

# **Life of Malatesta**

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## Introduction: How I met Errico Malatesta

The day I met Errico Malatesta is the most vivid memory of my distant youth.

It was in April, 1897. The conservative and bourgeois monarchy who sat in Savoy had suffocated the Italian people for nearly a year under a harsh storm of reactionary measures which prefigured fascism, *pausing to appease* them only once they threatened to disrupt the tranquil luxury of the ruling classes.

Francesco Crispi, the old Jacobin-become-Minister who hid behind the [banner of X] as he *persecuted all new ideas*, was forced to resign thanks to the tide of popular *indignation* at Italy's defeat in Abyssinia. *The imperial megalomania of the monarch* Umberto I and his Minister was *laid to rest*, and the peninsula *once more* breathed a small sigh of liberty.

The revolutionary proletarian movement began to grow. Four months *earlier* the first issues of *Avanti!* (Forward!), Italy's first socialist daily, had been published in Rome, and anarchists who had been disarticulated and reduced to silence by the reaction of mid-1894, once more had a pair of papers: *Social Future (L'Avvenire Sociale)* in Messina and *New Word (Il Nuovo Verbo/The New Word)* from Parma.

Many comrades, *however*, were still in jail or in *domicilio coatto*,<sup>1</sup> the *most famous of which* were Galleani, Molinari, Gavilli, Binazzi and Di Sciullo. Others, including Malatesta, Gori and Milano, lived under the *heavy burden* of exile. Young supporters surged to fill the *breach* left by their absence, and *replaced those who under* persecution had disappeared from the movement or crossed over to the socialist camp. Saverio Merlino, a well-known example of the latter, had gone so far as to try to buy his way out of prison by publicly insisting that anarchists accept the electoral and parliamentary system.

At the same time, some of those who were condemned and deported *recovered their freedom*, and others, like Pietro Gori, returned from their flight.

On March 14 of that year a new weekly, *L'Agitazione*, (*Agitation*) saw the light of day in Ancona, the capital of Marcas province and a traditional home to anarchists. The paper's subtitle declared it a "socialist anarchist periodical." At the time, I was a law student at the university of the nearby city Macerata. I was 19 and full of enthusiasm for the anarchist ideas which, since I had embraced them in 1893, had already cost me some police persecution, a short trial, and a bit of jail. From Ancona, my old friends Recchioni, Agostinelli and Smorti encouraged me to write for their new paper, in which they had already announced me as a contributor.

I decided to cement their invitation *with a brief hesitation*. Reading the paper's first issues had affected me intensely. It was a publication unlike anything I had read before: flawlessly written, compiled and printed, with more the tone of a magazine than a newspaper. Errico Malatesta contributed from London.

The authors I read in it were brimming with thought and animated by a spirit that was wonderful and new to me. I *confusedly felt* that I was their intellectual inferior; *all I knew* was the anarchist press of the past three or four years. I wrote and submitted a theoretical article on "Natural harmony," polishing it as well as I could manage. I explained anarchy as an application

of the laws of nature to human society through the medium of science, which by negating God brings us to the negation of all authority, political or economic. Its citations grounded it mostly in the intellectual authority of Kropotkin and the Italian philosopher Giovanni Bovio.

Frankly — and who hasn't been young and committed such sins of presumption as to throw the first stone — I believed that I had written a short masterpiece! Instead... my article wasn't published. I asked my friends from Ancona what had gone wrong and they told me that they disagreed with my article; they would publish it alongside with their criticisms if I insisted, but I declined, to avoid giving readers the impression of a family quarrel. They invited me to go to Ancona to exchange ideas in person.

I fell from the clouds! Why did these comrades disagree with me? I wrote them a few lines saying that I wouldn't bother to travel for something so minor — but either way, finding Malatesta's London address in the paper, I wrote him for the first time, expressing my shock that the paper he wrote for didn't share my conception of a complete and just anarchy. Malatesta didn't respond, but a few days later Cesare Agostinelli wrote for me to come to Ancona, saying that friends would like to see me there, adding that it wasn't only about the article... They sent me the money I *was lacking* to make the trip, but even without this I was already determined to go.

I made up my mind one Saturday afternoon, relaxing my usual vigilance *against* the police. I took the train to Ancona and arrived at dusk. Agostinelli greeted me in his small store at the end of the Corso and without delay, he took me down side streets to the distant suburb of Piano San Lazzaro.

Arriving at a *house*, he opened the door with a key and we climbed a wooden staircase at the end of the corridor, to find that it led to a sort of attic.

As we climbed, I heard an unknown voice ask, "Who is this?"

