as well as a group of workers. He had a great capacity for work, but he also had a great capacity to inspire people around him, a gift he was to keep throughout his life.

## **HIS EARLY YEARS**

In those early years, Malatesta and his mates threw everything into making a revolution which they believed to be just around the corner. They gave everything they had, time and money, even so far as selling their household possessions. To quote the great man himself;

*"Often one went to prison, but came out with more energy than before; persecutions only awakened our enthusiasm. It is true that the persecutions at that time were jokes compared with what took place later. At that time the regime had emerged from a series of revolutions; and the authorities, from the beginning stern so far as the workers, especially in the country, were concerned, showed a certain respect for freedom in the political struggle, a kind of embarrassment at being similar to the Bourbon and Austrian rulers, which however disappeared as the regime became consolidated and the struggle for national independence receded into the background"*

Malatesta learnt some valuable lessons. One of the first was that you could not lead the workers solely by example. His anarchist group could get themselves arrested and persecuted over and over again and it was not going to make the working class as a whole rise up. Something more was needed.

He also learnt that the working class was not going to rise up spontaneously and create a revolution. Even though, at the time there was mass discontent and regular uprisings. Malatesta wrote that when an uprising does take place:

*“the signori [ie, the aristos] if they have any sense can more easily control by distributing bread and throwing a few coppers to the clamouring mob from their balconies, than by ordering the carabinieri to fire on them. And if our wishes had not blinded our powers of observation, we could easily have noted the depressing, and therefore counter-revolutionary effect of hunger, and the fact that our propaganda was most effective in the least depressed regions and among those workers, mostly artisans, who were in less difficult financial straits.”*

## **BAKUNIN**

Malatesta also became a Bakunist, that is a follower of Bakunin's ideas within the First International. He was very clear on avoiding the cult of personality and would never agree with someone for what they were, but what they stood for. In fact, later on he criticised Bakunin for being too much of a Marxist.

Once he got over his initial learning, he continued throughout his life with three guiding points. He believed in the importance of propaganda in order to spread ideas and as he puts it, to push people to think and act for themselves. He was therefore an indefatigable propagandist of the written and spoken word. But he saw the limits of propaganda and viewed direct action as a vital component for preparing the environment for revolution. And the final ingredient was that he was an Internationalist.

## **LIFE IN EXILE**

As I mentioned at the beginning, Malatesta spent nearly half his life in exile, 35 years to be exact. The first period in exile began in 1878, when he was 25 years old. He returned to Italy five years later, when he was 30, but left the year after for South America and did not come back until 1897 when he was 43.

This time he stayed for 2 years while he edited the paper L'Agitazione (Agitation). So in 1899 he went off again where he lived most of the time in London and did not return to Italy until 1913-14 for barely a year, at the tender age of 60.

His last return to Italy was in 1919, and he lived out his last remaining 13 years there.

government, take possession of all social wealth and themselves organise production and consumption in the interests of everybody without waiting for the initiative to come from government which, however willing to comply, would be incapable of doing so.

But there is a further question: if capitalism were to be destroyed and a government were to be left in office, the government, through the concession of all kinds of privileges, would create capitalism anew for, being unable to please everybody it would need an economically powerful class to support it in return for the legal and material protection it would receive.

Consequently privilege cannot be abolished and freedom and equality established firmly and definitely without abolishing government--not this or that government but the very institution of government.

As in all questions of general interest, and especially this one, the consent of the people as a whole is needed, and therefore we must strain every nerve to persuade the people that government is useless as well as harmful, and that we can live better lives without government.

But, as we have, repeated more than once, propaganda alone is impotent to convince everybody--and if we were to want to limit ourselves to preaching against government, and in the meantime waiting supinely for the day when the public will be convinced of the possibility and value of radically destroying every kind of government, then that day would never come.

While preaching against every kind of government, and demanding complete freedom, we must support all struggles for partial freedom, because we are convinced that one learns through struggle, and that once one begins to enjoy a little freedom one ends by wanting it all. We must always be with the people, and when we do not succeed in getting them to, demand a lot we must still seek to get them to want something; and we must make every effort to get them to understand that however much or little they may demand should be obtained by their own efforts and that they should despise and detest whoever is part of, or aspires to, government.

Since government today has the power, through the legal system, to regulate daily life and to broaden or restrict the liberty of the citizen, and because we are still unable to tear this power from its grasp, we must seek to reduce its power and oblige governments to use it in the least harmful ways possible. But this we must do always remain outside, and against, government, putting pressure on it through agitation in the streets, by threatening to take by force what we demand. Never must we accept any kind of legislative position, be it national or local, for in so doing we will neutralise the effectiveness of our activity as well as betraying the future of our cause.

The struggle against government in the last analysis, is physical, material.

Governments make the law. They must therefore dispose of the material forces (police and army) to impose the law, for otherwise only those

can therefore sit back and wait until hunger reduces their employees to a more amenable frame of mind. The invention or the introduction of new machinery makes workers redundant and adds to the large army of unemployed, who are driven by hunger to sell their labour at any price. Immigration immediately creates problems in the countries where better working conditions exist, for the hordes of hungry workers, willy nilly, offer the bosses an opportunity' to depress wages all round. And all these facts, which necessarily derive from the capitalist system, conspire in counteracting and often destroying advances made in working class consciousness and solidarity. And in every case the overriding fact remains that production under capitalism is organised by each capitalist for his personal profit and not, as would be natural, to satisfy the needs of the workers in the best possible way. Hence the chaos, the waste of human effort, the organised scarcity of goods, useless and harmful occupations, unemployment, abandoned land, under-use of plant and so on, all evils which cannot be avoided except by depriving the capitalists of the means of production and, it follows, the organisation of production.

Soon then, those workers who want to free themselves, or even only to effectively improve their conditions, will be faced with the need to defend themselves from the government, with the need to attack the government, which by legalising the right to property and protecting it with brute force, constitutes a barrier to human progress, which must be beaten down with force if one does not wish to remain indefinitely under present conditions or even worse.

From the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to the struggle against government; and instead of opposing the capitalist millions with the workers' few pennies scraped together with difficulty, one must oppose the rifles and guns which defend property with the more effective means that the people will be able to find to defeat force by force.

#### **4. THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE**

By the political struggle we mean the struggle against government. Government is the ensemble of all those individuals who hold the reins of power, however acquired, to make the law and to impose it on the governed, that is the public.

Government is the consequence of the spirit of domination and violence with which some men have imposed themselves on other, and is at the same time the creature as well as the creator of privilege and its natural defender.

It is wrongly said that today government performs the function of defender of capitalism but that once capitalism is abolished it would become the representative and administrator of the general interest. In the first place capitalism will not be destroyed until the workers, having rid themselves of

#### **TIME SPENT IN LONDON**

During his years of exile he was not necessarily active. For example the 19 years that he spent in London between 1900 and 1919 he did little apart from go to an Anarchist International Congress in Amsterdam in 1907 and an exciting period in Italy when he was 60 during the years of 1913-14, which culminated in Red Week, June 1914.

Perhaps his most famous influence, in England, was a criminal libel case in 1912 where he was sentenced to deportation and 3 months in prison. (not in that order). A strong campaign for his release in the radical press and a mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square resulted in the sentence being quashed.

#### **MALATESTA AT 60**

It is a sign of Malatesta's influence and inspiration, that he was able, at the age of sixty to start things going in Italy, from where he lived, in London WC1. At the time, the anarchist movement in Italy was more or less torn apart by internal and personal problems. Many ex-anarchists had joined bourgeois parties. Malatesta, though, decided that the time was ripe for a growth in anarchist activity. The Italians had just fought an unpopular war, the Tripolitanian war and there was growing unrest.

