

For The Higher Police Authorities

Errico Malatesta

That the Police are indiscreet, vexatious, evil and, when it happens, even brutal, is something that we understand: it is the profession that wants it. They have always been and will always be like that, in any regime: and therefore we must fight for their radical abolition and not for their reform.

But do they really need to be also, and above all, stupid?

It would seem so.

At the time of the bombs and other attacks, when the police used all their strength and all their acumen to “save society” (the society of their lords), they never managed to discover a fact until after it happened, and have always arrested those who had nothing to do with it, leaving the real authors alone, whom of course they did not even suspect. And when they wanted to give themselves the satisfaction of uncovering a plot and preventing an attack, they had to... invent it themselves.

I recall these old stories, well known to all, because the police are now giving a sublime proof of idiocy towards me.

Since I returned to Italy, the authorities have been following me and have stationed in front of my house, or the houses of friends who host me when I am on the road: a couple, and sometimes two couples, of plainclothes guards, poor devils who are there exposed to the sun or to the frost... and to the people’s pillory [*berlina*]. And when I go to a place to give a lecture or to take part in a meeting, and it is announced in the newspapers and on the walls of the city where I go, those poor guards scramble to *discover* if I am leaving and where I am going, and question the neighbors... who tell them all sorts of lies.

They do not bother me at all, and I really have no reason to complain about it. The guards make wonderful discoveries, such as, for example, that Agostinelli and Brasili are probably anarchists, since I frequent them, that I often go to the print shop, and many other things of the kind, which without them would have remained in mystery, with serious danger to public safety. And I, for my part, if I want to see a friend who could be damaged if it was known that he is related to an anarchist, I escape the guards with the greatest ease; and I often do it just for fun. Then I find them at the door when I return home. It became so common that we ended up laughing at it, me and them.

And I don’t even want it to be over, as that too is a way of propaganda.

— Who is it — the people ask — whom the guards persecute so fiercely? Who knows what a terrible criminal!

— What! — Someone always replies — if he is such a good man!

— Then why do they persecute him?

— Because he is an anarchist.

— What do these anarchists want?

And so begins the conversation about our ideas, for the benefit of their propagation.

— But then — someone might tell me — if you don't have any damage and the propaganda benefits from it, why are you denouncing it?

Because... because I can't resist the temptation to pillory the authorities. It must be an effect of the reverence they inspire in me!

— And are you not afraid to open their minds and make them less ridiculous?

— There is no such danger! The Tuscans usually say: he who is born a fool is never cured [*chi nasce bischero non guarisce più*].

Once Depretis, attacked by Deputy Tajani, because there were a number of criminals in the police force, replied: "But who do you want me to put in, if the honest men don't want to do that job?"

If someone reproached Giolitti, who is a rascal but not an idiot, the ineptitude of his agents, he might reply: "But what can I do if intelligent men don't want to be policemen?"

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