"He's the 'Harmonist'," responded Agostinelli, obviously referring to my rejected article. Clambering to the top, I saw a small room with a *country bed* at one side, an oil lamp burning on the table, and a pair of chairs. On the chairs, on the table, on the bed and all about the floor lay an indescribable number of papers, journals and books in apparent disarray. A short stranger with thick, black hair met me with outstretched arms and deep, laughing eyes. Agostinelli stepped from the ladder and explained: "I present *to you*, Errico Malatesta."

When Malatesta embraced me, my heart leaped about in my chest — I was dazed and petrified. He was already a legend — demon of all the police of Europe, an audacious revolutionary, banned in Italy and elsewhere, and a refugee in London — but here he had been hiding all along. My impression, that of an inexperienced youth full of an almost religious faith, is easier to imagine than to describe.

"What?" he asked Agostinelli, "You haven't said anything to him?"

We cleared the chairs and sat, Agostinelli leaving moments later.

My friendship with Malatesta *formed* almost immediately, like we were merely renewing it and he had been an older brother or a comrade of many years. I would have spoken to him like my father if he hadn't looked so young — he was forty-four but looked even younger — such was his frank and easygoing nature, his comfortable air that only develops in the company of equals.

He promptly began a *long* and animated discussion, mostly about the points in my article. It would be too long to repeat, but for the most part is easy to imagine, knowing Malatesta's ideas, and my article which stated views common among anarchists of the day. At three in the morning we were still debating. I slept there as I could, on a cushion that Agostinelli (who had returned with food for us) had improvised for me in the corner.

At seven in the morning I was awake again, expressly to continue our discussion. We talked without rest, throughout the day, until night *cut the moment short* and we parted emotionally before my train for Macerata. I had to be back the next day to help with classes, but I also wanted to avoid alerting the police to my absence.

It had been roughly a month since Malatesta had arrived in Ancona *incognito* to put *L'Agitazione* together. He still lived beneath the weight of a three- to four- year sentence pronounced against him in Rome in 1884 for “association with ne'er-do-wells”; the threat barely changed him. He stayed hidden for about nine months before the police caught up with him, *but the verdict was already decided*.

Two months later a lack of basic necessities *provoked* popular rebellions in Ancona and elsewhere, and he was detained again. This time, the arrest was followed by a longer imprisonment, trial, *domicilio coatto*, and more. [check chronology]

After our first meeting, I often returned to Ancona to see Malatesta in hiding and *then later*, during his prison term and the trial of April '98. That first encounter determined the course of my life, spiritually and intellectually, and I can say it changed the rest of my life as well. In our long *colloquium*, more than twenty-four hours, I had the sensation that *my brain had taken flight in my skull*. I remember it still, like yesterday, when arguments I had been so *certain about* were discussed over and over, but finally fell to pieces. I wouldn't be able to repeat my points now, while Malatesta's arguments affected me with more than their logic: a logic so natural and coherent that it seemed that any child would have known it, so obvious that it was impossible to refute.

Through this encounter, anarchy, the *most radiant faith* of my early youth, had grown from *a simple faith to become a deep conviction*. If it had been possible before then to trade in my beliefs for others, I felt that with that episode I had become an anarchist for life; that it was already impossible to change *through anything other than a flippant and base treachery, or a dark and involuntary twist of my consciousness*.

Ages have passed since that remote spring of 1897. The hazards of life and battle have brought long separations between us more than once. Since then, years have passed without a letter. But whenever I went to see him — in London in 1906, in Amsterdam in 1907, in Ancona united again by common work from 1913–14, and finally without interruption from 1920 through 1926 — he always seemed the same to me as he did that first time. Physically, it appeared that the years failed to take their toll on him. In Bologna in 1920, I saw him playing with my children and full of passion, with the same spirit as in Ancona thirty years earlier when he wanted to fool around and run in the streets, or encouraged me *to make some noise* to scandalize the older comrades.

He *lived a perennial youth*, and his *ever-young spirit* tamed his physical nature. They say that age and death are nothing but prejudices, and the deep psychological (even physiological) truth in this *paradox* can be seen in the story of his long life. His fragile health, however, had threatened *illness* since the first signs of trouble *twenty years earlier*. When they met in 1872, Bakunin didn't believe Malatesta would last another six months and *the doctors* agreed; its fair to say that he defeated sickness for sixty years with his will to live. He never surrounded himself with doctors and nurses in *agonized* fear of death, but instead *had the air* of one who doesn't believe in death, believing in his own energies and skeptical of the medical arts. He had inner strength that became a spring of physical energy for him. The greatest portion of that inner strength certainly came from his *undevourable* optimism, which was never hobbled or fatigued by disillusionment, the bitter messes and disasters, nor the graves that were dug. Few have seen such suffering in all their

cursed existence. In the end, when he felt near death, he saw signs of the imminent rebellion and liberation he had hoped for with such indestructible faith. It is that optimism which — in wild forms of language reaching to the bounds of a sweeping creativity full of humanism — always reanimated him after defeat, like the *legend of Anteo*, always falling back to mother Earth, only to say, “No matter: we will start again.”