He contacted some anarchist buddies in Italy and set about editing an anarchist paper called Volonta from London which was to be distributed in Ancona, Italy. This was successful, but Malatesta could not keep himself from getting involved, and he came over to Italy.

#### **WHAT THE POLICE CHIEF SAID**

A good account of his activities is given by the police chief at the time. It is worth telling how we managed to get the account of the police chief. In the WWII, the Americans bombed an Ancona police station, which was destroyed. Two anarchists, while searching among the rubble found the police dossier on Malatesta which they then went and published. Here is a bit:

*"Malatesta's return from London was the signal for a reawakening of the anarchist movement in Ancona....Malatesta immediately set about reorganising it. he made revolutionary propaganda at meetings and gatherings; by leaflets and through articles in the weekly journal Volonta of which he is the editor and which is the organ of the party.*

*....In a short time in Ancona, anarchists and sympathisers number some 600 individuals consisting predominantly of dock porters, workers and criminal elements of the town.....*

*...he very frequently travels keeping in contact with the more prominent leaders and in constant touch with the other anarchist groups.. his qualities*

*as an intelligent, combative speaker who seeks to persuade with calm, and never with violent, language, are used to the full to revive the already spent forces of the party and to win converts and sympathisers, never losing sight of his principle goal which is to draw together the forces of the party and undermine the bases of the State, by hindering its workings, paralyse its services and doing anti-militarist propaganda, until the favourable occasion arises to overturn and destroy the existing State”*

What he was after was pretty clear, so clear that even the police chief understood it. At least 37 anarchist demos took place, that year, in the province, at which Malatesta took part.

## **RED WEEK**

Agitation had been going on elsewhere, and, after a proposal by the Trades Council of Ancona if was agreed to have a national demo, against disciplinary battalions, on the day commemorating the re-establishment of Italian unity and the Monarchy. The reason to have the demo on that day was because normally all the soldiers and police went on marches to celebrate that day. If they were all diverted because of the day of action it would have had a big impact and everyone would notice.

The relevant Minister, naturally, banned the demonstrations and, just as naturally, the demos went ahead. In Ancona the police over reacted and fired on a crowd going into the main square. 3 workers were killed and 20 injured.

After the massacre, the gendarmes shot themselves, and rushed back to the barracks for shelter. The people were left masters of the town. There was an immediate general strike which spread all over Italy. This was the beginning of the ‘red week’.

The two main unions and the Railwaymen's Union called a general strike. I will not go into this in much detail, but it could be a good subject for a talk sometime. The week involved strikes, and demos, which in turn led to conflicts with police and more killings. This pushed things further and in many places, autonomous communes were proclaimed.

As the situation developed, and people started reorganising society on socialist lines, the reformist union called the strike off. This split the movement and the government were able to move in and begin to restore order. Still it was pretty impressive.

## **WORLD WAR I**

When World War I broke out, Malatesta was back in London again. The anarchist movement split over whether or not to take sides. A small minority, but one which contained many influential voices, including Kropotkin,

which determines what part of a worker's labour should go to him; or if one wants to formulate a law, it could not be but that; wages cannot normally be less than what is needed to maintain life, nor can they normally rise such that no profit margin is left to the boss.

It is clear that in the first case workers would die, and therefore would stop drawing any wages, and in the second the bosses would stop employing labour and so would pay no more wages. But between these two impossible extremes there is an infinite scale of degrees ranging from the miserable conditions of many land workers to the almost respectable conditions of skilled workers in the large cities.

Wages, hours and other conditions of employment are the result of the struggle between bosses and workers. The former try to give the-workers as little as possible and get them to work themselves to the bone; the latter try, or should try to work as little, and earn as much, as possible. Where workers accept any conditions, or even being discontented, do not know how to put up effective resistance to the bosses demands, they are soon reduced to bestial conditions of life. Where, instead, they have ideas as to how human beings should live and know how to join forces, and through refusal to work or the latent and open threat of rebellion, to win the bosses respect, in such cases, they are treated in a relatively decent way. One can therefore say that within certain limits, the wages he gets are what the worker (not as an individual. of course. but as a class) demands.

Through struggle, by resistance against the bosses, therefore, workers can up to a certain point, prevent a worsening of their conditions as well as obtaining real improvement. And the history of the workers' movement has already demonstrated this truth.

One must not however exaggerate the importance of this struggle between workers and bosses conducted exclusively in the economic field. Bosses can give in. and often they do in face of forcefully expressed demands so long as the demands are not too great; but if workers were to make demands (and it is imperative that they should) which would absorb all the bosses profits and be in effect an indirect form of expropriation, it is certain that the bosses would appeal to the government and would seek to use force to oblige the workers to remain in their state of wage slavery.

And even before, long before workers can expect to receive the full product of their labour, the economic struggle becomes impotent as a means of producing the improvements in living standards.

Workers produce everything and without them life would be impossible; therefore it would seem that by refusing to work they could demand whatever they wanted. But the union of all workers, even in one particular trade, and in one country is difficult to achieve, and opposing the union of workers are the bosses organisations. Workers live from day to day, and if they do not work they soon find themselves without food; whereas the bosses, because they have money, have access to an the goods in stock and

emerging, all people must be convinced of their right to the means of production, and be prepared to exercise this basic right by expropriating the land owners, the industrialists and financiers, and putting all social wealth at the disposal of the people.

But can this expropriation be put into effect today? Can we today pass directly, without intermediate steps, from the hell in which the workers now find themselves to the paradise of common property?

Facts demonstrate what the workers are capable of today.

Our task is the moral and material preparation of the people for this essential expropriation; and to attempt it again and again, every time a revolutionary upheaval offers us the chance to, until the final triumph. But in what way can we prepare the people? In what way must one prepare the conditions which make possible not only the material fact of expropriation, but the utilisation to everybody's advantage of the common wealth?

We have already said that spoken and written propaganda alone cannot win over to our ideas the mass of the people. A practical education is needed, which must be alternately cause and effect in a gradual transformation of the environment. Parallel with the workers developing a sense of rebellion against the injustices and useless sufferings of which they are the victims, and the desire to better their conditions, they must be united and mutually dependent in the struggle to achieve their demands. And we as anarchists and workers, must incite and encourage them to struggle, and join them in their struggle.

But are these improvements possible in a capitalist regime? Are they useful from the point of view of a future complete emancipation of the workers?

Whatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off: they will earn more, work fewer hours and will have more time and energy to reflect on the things that matter to them, and will immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the causes of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activity and they will in the end understand that to make their victory secure and definitive, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of the moral elevation and emancipation of the workers must benefit by the fact that workers unite and struggle for their interests.

But, once again, can the workers succeed in really improving their conditions in the present state of society?

This depends on the confluence of a great number of circumstances.

In spite of what some say, there exists no natural law (law of wages)

wanted to support the Allied side (France, Russia and Britain) against the Germans. Kropotkin, who had been an anti-militarist before the war, wrote:

*“an anti-militarist propagandist ought never to join the anti-militarist agitation without taking in his inner self a solemn vow that in case a war breaks out, notwithstanding all efforts to prevent it, he will give the full support of his action to the country that will be invaded by a neighbour, whosoever the neighbour may be. Because, if the anti-militarists remain mere onlookers on the war, they support by their inaction the invaders; they help them to become still stronger, and thus to be a still stronger obstacle to the Social Revolution in the future”*

Malatesta totally disagreed with this, and wrote that what anti-militarism means is that you never take up arms for your masters and that you only fight for the social revolution. He pointed out that it is impossible to work out who the aggressor is in a war such as World War I. If you ask people to fight against the aggressor in a war you are as good as asking them to just obey the orders of your respective governments, who will tell you that it is the other side who is the aggressor.

It is worth repeating that anarchists who wanted to take sides in World War I were a minority, albeit a vocal one. After the war, Kropotkin returned to Russia and found himself alienated from the revolutionary left. In contrast, Malatesta returned to Italy in 1919, in triumph.

