

For Candia

Errico Malatesta

1897

Candia has risen in revolt against the Turkish overlord; Macedonia is on the brink of rising, and the whole of the Balkan Peninsula may well be ablaze shortly.¹

What must, what can we do in the face of these events?

Some socialists and some anarchists are already on their way to Candia; and news reaches us from every corner of comrades who would like to go and who are held back only by want of the means.

We have the deepest sympathy for these generous souls, and are especially delighted that the socialists – who usually dismiss us as sentimentalists and romantics – are not, when tested by events, quite the algebraic formulae that they might like to appear as, and that they have human hearts and understand that man lives, is moved by, suffers, and is enthused also by things that Marx's theories struggle to explain.

However, we must tell our comrades what our reasoning tells us.

The Greeks refuse to be ruled by the Turks, in which they are a thousand times right. They want to come under the rule of the king of Greece and... may they be spared what has befallen certain Italians.

But when it comes to us, if we could effectively help these rebels, we should do so in the name of our ideas, which embrace and include all minor issues; we should fight to ensure that these peoples are truly free to determine their own fates. But we could never serve as the king's men; we could never accept, in advance, responsibility for all the vexations that are going to be visited upon Cretans and others by the Greek bourgeoisie and that will, we have no doubt, make them nostalgic for the Turk.

For the moment, there is nothing to be said about Candia. The island is in the hands of the Greek king's men and the forces of the European coalition. Its fate lies in the hands of the diplomats: the steadfastness of the rebels may afford the king of Greece a chance to dig in his heels and secure annexation; but the intervention of a few foreign volunteers, even were it to be allowed, can carry no weight. Our comrades' heroism would assuredly be pointless and might indeed prove cheap heroics, boiling down to a simple excursion trip.

¹ The Greek revolt against Turkish rule on the island of Candia (these days, Crete) was the overture to the Greco-Turkish War. A legion of volunteers, led by Ricciotti Garibaldi took part in the war, which had triggered a pro-Greek solidarity campaign in Italy. Amilcare Cipriani, revolutionary of anarchist leanings, led his own volunteer unit, which included the socialists and anarchists to whom Malatesta is referring in his article.

To Macedonia and Epirus, that is where the volunteers should be directed today.²

But they would need to be able to go in sufficient numbers and strength to pursue a policy of their own. Otherwise, few in number and mixed in with the Greek bands, not knowing the language, we would not only have to do the bidding of the king of Greece but also impotently witness the inevitable slaughter of Turkish peasants; because, and let us not forget this, over yonder, besides the hatred for the oppressor that we ourselves share, there is racial and religious hatred, which is alien to us.

We ask our friends: if it were a matter of *liberating* Trieste, would they go if the only way of doing so would be enlisting under the King's colors or under Imbriani's?³

Given what we have said, it seems to us that in the actual circumstances, our own and those over there, there is nothing we can do.

Let us take solace from that. There is so much that we could be doing, if we wish, against Italy's Turks!

² The liberation of Macedonia and Epirus from Ottoman domination was the Greek nationalists' main objective. Raids of Greek irregular bands into Macedonian territory occurred in the previous months, and a Greek uprising in those regions seemed a possibility.

³ Former Garibaldian and deputy: Matteo Renato Imbriani was a fiery advocate of the rescue of "*terre irredente*" (unredeemed territories), a term he himself coined in 1877, with reference to the northern cities of Trento and Trieste, which remained under Austrian domination after the unification of Italy.

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