When I went to Rome in July 1926 to greet him, before I fled Italy in search of bread and the liberty that my “*fascistized*” homeland had robbed me of, I couldn’t have guessed that it would be our last meeting. He looked the same as he did thirty years before, *less* some white hairs and a slightly tired walk, but with his old smile, his eyes alive and deep for friends, *remote and pained* by the cruel tricks of his enemies. *And always in his logic closed to reason*, always firmly hopeful that victory is near.

My part in his life sadly ends here, when he decided to stay in Italy. *Though he appreciated the serious reasons compelling me to leave, the memory of his decision always reopens the lacerated wound of remorse.* He wrote several times to say that he has been well, that his decision was based on *expectations* which never *materialized*, and so on. In spite of everything, I am often overcome by the doubt that if it had been easier to stay... Who knows! But either way, that last day, he said goodbye to me not as a friend departing forever, who might never be seen again, but he accompanied our farewell embrace with a single word whose unyielding optimism came from the heart, as if the separation would be short, and the day soon in which Italy’s doors would be thrown open and exiles could walk *the earth* freely: “Ciao!”

More than seven years have passed, and still neither of us has seen the other!

Curse the tyrants who divided us forever and denied *us* even the bitter consolation of throwing a flower on his tomb!

# The Man

Future generations will understand Malatesta through what remains of him: the *vast complex* of his ideas and the story of his life. These *will easily fill a generous page of history which can never be erased*. His living *personality* is what has vanished, and however eloquent the testimony of his writings or the cold account of his accomplishments, these will only be an incomplete reflection of what we saw — we who lived a bit of his life and warmed ourselves by the passionate fires of his heart.

The true Errico Malatesta continues alive and whole in our spirits and memories — but won't this impression he made and the influence he held *upon* us eventually be dissolved by the corrosive efforts of time? Either way, when those of us who knew him personally have vanished, some final, living part of him will disappear with us. Not to *dismiss this inevitability*, but to soften its effect a little, I will try to describe that living part of him here, independently from his life-story and the ideas he defended in his writings, which I will present and discuss separately. I haven't the skill to revive him in his most beautiful *aspects*, so my attempt will necessarily fall short of reality.

Maybe at some point in the future another author will do what is necessary better than I have; but I know that my efforts will at least complete a picture of him, when no painter or photographer *will be able to bring back the light which has gone out forever*. I fear that my work might be mistaken for one of the usual *apologias* of political parties. It isn't. I have asked myself more than once, even while he was alive, if I would have felt the same admiration and affection towards him if we had held different political views. However difficult it was to separate the person from his thought, I have always answered that my feelings towards him, after knowing him so well, couldn't have been any different. The proof *that this isn't simply my own partiality* is that Malatesta's moral qualities have also *struck* and won over anyone who has had the chance to *grow close* to him in any real way, regardless of their differences of ideas, political opinions, or their place in society. On more than one occasion, his bloodiest enemies *felt driven to respect before him*; including *the thugs* who were kinder — for however fleeting a moment — after meeting him.

## His Goodness / Kindness

Malatesta's thought and actions cannot be fully understood without knowing *what goodness was present in the propagandist and the militant*. Despite the theoretical and practical quarrels that *could* at times separate him from others, he was truly the soul-brother of those who could be called — as Pietro Gori called them — the "*heroes of goodness*": Elise Reclus, Peter Kropotkin, Louise Michel, and others less known, including the entirely ignored majority of humankind, sometimes uneducated and almost illiterate, as were many we had known in the revolutionary world. *They* weren't exempt from ugliness and baseness either, of course, and were still certainly too few, but already enough to do honor to humanity and to inspire belief in the brightest of hopes



for our future. Kindness, not weakness or blindness, is the best *raw material* for all constructive rebellions against tyrants and social miseries.

Malatesta's kindness was *united with an inflexible* and resolved character, which didn't trail off in useless words, but which *was felt* in each one of its spoken or written manifestations as one feels the heat of the sun. When he spoke to crowds, what made his reasoning and encouragement sink in among the people who rushed to hear him and raised their enthusiasm, despite the literary *nakedness* of his speech was, on top of the seriousness of what he said, the great feeling of love felt beneath all of his words.