The remaining years that Malatesta spent in Italy after 1919 are regarded as his most productive, even though this period also marked the defeat of the working class of Italy by the steadily growing fascists under Mussolini.

## **UMANITA NOVA**

As before, Malatesta edited a paper. This time it was an anarchist daily, called Umanita Nova . He travelled the country addressing meetings and trying to bring together all the revolutionary elements in the Socialist and republican parties, and in the Trade Union movement, to fight against fascism.

He tried to bring together a huge movement which had in its ranks anarchists of all sorts, including those types who are anti organisation. The object of the movement was to fight against fascism. They failed in this aim, of course, but so did the Socialists, communists and trades unions.

During this time anarchists were subject to regular attacks by young fascist thugs. Despite this, the paper sold 50,000 copies daily. The revolutionary syndicalist union had a membership of more than 500,000. They were also harassed by the new Communist Party, which tried to destroy all the the left wing that was not allied to it.

## **RISE OF FASCISM**

But the anarchists could not get it together and they slowly lost ground along with the rest of the working class. In July 1921 a general strike, which turned out to be a last gasp effort, was called by the anti fascist 'Workers alliance' - which the anarchist helped to set up. It was only partly effective.

It became harder and harder to sell the paper. Eventually the paper could only be sold in Rome, all other papers were seized or burnt by vigilantes. It became a weekly paper in August 1922 and Mussolini's march on Rome took place 2 months later in October 1922. It was around this time that the authorities closed down the paper for good.

Malatesta was now 70, he could not carry on in politics in that climate so he went back to his day job as an electrician mechanic.

A few years later he again tried publishing, this time the *Pensiero e Volonta* which again lasted a few years. It was theoretical and fortnightly. But the censor banned theoretical magazines in 1926 and Malatesta was finally silenced in Italy for good.

## **GRUESOME DEATH**

He now had six years to live and he spent them in Rome under house arrest. The police set up a permanent post in the porch of his house. Anybody who tried to visit him was arrested, and when Malatesta went out, anybody who tried to approach him was arrested. The bronchial problems which had dogged him all his life finally caught up on him in 1932 when he died slowly and painfully.

## **HIS IDEAS**

Malatesta was an anarchist communist. He was a supporter of Bakunin in the first International. He objected to Kropotkin on the First World War issue but also on Kropotkin's theory of a spontaneous revolution, ie that a revolution would happen spontaneously.

He believed in action as well as words and had a significant part in the conception and organisation of the general strike that led to "Red Week" in Italy in 1914, even though he had already left the country when it happened.

However, when the "Platform of the Libertarian communists" came out in 1926, Malatesta criticised it for being, "one step away from Bolshevism" and an attempt to "Bolshevise anarchism"

He also, as I mentioned before, criticised Bakunin for being too much of a Marxist.

On reading his pamphlet, "Anarchy" I find what is published to be very theoretical, wordy, but at the same time he makes interesting points. It may be that the only stuff that is translated into English is the theoretical writings, on

accustomed to conditions of comfort fall on hard times and others, through exceptionally favourable circumstances succeed in raising themselves above the conditions into which they were born. A large proportion of the working class has already succeeded either in emerging from a state of abject poverty, or was never in such a situation; no worker to speak of, finds himself in a state of complete social unawareness, of complete acquiescence to the conditions imposed on him by the bosses. And the same institutions, such as have been produced by history, contain organic contradictions and are like the germs of death, which as they develop result in the dissolution of institutions and the need for transformation.

From this the possibility of progress--but not the possibility of bringing all men to the necessary level to want, and to achieve, anarchy, by means of propaganda, without a previous gradual transformation of the environment.

Progress must advance contemporaneously and along parallel lines between men and their environment. We must take advantage of all the means, all the possibilities and the opportunities that the present environment allows us to act on our fellow men and to develop their consciences and their demands; we must use all advance in human consciences to induce them to claim and to impose those major social transformations which are possible and which effectively serve to open the way to further advances later.

We must not wait to achieve anarchy, in the meantime limiting ourselves to simple propaganda. Were we to do so we would soon exhaust our field of action; that is, we would have converted all those who in the existing environment are susceptible to understand and accept our ideas, and our subsequent propaganda would fall on sterile ground; or if environmental transformations brought out new popular groupings capable of receiving new ideas, this would happen without our participation, and thus would prejudice our ideas.

We must seek to get all the people, or different sections of the people, to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms that it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them; and in always propagating all aspects of our programme, and always struggling for its complete realisation, we must push the people to want always more and to increase its pressures, until it has achieved complete emancipation.

## **3. THE ECONOMIC STRUGGLE**

The oppression which today impinges most directly on the workers and which is the main cause of the moral and material frustrations under which they labour, is economic oppression, that is the exploitation to which bosses and business men subject them, thanks to their monopoly of all the most important means of production and distribution.

To destroy radically this oppression without any danger of it re-

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It follows from what we have said that we have to work to awaken in the oppressed the conscious desire for a radical social transformation, and to persuade them that by uniting they have the strength to win; we must propagate our ideal and prepare the required material and moral forces to overcome those of the enemy, and to organise the new society, and when we will have the strength needed we must, by taking advantage of favourable circumstances as they arise, or which we can ourselves create, to make the social revolution, using force to destroy the government and to expropriate the owners of wealth, and by putting in common the means of life and production, and by preventing the setting up of new governments which would impose their will and to hamper the reorganisation of society by the people themselves.

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All this is however less simple than it might appear at first sight. We have to deal with people as they are in society today, in the most miserable moral and material condition; and we would be deluding ourselves in thinking that propaganda is enough to raise them to that level of intellectual development which is needed to put our ideas into effect.

Between man and his social environment there is a reciprocal action. Men make society what it is and society makes men what they are, and the result is therefore a kind of vicious circle. To transform society men must be changed, and to transform men, society must be changed.

Poverty brutalises man, and to abolish poverty men must have a social conscience and determination. Slavery teaches men to be slaves, and to free oneself from slavery there is a need for men who aspire to liberty. Ignorance has the effect of making men unaware of the causes of their misfortunes as well as the means of overcoming them, and to do away with ignorance people must have the time and the means to educate themselves.

Governments accustom people to submit to the Law and to believe that Law is essential to society; and to abolish government men must be convinced of the uselessness and the harmfulness of government.

How does one escape from this vicious circle?

Fortunately existing society has not been created by the inspired will of a dominating class, which has succeeded in reducing all its subjects to passive and unconscious instruments of its interests. It is the result of a thousand internecine struggles, of a thousand human and natural factors acting indifferently, without directive criteria; and thus there are no clear-cut divisions either between individuals or between classes.

Innumerable are the variations in material conditions; innumerable are the degrees of moral and intellectual development; and not always-we would almost say very rarely, does the place of any individual in society correspond with his abilities and his aspirations. Very often individuals

the grounds that the rest would not be so relevant as time passes on.

The Freedom Book on Malatesta “Malatesta Life and Ideas” published in 1984 also contains solely theoretical articles, some of which are repeated in the pamphlet that I just mentioned as well. Typical subjects are “Anarchism and Science” and “Anarchism and Freedom” and “Anarchism and Violence” which you can predict by the titles what they are going to say. Still, articles like these make a good introduction to anarchism for the new reader.

In “An anarchist programme”, which is another article in the book, Malatesta sets out what anarchists should do. He first gives a list of what we are against; capitalism; what we are for; anarchism; and how to get there. It is in how to get a revolution, and how to act in day to day politics that I would have most problems with him.

Malatesta wanted to work with all anarchists, anarchists that believe in organisation as well as those that did not. This obviously covers just about anybody who calls themselves an anarchist. For these reasons they would be very limited in the actions they could take. They would also be doomed to splits and disintegration in a short time as their real differences came to a head.

