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Errico Malatesta
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7/3/1914

Translated from www.bibliotecaginobianco.it and
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Translation from Italian by João Black, helped by Zoe Baker.

This article was originally published as “*La Nostra Politica Estera*” (with the subtitle “*Guerra e Pace*”) in *Volontà* (Ancona),
7/3/1914 (see links above)

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Our Foreign Policy

War and Peace

Errico Malatesta

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Strictly speaking we cannot have a foreign policy, since we are, and want to stay, 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 ethnic group they come from, whatever language they speak, to consider themselves as brothers and to group freely and cooperate together for the greatest well-being, the greatest freedom, the greatest civilization of all.

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

the various political groupings in which historical events and the interests and ambitions of the masters, albeit favored by special natural conditions, have divided humanity.

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

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

So tell us some who, not being able to make us patriots and nationalists with ordinary arguments based on criminal hatred and stupid vanities, believe they can appeal to our instincts of combativeness and make us accept the most reactionary theories under the guise of revolutionism. And we accept their thesis. We, despite our ideas, are necessarily 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, could do; and we in turn can do against the government of Italy what we would not have the means to do against the government of a distant country. So the conclusion is that, for an anarchist, the primary enemy is the oppressor who is closest to him, and against whom he can fight more effectively. For an Italian anarchist, and in general for every Italian worker who aspires to his and his comrades' emancipation, it is above all necessary to fight the government of Italy and the bosses of Italy, that is, those who call themselves our fellow citizens [*connazionali*] and compatriots, and in the name of the nation and the homeland [*patria*] would like

There is no holy war other than that waged to free ourselves from oppression, there is no just violence other than that which repels violence.

Civilization spreads with propaganda, example, benefits; and if one day the emancipated workers of Europe will have to carry arms among the backward peoples, it will not be to oppress them, not to impose on them ways of life that they do not appreciate, but to help them free themselves, to rid them of indigenous or alien tyranny to which they may find themselves subject. And with freedom they will bring them grain, livestock, medicines, work tools. Then yes, civilization will be accepted and will expand throughout the world, to make all humanity free, rich, happy, wise.

* * *

The new apostles of brute force, the gloved and perfumed dandies who play Rodomonte among the beautiful ladies and send the proletarians to the slaughter for the glory of the monarchy and for the bankers' purse, treat us as pacifists.

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

As long as there are privileged who support the privilege over brute force, men of war can be sure that we will not make peace.

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

* * *

They say that nationalist and patriotic sentiment is a fact, and therefore it must be accepted.

Religion, crime, misery, slavery and a thousand individual or collective aberrations are also facts. Will we therefore have to accept everything, and renounce every action for the better?

Patriotic sentiment, when it is not a simple hype made in the interest of a class and really exists in the popular mind, is good or bad according to circumstances: good when it serves to animate the revolt against the oppressor who finds himself being a foreigner; bad when it pushes to oppress others and to better accept indigenous oppression. It always remains an inferior sentiment, which civilization will have to replace with the broad sentiment of human brotherhood, but it is respectable and can evolve and expand if it recognizes and respects in others the right to an equivalent sentiment, that is, when, asking for a homeland for itself, it knows how to respect the homeland of others or, better still, knows how to fight, like the Italian patriots already, to help others to claim a homeland. It is on the other hand despicable, and leading to the most horrible misdeeds and the most miserable degenerations, if it serves the satisfaction of criminal instincts of rapine and domination.

Governments and the ruling classes use patriotic sentiment (as well as that other human defect which is religious sentiment) to make the people accept their power better and to drag the people into wars and colonial enterprises made for their [the ruling classes] exclusive profit. And their theorists say that above the struggle between poor and rich, between proletarians and property owners, there is a national solidarity that unites in a common sentiment and interest all the people of the same country, all the members of the same nation.

Naturally this is the doctrine for the subjects, because as for the rulers they treat their compatriots as slaughter fodder, they place their money where it gives more interest, they prefer the workers who produce more and are satisfied with less, they buy and sell on the more advantageous market, caring only for their own profit and completely indifferent to the sufferings of their compatriots.

But even if it were true—and sometimes it is, as it also happens 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 looting and excessive exploitation, some material advantage would come to a part of or perhaps the entire proletariat of the conquering country, the conquest, or complicity in the conquest of those who call themselves friends of the workers, would be no less condemnable, both from the superior point of view of justice and human freedom, and also from that of the lasting interests of the proletariat itself, which for a moment can profit from it, but then pays the crime in the currency of servitude.

A murder is always an abominable act and it degrades and bestializes whoever commits it, even if it enriches him... not to mention that most of the time, sooner or later, it turns out a bad deal!

* * *

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

The democratic socialists, who while saying that they want to revolutionize the entire capitalist order then do work of social conservation, trying to make the current state of affairs more bearable and more tolerated, or rather trying to give hope that new laws will be able to repair the worst evils, may be interested in relations with foreign States, in commercial treaties,

in the dominion of the seas and similar pastimes. The Republicans, who instead of thinking about making a republic are concerned with moralizing the monarchy by denouncing the thievery of deputies and the illicit loves of generals, can side with the triple alliance [triplice alleanza] or the triple entente [triplice intesa] 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 for them to practice the arts of the statesman.

But we, who really want to overthrow the current social system, we who are not satisfied with simple improvements, we who believe that those limited improvements that the capitalist system could grant without denying itself will not be obtained, or will not be useful and effective, if not extracted by the resistance and the threat of the proletariat in struggle against the bosses—we cannot have any voluntary relationship with the State and we do not deal with it except insofar as we can undermine its strength and existence.

* * *

We are told that civilization spreads with war.

If it were true, we should in any case first think about becoming civil ourselves, that is, we should first conquer freedom and the social wealth for ourselves, we should make poverty, ignorance, oppression, alcoholism, prostitution disappear from among us, and then bring to others the benefits that we would have been able to achieve for ourselves.

Bringing massacre to other countries to offer them capitalism and the parliamentary regime, to add the evils of our civilization to those of their civilization, would be crazy when not a work of delinquents.

But it's not true. War, violence, does not produce civilization, but barbarism, slavery, hatred, misery: it oppresses the vanquished, corrupts and brutalizes the victor.