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Errico Malatesta
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Our Foreign Policy

War and Peace

Errico Malatesta

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Strictly speaking, we cannot have a foreign policy, as we are and want to be outside and against the current partition of the world into rival States.

For us there are no foreigners. We want all men, whatever their place of birth, whatever ethnicity they may be derived from, whatever language they speak, to consider themselves as brothers and sisters and to group together freely and cooperate together for the greatest well-being, the greatest freedom, the greatest civilization of all.

And given that this universal brotherhood, this harmonization of all interests and all aspirations in a vast unity (that of humankind) that respects and favors the free development of all varieties, the full autonomy of all individuals and all groups, is still an ideal in contrast to today’s harsh reality; given that men are still divided into oppressed and oppressors, and some live exploiting the work of others, and workers carry the weight of all social burdens and are coerced in their material and moral development, and often reduced to the most squalid and stultifying misery — we are, whatever our country of origin or address, for the oppressed against the oppressors, for the workers

against the parasites, without any regard to the various political groupings in which the historical vicissitudes and the interests and ambitions of the masters, although favored by special natural conditions, divided humanity.

If one wants to speak of foreigners, then for us the foreigner is not the one who was born beyond some border and speaks a different language, or has a different colored skin; — the foreigner, the enemy, is the oppressor, is the exploiter, is anyone who, in whatever country, submits another man to his will.

— “But we, despite our cosmopolitanism, still have to live in the state in which we find ourselves and submit to its political regime. We can ideally feel in solidarity with both the worker in a distant country and the one who works beside us, we can hate foreign governments as much as our national government; but in practice it is with the neighbors that solidarity or struggle is most alive, most felt, most effective.”

So tell us some people who, not being able to make us patriots and nationalists with the common arguments based on criminal hatred and stupid vanities, believe they can appeal to our combative instincts and make us accept the most reactionary theories under the mask of revolutionaryism. And we accept their thesis. We, despite our ideas, are forcibly Italian citizens, that is to say subjects of the government of Italy; and therefore this government oppresses us and affects us more than the government of Japan, for example, can do; and we, for our part, can do against the government of Italy what we would have no means of doing against the government of a distant country. So the conclusion is that, for an anarchist, the first enemy is the oppressor who is closest to him, and against whom he can fight most effectively. For an Italian anarchist, and in general for every Italian worker who aspires to the emancipation of himself and his companions, it is above all necessary to fight the government of Italy and the bosses of Italy, that is, those who claim to be our co-nationals and our compatriots, and in the name of the nation and the country would want us

to take their weapons to backward peoples, it will not be to oppress them, nor to impose systems of life on them that they do not appreciate, but to help them free themselves, to rid them of indigenous or outsider tyranny they are subject to. And with freedom, they will take them wheat, cattle, medicines, work tools. Then yes, civilization will be accepted and it will expand all over the world, to make all humanity free, rich, happy and wise.

The new apostles of brute force, the gloved and perfumed dudes who go play Rodomonte among the beautiful ladies, and send the proletarians to the slaughterhouse for the glory of the monarchy and the bankers' purse, call us pacifists.

Indeed, we are for peace, but only on the condition that there is justice.

As long as there are privileged who support their privilege with brute force, let the men of war also be certain that we will not make peace.

to docilely accept their dominion. Is this the conclusion they wanted to reach? If so, we agree.

They say that the nationalist and patriotic sentiment is a fact, and therefore it is necessary to accept it.

There are also facts like religion, crime, misery, slavery and a thousand individual and collective aberrations. Is it necessary, then, to accept everything and renounce any action for the better?

The patriotic feeling, when it is not merely a construct made in the interest of a class and really exists in the popular mood, is good when it serves to animate the revolt against the oppressor who happens to be a foreigner; bad when it encourages to oppress others and to make indigenous oppression better accepted. It always remains an inferior feeling, which civilization must replace with the broad feeling of human brotherhood, but it is respectable and can evolve and expand if it recognizes and respects in others the right to the equivalent feeling; that is, when, claiming a homeland for itself, it knows how to respect the homeland of others or, even better, it knows how to fight, as the Italian patriots already do, to help others to claim a homeland. Despicable, however, and leading to the most horrible acts and the most miserable degenerations, if it serves the satisfaction of criminal instincts of rapine and dominion.

The government and the ruling classes use patriotic sentiment (as well as the other human defect which is religious sentiment) to make their power better accepted by the people and to drag the people into wars and colonial ventures carried out for their exclusive benefit. And its theorists say that above the struggle between the poor and the rich, between proletarians and property owners, there is a national solidarity that unites in a feeling and in a common interest everyone in the same country, all members of the same nation.

Naturally this is a doctrine for the dominated, because as for the dominators, they treat their co-nationals like cannon fodder, and put their money where it yields more, prefer workers

who produce more and settle for less, buy and sell on the more advantageous market, taking care only of their profit and completely indifferent to the sufferings of their co-nationals.

But even if it were true — and sometimes it is, as it happens even in the relations between the different provinces of the same State or between the different categories of workers — even if it were true that from the plundering and overexploitation some material advantage comes to part of or perhaps the whole proletariat of the conquering country, the conquest, or the complicity in it by those who claim to be friends of the workers, would not be less condemnable, either from the superior point of view of human justice and freedom, or even from the point of view of the lasting interests of the proletariat itself, which for a moment may benefit, but then pays the crime in currency of servitude.

A murder always remains an abominable act that degrades and bestializes those who commit it, even if it enriches them... not to mention that most of the time, sooner or later, it ends up being a bad deal!

We are against the bourgeois class, we stand against and outside the State — and we urge workers to do the same — both in peace and in war.

Democratic socialists, who, while claiming to want to revolutionize the entire capitalist order, later do social conservation work, trying to make the current state of affairs more bearable and more supported, or rather, trying to make us hope that new laws can repair the most glaring evils, can take an interest in relations with foreign States, trade treaties, the rule of the seas and similar hobbies. Republicans, who instead of thinking about making the republic are concerned with moralizing the monarchy by denouncing the robberies of the deputies and the illicit lovers of the generals, can take sides by the triple alliance

or the triple agreement and worry about the strength and prestige of Italy. Socialists and Republicans aspire to go to power — some perhaps with the monarchy — and it is natural that they exercise the arts of the statesman.

But we, who truly want to overthrow the current social system, we who are not content with simple improvements, we who believe that these limited improvements that the capitalist system could grant without denying itself will not be obtained, or will not be useful nor effective, if they are not wrested by the resistance and threat of the proletariat in struggle against the bosses, we cannot have any voluntary relationship with the State, and we are concerned with it only insofar as we can undermine its strength and existence.

We are told that civilization is propagated through war.

If it were true, we should in any case first think of becoming civilized ourselves, that is, we should first conquer freedom and the possession of wealth for ourselves, we should make misery, ignorance, oppression, alcoholism, prostitution disappear from our midst, and then bring to others the benefits that we had been able to realize for ourselves.

Bringing the slaughter to other countries in order to offer them capitalism and a parliamentary regime, to combine the evils of our civilization with those of their civilization, would be crazy when it was not the work of delinquents.

But it's not true. War, violence, does not produce civilization, but barbarism, slavery, hatred, misery: it oppresses the loser, corrupts and stupefies the winner.

There is no holy war but the one made to free ourselves from oppression; there is no just violence but that which repels violence.

Civilization is propagated through propaganda, example, benefits; and if one day Europe's emancipated workers have