This happened in Italy where it seems that in the period 1913-14 and 1919-22 the main thing that stuck the anarchists together was Malatesta himself. The anarchist movement had been destroyed by splits and defections to bourgeois parties. He certainly re-started the movements at those times and seemed to be the driving force and main guru.

## **CONCLUSION**

So in conclusion, Malatesta led an inspiring life, he was dedicated to the cause and he gave his life to it. He lived through exciting times; the Paris Commune, the First International, World War I and the rise of fascism.

He was the editor of numerous anarchist papers and was a prolific writer and agitator. And despite his antagonisms towards platformism he was a great organiser and was able to inspire and lead whole movements around him. I hope this talk has let people know more about him which in some way will contribute to keeping his memory alive.

# ANARCHISM AND ORGANIZATION

by Errico Malatesta

Organization which is, after all, only the practice of cooperation and solidarity, is a natural and necessary condition of social life; it is an inescapable fact which forces itself on everybody, as much on human society in general as on any group of people who are working towards a common objective. Since humanity neither wishes to, nor can, live in isolation it is inevitable that those people who have neither the means, nor a sufficiently developed social conscience to permit them to associate freely with those of a like mind and with common interests, are subjected to the organization by others, generally constituted in a class or as a ruling group, with the aim of exploiting the labor of others for their personal advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small privileged group has always been the result of the inability of the oppressed to agree among themselves to organize with others for production, for enjoyment and for the possible needs of defense against whoever might wish to exploit and oppress them. Anarchism exists to remedy this state of affairs... (*Il Risveglio*, October 15, 1927)

There are two factions among those who call themselves anarchists, with or without adjectives: supporters and opponents of organisation. If we cannot succeed in agreeing, let us, at least, try to understand each other.

And first of all let us be clear about the distinctions, since the question is a triple one: organisation in general as a principle and condition of social life today and in the future society; the organization of the anarchist movement; and the organisation of the popular forces and especially of the working masses for resistance to government and capitalism...

Now, it seems to us that organization, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A human being in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast, for they would be unable to obtain nourishment for themselves, except perhaps in tropical regions or when the population is exceptionally sparse; and they would be, without exception, unable to rise much above the level of an animal. Having therefore to join with other humans, or more accurately, finding themselves united to them as a consequence of the evolutionary antecedents of the species, they must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his/her will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity: and the most extreme anti-organisers not only are subject to the general organisation of the society they live in, but are also in the voluntary actions in their lives, and in their rebellion against organisation, they unite among themselves, they share out their tasks, they *organise* with whom they are in agreement, and use the means that society puts at their disposal... (*l'Agitazione*, June 4 1897)

a lively and strong desire in men to transform society for the good of all, then those who are convinced, will by their own efforts as well as by the example of those already convinced, unite and want to as well as be able to act for their common ideals.

As we have already pointed out, it would be ridiculous and contrary to our objectives to seek to impose freedom, love among men and the radical development of human faculties, by means of force. One must therefore rely on the free will of others, and all we can do is to provoke the development and the expression of the will of the people. But it would be equally absurd and contrary to our aims to admit that those who do not share our views should prevent us from expressing our will, so long as it does not deny them the same freedom.

Freedom for all, therefore, to propagate and to experiment with their ideas, with no other limitation than that which arises naturally from the equal liberty of everybody.

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But to this are opposed--and with brute force--those who benefit from existing privileges and who today dominate and control all social life.

In their hands they have all the means of production; and thus they suppress not only the possibility of free experimentation in new ways of communal living, and the right of workers to live freely by their own efforts, but also the right to life itself; and they oblige whoever is not a boss to have to allow himself to be exploited and oppressed if he does not wish to die of hunger.

They have police forces, a judiciary, and armies created for the express purpose of defending their privileges; and they persecute, imprison and massacre those who would want to abolish those privileges and who claim the means of life and liberty for everyone.

Jealous of their present and immediate interests, corrupted by the spirit of domination, fearful of the future, they, the privileged class, are, generally speaking incapable of a generous gesture; are equally incapable of a wider concept of their interests. And it would be foolish to hope that they should freely give up property and power and adapt themselves to living as equals and with those who today they keep in subjection.

Leaving aside the lessons of history (which demonstrates that never has a privileged class divested itself of all or some of its privileges, and never has a government abandoned its power unless obliged to do so by force or the fear of force), there is enough contemporary evidence to convince anyone that the bourgeoisie and governments intend to use armed force to defend themselves, not only against complete expropriation, but equally against the smallest popular demands, and are always ready to engage in the most atrocious persecutions and the bloodiest massacres.

For those people who want to emancipate themselves. only one course is open: that of opposing force with force.

6. War on rivalries and patriotic prejudices. Abolition of frontiers; brotherhood among all peoples.

7. Reconstruction of the family, as will emerge from the practice of love, freed from every legal tie, from every economic and physical oppression, from every religious prejudice.

This is our ideal.

## 2. WAYS AND MEANS

We have outlined under a number of headings our objectives and the ideal for which we struggle.

But it is not enough to desire something; if one really wants it adequate means must be used to secure it. And these means are not arbitrary, but instead cannot but be conditioned by the ends we aspire to and by the circumstances in which the struggle takes place, for if we ignore the choice of means we would achieve other ends, possibly diametrically opposed to those we aspire to, and this would be the obvious and inevitable consequence of our choice of means. Whoever sets out on the highroad and takes a wrong turning does not go where he intends to go but where the road leads him.

It is therefore necessary to state what are the means which in our opinion lead to our desired ends, and which we propose to adopt.

Our ideal is not one which depends for its success on the individual considered in isolation. The question is of changing the way of life of society as a whole; of establishing among men relationships based on love and solidarity; of achieving the full material, moral and intellectual development not for isolated individuals, or members of one class or of a particular political party, but for all mankind--and this is not something that can be imposed by force, but must emerge through the enlightened consciences of each one of us and be achieved with the free consent of all.

Our first task therefore must be to persuade people.

We must make people aware of the misfortunes they suffer and of their chances to destroy them. We must awaken sympathy in everybody for the misfortunes of others and a warm desire for the good of all people.

To those who are cold and hungry we will demonstrate how possible and easy it could be to assure to everybody their material needs. To those who are oppressed and despised we shall show how it is possible to live happily in a world of people who are free and equal; to those who are tormented by hatred and bitterness we will point to the road that leads to peace and human warmth that comes through learning to love one's fellow beings.

And when we will have succeeded in arousing the sentiment of rebellion in the minds of men against the avoidable and unjust evils from which we suffer in society today, and in getting them to understand how they are caused and how it depends on human will to rid ourselves of them; and when we will have created

Admitting as a possibility the existence of a community organized without authority, that is without compulsion -- and anarchists must admit the possibility, or anarchism would have no meaning -- let us pass on to discuss the organization of the anarchist movement.

In this case too, organization seems useful and necessary. If a movement means the whole -- individuals with a common objective which they exert themselves to attain -- it is natural that they should agree among themselves, join forces, share out the tasks and take all those steps which they think will lead to the achievement of those objectives. To remain isolated, each individual acting or seeking to act on their own without coordination, without preparation, without their modest efforts to a strong group, means condemning oneself to impotence, wasting one's efforts in small ineffectual action, and to lose faith very soon in one's aims and possibly being reduced to complete inactivity...

A mathematician, a chemist, a psychologist or a sociologist may say they have no programme or are concerned only with establishing the truth. They seek knowledge, they are not seeking *to do* something. But anarchism and socialism are not sciences; they are proposals, projects, that anarchists and socialists seek to realize and which, therefore need to be formulated as definite programs...

