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Errico Malatesta
Is Revolution Possible?
1914

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Needless to say, we cannot know what may happen in the near future.

But whatever the future may bring, should it be the government caving in to the railway workers' demands, coming to the rescue of the monarchist order and the masters' interests yet again, or tackling the strike with all its uncertainties, the fact is that the crisis by which Italy is at present beset represents a great lesson that is not going to go to waste.¹

For many years now, the “hard-headed” types out to resolve the heavyweight of making an omelette without breaking eggs have been going around preaching that revolution is no longer an option. Breach-loading rifles; machine-guns; rapid communications; the old cities being cleared of narrow, twisting streets spelled certain defeat for any attempt at popular insurrection.

¹ A great agitation of the railway workers had taken place between the fall 1913 and the spring 1914, contributing to the resignation of Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti in March 1913. The labour dispute continued under the new ministry of Antonio Salandra and was still open at the time of the present article, with the railway workers threatening to go on strike.

We were the “1848 fossils,” the “romantics,” the “classic revolutionaries” overtaken by the onward march of time.

We stood condemned by science—that dutiful maid of all work—“Science.”

By then, in order to save the world and transform society, what was needed was lots of fear... and the election of deputies to the parliament.

Now, lo and behold, at one fell swoop and because of a minor pay issue—because of the simple fact that one category of workers has caught on that when one works, one has, at the very least, a right to eat and to rest, and is vigorously calling for some improvements—the whole of “science” can be ignored and the laws of “evolution” forgotten: and we seem to hark back to the days of barbarism when revolutionaries were less well versed in science but also had less fear.

There is indeed a strike-back atmosphere. One can sense fresh hopes stirring in the popular classes, and the ruling, which is to say, oppressor classes, are entirely overrun by ill-concealed worry.

People wonder—if the railwaymen were really to refuse to work, if ill-intentioned people were to sabotage the rolling stock and railway tracks making even a skeleton service impossible, if the most wide awake segment of the proletariat was to support the action by means of general strikes—what would the government do with its soldiers, even if the latter were to forget that they are proletarians who were forcibly conscripted and have parents, brothers, and chums in the strikers’ ranks? And how could the established order carry on then?

Revolution would become a necessity: only it could ensure that the life of society carried on.

Maybe this is not going to happen today. But why would it not, tomorrow?

Nobody can tell in advance when the time will be ripe, and the fatal hour could arrive at any moment.

Let everybody hold themselves in readiness for tomorrow... or today.