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Pseudo-Scientific Aberrations

Errico Malatesta

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According to the Franco-Russian socialist, Frederic Stackelberg, who is well-known not only for his political activity but for his valuable work in popularising astronomy:

‘socialism is nothing more than the biological monism* of the arts and sciences of the 19th century and the astronomical monism of the Renaissance, confirmed by recent astronomical discoveries.’ (*Le Semeur de Normandie*, 25th October).

In ordinary vulgar language this means that if recent discoveries were to give rise to biological theories that differ from the dominant theories of the nineteenth century, and if astronomical research were to show that the stars were composed of matter different from our own planet’s, there would be no point in socialism existing and socialists would be wrong!

Now Stackelberg is not just an astronomer who lives with his head in the clouds and the kind of snob-socialist who talks about socialism without knowing what it really means. He is, or was, a militant socialist (who at one time flirted with anarchism). He made

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his contribution to the struggle for human liberation and still has a passionate interest in social questions. In point of fact, in the same article from which we have drawn that bewildering definition of socialism we also find that:

‘The programme, the immediate aim of scientific Socialism and Communism is:

- I. The common ownership of the land and all means of production;
- II. The emancipation of women in terms of civil, political and economic equality, with men, which will put an end to the old moral code of our ancestors;
- III. The replacement of the rule of man over man by the worldwide administration of production based on equivalence of labour.’

So far so good. But what does astronomy have to do with it?!

We would not have raised the matter if it had simply been some isolated example of academics who, tormented by the need to search for a universal formula that would explain everything that the senses perceive, that thought conceives and that life actually does, allow themselves to be drawn into making rash statements and grotesque judgements.

But unfortunately the habit is widespread, perhaps especially in our milieu.

Our desk is littered with the writings of good comrades who feel the need to give their anarchism a ‘scientific base’ and who consequently fall into the sort of traps which would seem ridiculous were they not rendered pathetic by the obvious efforts they have made in the sincere belief that they are furthering their cause. And most pathetic of all are the many who make excuses for not doing

better ... because they haven’t had the opportunity to pursue their studies.

But why get bogged down in things one doesn’t know about, instead of making sound propaganda based on human needs and aspirations?

Clearly it isn’t necessary to be a learned scholar to be a good and useful anarchist. On the contrary, being a scholar can sometimes be a positive hindrance. But to talk about science it would perhaps be advisable to know a little about it!

And let no one accuse us, as a comrade did recently, of having scant respect for science. On the contrary, we know what beauty, greatness and power there is in science. We recognise the part it plays in the liberation of thought and in the triumph of humankind over the hostile forces of nature, and we therefore hope that we and all comrades will be able to form a clear and coherent idea about Science and deepen our understanding of it in at least one of its innumerable branches.

Our programme does not only include *bread for all*, but also *science for all*. But it seems to us that in order to speak at all usefully about science we first need to clarify what its aims and its functions are.

Like bread, science is not a free gift of Nature. It must be conquered by struggle. And we are fighting to create the conditions which give to all the possibilities of joining in the struggle.