If it is true that [organization creates leaders]; if it is true that anarchists are unable to come together and arrive at an agreement without submitting themselves to an authority, this means that they are not yet very good anarchists, and before thinking of establishing an anarchist society within the world they must think of making themselves able to live anarchistically. The remedy does not lie in the abolition of organization but in the growing consciousness of each individual member. In small as well as large societies, apart from brute force, of which it cannot be a question for us, the origin and justification for authority lies in social disorganization.

When a community has needs and its members do not know how to organize spontaneously to provide them, someone comes forward, an authority who satisfies those needs by utilizing the services of all and directing them to their liking. If the roads are unsafe and the people do not know what measures to take, a police force emerges which in return for whatever services it renders expects to be supported and paid, as well as imposing itself and throwing its weight around; if some article is needed, and the community does not know how to arrange with the distant producers to supply it in exchange for goods produced locally, the merchant will appear who will profit by dealing with the needs of one section to sell and of the other to buy, and impose his/her own prices both on the producer and the consumer. This is what has happened in our midst; the less organized we have been, the more prone are we to be imposed on by a few individuals. And this is understandable...

So much so that organization, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each one of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in the collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders...

But an organization, it is argued, presupposes an obligation to coordinate one's own activities with those of others; thus it violates liberty and fetters initiative. As we see it, what really takes away liberty and makes initiative impossible is the isolation which renders it powerless. Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting; this is true among ourselves as well as society as a whole. And it is by cooperation with our fellow human beings that we find the means to express our activity and our power of initiative. (*l'Agitazione*, June 11, 1897)

An anarchist organization must allow for complete autonomy, and independence, and therefore full responsibility, to individuals and groups; free agreement between those who think it useful to come together for cooperative action, for common aims; a moral duty to fulfill one's pledges and to take no action which is contrary to the accepted programme. On such bases one then introduces practical forms and suitable instruments to give real life to the organization. Thus the groups, the federation of groups, the federations of federations, meetings, congresses, correspondence committees and so on. But this also must be done freely, in such a way as not to restrict the thought and the initiative of individual members, but only to give greater scope to the efforts which in isolation would be impossible or ineffective. Thus for an anarchist organization congress, in spite of all the disadvantages from which they suffer as representative bodies... are free from authoritarianism in any shape or form because they do not legislate and do not impose their deliberations on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal contacts among the most active comrades, to summarize and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means for action; to acquaint everybody with the situation in the regions and the kind of action most urgently needed; to summarize the various currents of anarchist opinions at the time and to prepare some kind of statistics therefrom. And their decisions are not binding, but simply suggestions, advice and proposals to submit to all concerned, and they do not become binding and executive except for those who accept them and for as long as they accept them. The administrative organs they nominate -- Correspondence Commissions, etc. -- have no directive powers, do not take initiatives except for those who specifically solicit and approve of them, and have no authority to impose their own views, which they can certainly hold and propagate as groups of comrades, but which cannot be presented as the official views of the organization. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals communicated to them by groups and individuals; and they act for those who want to make use of them, to facilitate relations between groups, and cooperation between those who are in agreement on various initiatives; each is free to correspond with whoever he/she likes direct, or make use of the other committees nominated by specific groupings.

In an anarchist organization individual members can express any opinion and use every tactic which is not in contradiction with the accepted principles and does not interfere with the activities of others. In every case a particular organization last so long as the reasons for union are superior to those for

which in turn creates the evils such as ignorance, crime, prostitution, diseases due to malnutrition, mental depression and premature death. From all this arises a special class (government) which, provided with the necessary means of repression, exists to legalise and protect the owning class from the demands of the workers; and then it uses the powers at its disposal to create privileges for itself and to subject, if it can, the owning class itself as well. From this the creation of another privileged class (the clergy), which by a series of fables about the will of God, and about an after-life etc., seeks to persuade the oppressed to accept oppression meekly, and (just as the government does), as well as serving the interest of the owning class, serves its own. From this the creation of an official science which, in all those matters serving the interests of the ruling class, is the negation of true science. From this the patriotic spirit, race hatred, wars and armed peace, sometimes more disastrous than wars themselves. From this the transformation of love into torment or sordid commerce. From this hatred, more or less disguised, rivalry, suspicion among all men, insecurity and universal fear...

We want to change radically such a state of affairs. And since all these ills have their origin in the struggle between men, in the seeking after well-being through one's own efforts and for oneself and against everybody, we want to make amends, replacing hatred by love, competition by solidarity, the individual search for personal well-being by the fraternal cooperation for the well-being of all, oppression and imposition by liberty, the religious and pseudo-scientific lie by truth.

Therefore:

1. Abolition of private property in land, in raw materials and the instruments of labour, so that no one shall have the means of living by the exploitation of the labour of others, and that everybody, being assured of the means to produce and to live, shall be truly independent and in a position to unite freely among themselves for a common objective and according to their personal sympathies.
2. Abolition of government and of every power which makes the law and imposes it on others: therefore abolition of monarchies, republics, parliaments, armies, police forces, magistratures and any institution whatsoever endowed with coercive powers.
3. Organisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members, guided by science and experience, and free from any kind of imposition which does not spring from natural needs, to which everyone, convinced by a feeling of over, riding necessity, voluntarily submits.
4. The means of life, for development and well-being, will be guaranteed to children and all who are prevented from providing for themselves.
5. War on religions and all lies, even if they shelter under the cloak of science. Scientific instruction for all to advanced level.

it would in a short time recapture the political power which the insurrection had torn from its grasp. And in order to take away economic power from the bourgeoisie, it is necessary to organise immediately a new economic structure based on justice and equality. Economic needs, at least the most essential ones, cannot be interrupted; they must be satisfied immediately. "Central Committees" either do nothing or act when their services are no longer required. (*Umanità Nova*, August 12, 1920)

## AN ANARCHIST PROGRAMME

*Il Programma Anarchico* was drafted by Errico Malatesta and adopted by the Unione Anarchica Italiana at its Congress in Bologna (1920)

### 1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

We believe that most of the ills that afflict mankind stem from a bad social organisation; and that Man could destroy them if he wished and knew how.

Present society is the result of age-long struggles of man against man. Not understanding the advantages that could accrue for all by cooperation and solidarity; seeing in every other man (with the possible exception of those closest to them by blood ties) a competitor and an enemy, each one of them sought to secure for himself, the greatest number of advantages possible without giving a thought to the interests of others.

In such a struggle, obviously the strongest or more fortunate were bound to win, and in one way or another subject and oppress the losers.

So long as Man was unable to produce more than was strictly needed to keep alive, the conquerors could do no more than put to flight or massacre their victims, and seize the food they had gathered.

Then when with the discovery of grazing and agriculture a man could produce more, than what he needed to live, the conquerors found it more profitable to reduce the conquered to a state of slavery, and put them to work for their advantage.

Later, the conquerors realised that it was more convenient, more profitable and certain to exploit the labour of others by other means: to retain for themselves the exclusive right to the land and working implements, and set free the disinherited who, finding themselves without the means of life, were obliged to have recourse to the landowners and work for them, on their terms.

Thus, step by step through a most complicated series of struggles of every description, of invasions, wars, rebellions, repressions, concessions won by struggle, associations of the oppressed united for defence, and of the conquerors for attack, we have arrived at the present state of society, in which some have inherited the land and all social wealth, while the mass of the people, disinherited in all respects, is exploited and oppressed by a small possessing class.

From all this stems the misery in which most workers live today, and

dissension; otherwise it disbands and makes way for other, more homogenous groupings.

Certainly the life and permanence of an organization is a condition for success in the long struggle before us, and besides, it is natural that every institution should by instinct aim at lasting indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organization must be the result of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continually changing circumstances. When it can no longer serve a useful purpose it is better that it should die. (*Il Risveglio*, October 15, 1927)

We would certainly be happy if we could all get along well together and unite all the forces of anarchism in a strong movement; but we do not believe in the solidity of organizations which are built on concessions and assumptions and in which there is no real agreement and sympathy between members.

Better disunited than badly united. But we would wish that each individual joined their friends and that there should be no isolated forces, or lost forces. (*L'Agitazione*, June 11, 1897)

It remains for us to speak of the organization of the working and oppressed masses for resistance against both the government and the employers...

Workers will never be able to emancipate themselves so long as they do not find in union the moral, economic and physical strength that is needed to subdue the organized might of the oppressors.

There have been anarchists, and there still are some, who while recognizing the need to organize today for propaganda and action, are hostile to all organizations which do not have anarchism as their goal or which do not follow anarchist methods of struggle... To those comrades it seemed that all organized forces for an objective less than radically revolutionary, were forces that the revolution was being deprived of. It seems to us instead, and experience has surely already confirmed our view, that their approach would condemn the anarchist movement to a state of perpetual sterility. To make propaganda we must be amongst the people, and it is in the workers' associations that workers find their comrades and especially those who are most disposed to understand and accept our ideas. But even when it is possible to do as much propaganda as we wished outside the associations, this could not have a noticeable effect on the working masses. Apart from a small number of individuals more educated and capable of abstract thought and theoretical enthusiasms, the worker cannot arrive at anarchism in one leap. To become an convinced anarchist, and not in name only, they must begin to feel the solidarity that joins them to their comrades, and to learn to cooperate with others in defense of common interests and that, by struggling against the bosses and against the government that supports them, should realize that bosses and governments are useless parasites and that the workers could manage the domestic economy by their own efforts. And when the worker has understood this, he or she is an anarchist even if they do not refer to themselves as such.

Furthermore, to encourage popular organizations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our programme. An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore always easily dominated. And it follows, logically, that it cannot desire more than that much organization, and of the kind it needs to attain power: Electoral organizations if it hopes to achieve it by legal means; Military organization if it relies on violent action.

But we anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves. We do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force; we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance. It matters to us therefore that all interests and opinions should find their expression in a conscious organization and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance.

We have undertaken the task of struggling against existing social organization, and of overcoming the obstacles to the advent of a new society in which freedom and well being would be assured to everybody. To achieve this objective we organize ourselves and seek to become as numerous and as strong as possible. But if it were only our anarchist groupings that were organized; if the workers were to remain isolated like so many units unconcerned about each other and only linked by the common chain; if we ourselves besides being organized as anarchists in a federation, were not as workers organized with other workers, we could achieve nothing at all, or at most, we might be able to impose ourselves... and then it would not be the triumph of anarchism, but our triumph. We could then go on calling ourselves anarchists, but in reality we should simply be rulers, and as impotent as all rulers are where the general good is concerned. (*l'Agitazione*, June 18, 1897)

## ENDS AND MEANS

by Errico Malatesta

The end justifies the means. This saying has been much abused; yet it is in fact the universal guide to conduct. It would, however, be better to say: every end needs its means. Since morality must be sought in the aims, the means is determined.

Once the goal one is aiming at has been established, consciously or through necessity, the big problem of life is to find the means which, in the circumstances, leads to that end most surely and economically. In the way this problem is solved will depend, so far as it can depend on human will, whether the individual (or party) reaches or fails to achieve his ends, whether he is useful to his cause or unwittingly serves that of the enemy. To have found the right means, herein lies the whole secret of great men and parties that have left their mark on history.

For mystics, the aim of the Jesuits is the glory of God; for others it is

cohabitation throughout the ages and by the proven benefits of mutual aid—all these advantages will remain, and it would be foolish, and in any case impossible, to give up all these things.

We must therefore fight authority and privilege, but take advantage of all the benefits of civilisation; and nothing must be destroyed which satisfies, even badly, a human need until we have something better to put in its place. We must be intransigent in our opposition to all capitalist imposition and exploitation, and tolerant of all social concepts which prevail in different human groupings, so long as they do not threaten the equal rights and freedom of others; and content ourselves with advancing gradually in step with the moral development of the people and as the available material and intellectual means increase—doing all we can, of course, by study, work and propaganda to hasten the development towards ever more advanced ideals.' (*Pensiero e Volontà*, October I, 1925)

But after the successful insurrection, when the government has fallen, what must be done?

We anarchists would wish that in every district the workers, or, more accurately, those among them who are more socially conscious and have a spirit of initiative, should take possession of all the means of production, of all the wealth—land, raw materials, houses, machines, food stocks, etc... and to the best of their ability, initiate new forms of social life. We would wish that the land workers who today work for masters should no longer recognise the landowners' property rights but continue and intensify production on their own account, establishing direct contacts with workers in industry and transport for the exchange of goods and services; that industrial workers, including engineers and technicians, should take possession of the factories and continue and intensify production for their own benefit and that of the whole community; immediately switching production in those factories which today turn out useless or harmful goods to supplying the articles most urgently required to satisfy the needs of the public; that the railwaymen should continue to operate the railways but in the service of the community; that committees composed of volunteers or elected by the people should take over, under the direct control of the population, all available accommodation to house, as well as is possible in the circumstances, those most in need; that other committees, always under the direct control of the people, should deal with provisioning and the distribution of consumer goods; that all the members of the bourgeoisie should of necessity have to "muck in" with those who were the proletarian masses and work like everybody else in order to enjoy the same benefits as everybody else. And all this must be done immediately, on the very day, or the morrow of the successful insurrection, without waiting for orders from central committees or from any other kind of authority.

This is what the anarchists want, and it is in fact what would naturally happen if the revolution were to be a truly social revolution and not just a political change, which after a few convulsions would lead things back to what they were formerly. For, if one did not deprive the bourgeoisie of its economic power at once,

barely covered by a cloak of civilization, and raises to the highest posts the worse elements of the population. And far from serving to defend the revolution it discredits it, makes it repellent to the masses and after a period of fierce struggles, gives rise, of necessity, to what they would today call “a return to normality.” that is, to the legalisation and perpetuation of tyranny. Whichever side wins, one always arrives at the creation of a strong government, which assures peace to some at the price of freedom, and to others domination without too many risks...

Certainly the revolution must be defended and developed with an inexorable logic; but one must not and cannot defend it with means which contradict its ends.

The most powerful means for defending the revolution remains always that of taking away from the bourgeoisie the economic means on which their power is based, and of arming everybody (until such time as one will have managed to persuade everybody to throwaway their arms as useless and dangerous toys), and of interesting the mass of the population in the victory of the revolution.

If in order to win it were necessary to erect the gallows in the public square, then I would prefer to lose.’ (*Pensiero e Volontà*, October 1, 1924)

And after the revolution, that is, after the defeat of the existing powers and the overwhelming victory of the forces of insurrection, what then?

It is then that gradualism really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country, the utilisation for the benefit of everybody of all natural sources of power and of raw materials; distribution of industries and. cultivation according to the natural resources of the different regions; public education, care of children and the aged, health services, protection against common criminals and the more dangerous ones who might again try to suppress the freedom of others for the benefit of individuals or parties -and so on. And in every problem [anarchists] should prefer the solutions which not only are economically superior but which satisfy the need for justice and freedom and leave the way open for future improvements, which other solutions might not.

In the event justice, liberty and solidarity should override economic advantages. One must not think of destroying everything in the belief that later things will look after themselves. Present civilisation is the result of development extending over thousands of years, and has solved, in a way, the problem of large concentrations of population, often crowded into small territories, and of satisfying their ever-increasing and complex needs. Its benefits have decreased-because development has been taking place under the pressure of authority in the interests of the ruling classes; but even if one takes away authority and privilege, the advantages acquired, the triumphs of man over the adverse forces of nature, the accumulated experience of past generations, sociability learned through

the power of the Company of Jesus. They must therefore make every effort to brutalise, terrorise and subject the masses.

The aim of the Jacobins, and all authoritarian parties who believe themselves to be in possession of absolute truth, is to impose their ideas on the ignorant masses. They must therefore make every effort to seize power, subject the masses, and fit humanity to the Procrustian bed of their concepts.

The problem for us is a different one; because our aims are so different, so also must be our means.

We do not carry on our struggle in order to put ourselves in the place of the exploiters and oppressors of today, no do we even struggle for the triumph of an empty abstraction. We have nothing in common with that Italian patriot who declared: “What does it matter if all Italians die of hunger so long as Italy is great and glorious! “; nor even with that comrade who confessed to being indifferent to whether three quarters of humanity perished in making the world free and happy...

In our opinion all action which is directed towards the destruction of economic and political oppression; which serves to raise the moral and intellectual level of the people; which gives them an awareness of their individual rights and their power, and persuades them themselves to act on their own behalf; [in a word] all activity that encourages a hatred of oppression and awakens love among Man. brings us closer to our ends and therefore is a good thing (subject only to a quantitative consideration: of obtaining the best results from the available forces at our disposal). On the other hand, all activity that tends to preserve the present state of affairs, that tends to sacrifice man against his will for the triumph of a principle, is bad because it is a denial of our ends. We seek the triumph of freedom and of love.

Should we, for this reason, renounce the use of violent means? Not at all. Our means are those that circumstances allow and impose.

Of course we do not wish to lay a finger on anyone; we would wish to dry all the tears of humanity and not be responsible for more tears. But we must either struggle in the world as it is or remain helpless dreamers. The day will come, we are convinced of this, when it will be possible to serve the cause of Mankind without hurting either oneself or others; but today this is not possible. Even the purest and gentlest of martyrs, those who would allow themselves to be dragged to the gallows for the triumph of good, without resisting, blessing their persecutors, as did the Christ of the legend, would be doing harm. Besides the harm to their own persons, which after all must be reckoned with too, they would cause bitter tears to be shed by all those who loved them. In all actions in life it is, therefore always a question of seeking to cause the least harm to achieve the greatest possible good...

Obviously the revolution will be the cause of many tragedies and much suffering; but even if it produced a hundred times more, it would always be a blessing compared with the sufferings which now exist in the world as a result of the evil organisation of society. (*l'En Dehors*, August 17. 1892)

There are, and there always have been in all socio-political struggles, two kinds of hypnotisers.

There are those who consider that we are never mature enough, that we expect too much, that we must wait, and be satisfied to advance a little at a time with the aid of small reforms... which are periodically won and lost without ever solving anything. And there are those who affect contempt for the small things, and advocate all or nothing, and in putting forward schemes, probably excellent ones which cannot however be realised through lack of sufficient support, prevent, or seek to prevent, others from doing the little that can be done.

For us what is most important is not what we achieve... but how we achieve it.

If in order to secure an improvement in the situation one abandons one's basic programme and stops propagating it or struggling to realise it; if one induces the masses to pin their hopes on laws and the good-will of the rulers rather than in their own direct action; if one suffocates the revolutionary spirit, and ceases to foment discontent and resistance-then every advantage will prove illusory and ephemeral, and in all cases will bar the roads to the future society.

But if instead, one does not forget one's final objectives, and encourages the popular forces, as well as inciting to direct action and insurrection, very little may be achieved at the time, but one has made a step forward in the moral preparation of the mass of the people, and in the achievement of a more favourable social climate.

"The optimum is enemy of the good" says the proverb: let us do what we can, assuming we cannot do all we would wish; but do something we must. (*Umanità Nova*, June 25. 1922)

Another damaging argument sincerely advanced by many, but which for others is an excuse for doing nothing, is that the present social environment does not make morality possible; and that consequently it is useless to make efforts which cannot succeed, and it is therefore best to get all one can for oneself without bothering about others, except to change one's way of life when the social organisation will be changed. Obviously all anarchists and socialists understand the economic facts of life which today oblige man to struggle against man, and any observer will see the importance of a personal struggle against the overwhelming power of the present social environment. But it is also obvious that without revolt by the individual, who joins with others of like mind to offer resistance to the environment in order to change it, it will never change.

All of us, without exception, are obliged to live, more or less, in contradiction with our ideals; but we are anarchists and socialists because, and in so far as, we suffer by this contradiction, and seek to make it as small as possible. In the event of adapting ourselves to the environment, we would of course also lose the desire to change it, and would become ordinary bourgeois; bourgeois without money perhaps, but for all that bourgeois in our actions and intentions.' (*L'Anarchia*, August 1896)

they also come from the possibility of degeneration of the revolution itself; and from the arrivistes who, though revolutionaries, nevertheless retain a mentality and sympathies which are bourgeois and seek to direct the revolution towards ends which are anything but equalitarian and libertarian.' (*Umanità Nova*, August 27, 1920)

Once the situation is reached whereby no one could impose his wishes on others by force, nor take away from any man the product of his labour, anarchists could then only act through propaganda and by example.

Destroy the institutions and the machinery of existing social organisations? Yes, certainly, if it is a question of repressive institutions; but these are, after all, only a small part of the complex of social life. The police, the army, the prisons and the judiciary are potent institutions for evil, which exercise a parasitic function. Other institutions and organisations manage, for better or for worse, to guarantee life to mankind; and these institutions cannot be usefully destroyed without replacing them by something better.

The exchange of raw materials and goods, the distribution of foodstuffs, the railways, postal services and all public services administered by the State or by private companies, have been organised to serve monopolistic and capitalist interests, but they also serve real needs of the population. We cannot disrupt them (and in any case the people would not in their own interests allow us to) without reorganising them in a better way. And this cannot be achieved in a day; nor as things stand, have we the necessary abilities to do so. We are delighted therefore if in the meantime, others act, even with different criteria from our own.

Social life does not admit of interruptions, and the people want to live on the day of the revolution, on the morrow and always.' (*Umanità Nova*, October 7, 1922)

There are still many people who are fascinated by the idea of "terror." For them it seems that the guillotine, firing squads, massacres, deportations and jails are powerful and indispensable arms of the revolution, and observe that if so many revolutions have been defeated and have not produced the results hoped for, it is the fault of the goodness, and "weakness" of the revolutionaries, who have not persecuted, repressed and killed on a large enough scale.

It is a prejudice current in some revolutionary circles which had its origins in the rhetoric and historic falsification of the apologists of the Great French Revolution and has been revived in recent years by the bolsheviks in their propaganda. But the truth is just the opposite; Terror has always been the instrument of tyranny. In France it served the grim tyranny of Robespierre and paved the way for Napoleon and the subsequent reaction. In Russia it persecuted and killed anarchists and socialists, and massacred rebellious workers and peasants, and has halted the development of a revolution which really might have ushered in a new era for mankind. Those who believe in the liberating and revolutionary efficacy of repression and savagery have the same kind of backward mentality as the jurists who believe that crimes can be prevented and the world morally improved by the imposition of stiff punishments.

The Terror, like war, awakens atavistic and bellicose sentiments, still

tomorrow, after a triumphant insurrection, and the achievement of freedom, in that we will seek with all the means that freedom permits, that is by propaganda, example and even violent resistance against anyone who should wish to restrict our freedom in order to win over to our ideas an ever greater number of people.

But we will never recognise the institutions; we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to go on advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government, whether it be that of the monarchy today, or the republican or bolshevik governments of tomorrow.' (*Pensiero e Volontà*, March 1, 1924)

## DEFENCE OF THE REVOLUTION

by Errico Malatesta

The revolution we want consists in depriving the present holders of their power and wealth and in putting the land and the means of production and all existing wealth at the disposal of the workers, that is of everybody, since those who are not, will have to become, workers, And the revolutionaries must defend this revolution by seeing to it that no individual, party or class finds the means' to constitute a government and restore privilege in favour of new or old bosses...

To defend, to save the revolution there is only one means: that of pushing the revolution as far as it will go. So long as there are those who will be in a position to oblige others to work for them; so long as there are those who are in a position to violate the freedom of others, the revolution will not be complete, and we will be still in a state of legitimate defence and to the violence which oppresses we will oppose the violence that liberates.

Do you fear that the dispossessed bourgeoisie may hire soldiers of fortune to restore the old regime? Dispossess them completely and you will see that without money you can employ no one.

Do you fear a military coup? Arm all the population, ensure that they really are in possession of all wealth so that every person will have to defend his own freedom and the means which can ensure his well-being, and you will see whether the generals seeking adventures will find who to follow them: But if after that, the people in arms, in possession of the land, the factories and all the natural wealth were incapable of defending themselves, and allowed themselves once again to be brought under the yoke, it would mean that they were still not capable of enjoying freedom. The revolution would have failed and the work of education and preparation would have to be resumed for another attempt which would have greater chances of success because it would benefit from the seeds that had been sown at the previous attempt.' (*Fede*, November 25)

The dangers with which a revolution is faced do not come solely or principally from the reactionaries conspiring for a restoration and calling for foreign intervention;

## REFORMISM

by Errico Malatesta

The fundamental error of the reformists is that of dreaming of solidarity, a sincere collaboration, between masters and servants, between proprietors and workers which even if it might have existed here and there in periods of profound unconsciousness of the masses and of ingenuous faith in religion and rewards, is utterly impossible today.

Those who envisage a society of well stuffed pigs which waddle contentedly under the ferule of a small number of swineherd; who do not take into account the need for freedom and the sentiment of human dignity; who really believe in a God that orders, for his abstruse ends, the poor to be submissive and the rich to be good and charitable can also imagine and aspire to a technical organisation of production which assures abundance to all and is at the same time materially advantageous both to the bosses and to the workers. But in reality "social peace" based on abundance for all will remain a dream, so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes, that is employers and employees. And there will be neither peace nor abundance.

The antagonism is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers for the better exploitation of the forces of nature in the interests of mankind, because the bosses above all want to, remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want more!' (*Umanità Nova*, May 10, 1922)

[Our good friends] are wasting their time when they tell us that a little freedom is better than a brutal and unbridled tyranny; that a reasonable working day, a wage that allows people to live better than animals, and protection of women and children, are preferable to the exploitation of human labour to the point of human exhaustion; or that the State school, bad as it is, is always better, from the point of view of the child's moral development, than schools run by priests and monks... for we are in complete agreement. And we also agree that there may be circumstances in which the Election results, national or local, can have good or bad consequences and that this vote might be determined by the anarchists' votes if the strength of the rival parties were equally balanced.

In most cases it is an illusion; when elections are tolerably free, the only value they have is symbolic: they indicate the state of public opinion, which would have imposed itself by more efficacious means, and with more far reaching results, if it had not been offered the outlet of elections. But no matter even if some minor advances were the direct result of an electoral victory, anarchists should not flock to the polling booths or cease to preach their methods of struggle.

Since no one can do everything in this world, one must choose one's own line of conduct.

There is always an element of contradiction between minor improvements, the satisfaction of immediate needs and the struggle for a society which is really better than the existing one. Those who want to devote themselves to the erection of public lavatories and drinking fountains where there is a need for them. or who use their energies for the construction of a road, or the establishment of a municipal school, or for the passing of some minor law to protect workers or to get rid of a brutal policeman, do well, perhaps, to use their ballot paper in favour of this or that influential personage. But then - since one wants to be "practical" one must go the whole hog - so, rather than wait for the victory of the opposition party, rather than vote for the more kindred party, it is worth taking a short cut and support the dominant party, and serve the government already in office, and become the agent of the Prefect or the Mayor. And in fact the neo-converts we have in mind did not in fact propose voting for the most "progressive" party, but for the one that had the greater chance of being elected... But in that case where does it all end?..." (*Pensiero e Volontà*, May 15, 1924)

In the course of human history it is generally the case that the malcontents, the oppressed, and the rebels, before being able to conceive and desire a radical change in the political and social institutions, restrict their demands to partial changes, to concessions by the rulers, and to improvements. Hopes of obtaining reforms as well as in their efficacy, precede the conviction that in order to destroy the power of a government or of a class, it is necessary to deny the reasons for that power, and therefore to make a revolution.

In the order of things, reforms are then introduced or they are not, and once introduced either consolidate the existing regime or undermine it; assist the advent of revolution or hamper it and benefit or harm progress in general, depending on their specific characteristic, the spirit in which they have been granted, and above all, the spirit in which they are asked for, claimed or seized by the people.

Governments and the privileged classes are naturally always guided by instincts of self-preservation, of consolidation and the development of their powers and privileges; and when they consent to reforms it is either because they consider that they will serve their ends or because they do not feel strong enough to resist, and give in, fearing what might otherwise be a worse alternative.

The oppressed, either ask for and welcome improvements as a benefit graciously conceded, recognise the legitimacy of the power which is over them, and so do more harm than good by helping to slow down, or divert and perhaps even stop the processes of emancipation. Or instead they demand and impose improvements by their action, and welcome them as partial victories over the class enemy, using them as a spur to greater achievements, and thus they are a valid help and a preparation to the total overthrow of privilege, that is, for the revolution. A point is reached when the demands of the dominated class cannot be acceded to by the ruling class without compromising their power. Then the violent conflict inevitably occurs.

It is not true to say therefore, that revolutionaries are systematically

opposed to improvements, to reforms. They oppose the reformists on the one hand because their methods are less effective for securing reforms from governments and employers, who only give in through fear, and on the other hand because very often the reforms they prefer are those which not only bring doubtful immediate benefits, but also serve to consolidate the existing regime and to give the workers a vested interest in its continued existence. Thus, for instance, State pensions, insurance schemes, as well as profit sharing schemes in agricultural and industrial enterprises, etc.' (*Umanità Nova*, September 10, 1920)

Apart from the unpleasantness of the word which has been abused and discredited by politicians, anarchism has always been, and can never be anything but, reformist. We prefer to say reformatory in order to avoid any possible confusion with those who are officially classified as "reformists" and seek by means of small and often ephemeral improvements to make the present system more bearable (and as a result help to consolidate it); or who instead believe in good faith that it is possible to eliminate the existing social evils by recognising and respecting, in practice if not in theory, the basic political and economic institutions which are the cause of, as well as the prop that supports these evils. But in any case it is always a question of reforms, and the essential difference lies in the kind of reform one wants and the way one thinks of being able to achieve it. Revolution means, in the historical sense of the word, the radical reform of institutions, achieved rapidly by the violent insurrection of the people against existing power and privileges; and we are revolutionaries and insurrectionists because we do not just want to improve existing institutions but to destroy them completely, abolishing every form of domination by man over man, and every kind of parasitism on human labour; and because we want to achieve this as quickly as possible, and because we believe that institutions born of violence are maintained by violence and will not give way except to an equivalent violence. But the revolution cannot be made just when one likes. Should we remain inactive, waiting for the situation to mature with time?

And even after a successful insurrection, could we overnight realise all our desires and pass from a governmental and capitalist hell to a libertarian-communist heaven which is the complete freedom of man within the wished-for community of interests with all men?

These are illusions which can take root among authoritarians who look upon the masses as the raw material which those who have power can, by decrees, supported by bullets and handcuffs, mould to their will. But these illusions have not taken among anarchists. We need the people's consensus, and therefore we must persuade by means of propaganda and example, we must educate and seek to change the environment in such a way that this education may reach an ever increasing number of people...

We are reformers today in so far as we seek to create the most favourable conditions and as large a body of enlightened militants so that an insurrection by the people would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. We shall be reformers