Similarly, when he strived to convince someone *in order to attract them to his ideas* in private conversation, his interlocutor would be won over *above all else* by a contagious feeling *which awoke the best qualities* of the soul and *produced a reassuring belief in himself* and in all people.

Naturally, Malatesta's writings didn't have the same effectiveness as his spoken word, when his sharp eyes could illuminate and give warmth, firm and sweet at once, his voice and gestures so expressive and affectionate. His writings still had an extraordinary ability to persuade, not only by their clarity, simplicity and conciseness, but also because of the noble and untiring human love that *formed* his spiritual medium, never needing to resort to that sentimental wordiness which is nothing more than the artificial display of goodness. His personal goodness is *revealed there* in a *reasoned and reasonable* optimism that casts a feeling of both safety and comfort over the reader, though always remaining grounded in the most real and painful uncertainties.

I should emphasize the *fighting nature* and the energizing effects of Malatesta's kindness, so that he isn't mistaken for one of those who, passive and resigned, guiltily indulge the tyrannical and *wicked*. He hated the bad as much as he loved the good; hate, he used to say, is often an expression of love, though love and not hate is the true *factor* of human liberation.

His innate kindness was a weapon for fighting, an instrument of revolution, the leaven of rebellion. Far from hiding this kindness when faced with the harshest *necessities* of revolutionary action, he brandished it with resolved animation and affirmed it with an *uncompromising inexorability*. *It always remained alert* in him, recovering from each bitter battle, thoughtful of *the human objective* of every fight, *confounding in the same higher pity* the vanquished and fallen of all places. *This was so sincere and obvious in all of his acts and words, particularly to those under the direct influence of his presence, by disarming them of all the malevolent preventions and partisan hostilities of people, other than the notorious digging scoundrels or shameful people paid with the single object of attacking and defaming him.*

It would be possible to tell many stories, some curious and others shocking, about the influence exerted by Malatesta in the *most diverse environments*, about people of the highest social classes and furthest removed from his ideas and propositions, who ran into him in the course of busy everyday life. The papers once invented a stupid and conspiratorial drama about *the simple fact of the profound impression* Malatesta made on the ex-queen of Naples, Maria Sofia, and the esteem she held him in after their chance acquaintance.<sup>1</sup> The famous English political writer and journalist William Steed testified his highest regard for Malatesta, and openly spoke of him as one of the most interesting Italians of his time. His humane influence was felt even by the judges, jailers, and police agents charged with condemning him, keeping him in custody, and watching over him.

In the course of narrating his life, *below*, I will have the chance to elaborate some of the episodes I have already touched upon which best characterize the *influence* of Malatesta's personality. I remember once seeing tears in the eyes of some *magistrates* and soldiers while he spoke to the

judges of love and family in the Ancona trial of 1898. *Also in 1898*, during my own interrogation in jail, I mentioned Malatesta's name to an investigator — the reactionary Catholic judge Alipio Alippi, later presiding over the Supreme Court of Appeals until his death — who *had known him in Ancona some months previously for official reasons*, and he exclaimed that if all anarchists had been like Malatesta, anarchy would have been *a realization of the Word of Christ*. A *humble* cop who arrested me in Bologna in 1920 told me the same thing, confessing an enthusiasm for Malatesta—his big secret: “Ah, if all you anarchists could have been like him, then...!” And I know that in 1913–14 in Ancona the guards charged with watching the door of his house day and night *sometimes asked each other in the evenings if he wouldn't escape the next day, and later they calmly went to the house, saying to some neighbor: “A man as good as that can't do anything wrong.”*<sup>2</sup>

*I believe that even now*, Bologna still remembers a meeting Malatesta held in San Giovanni, Persiceto, in the spring or summer of 1920.

The city's little theater was already full, and the public didn't bother to hide their indignation at the large patrol of soldiers commanded by a lieutenant, arrived fresh from Bologna and armed to the teeth in the *service* of public safety, who had lined up all the way down a side wall. It looked like a *set-up*. Any trifling little thing could have precipitated a tragedy! Malatesta arrived and someone asked him whether they should seize the hall from this *public force*. “No,” responded Malatesta, “leave them in peace. I will speak for them as well.”

He began to speak of the miserable conditions of the peasant families in Southern Italy, from which the majority of soldiers and police agent had been recruited *through the pressure of hunger*. He evoked the sad figures of distant mothers who *wait for help*, and for news of their sons, *whose danger* they can vaguely sense. Later he came to speak of other working mothers in the more developed cities, also *trembling* that they might not see their own children return home after going to a meeting or a demonstration... A shiver passed through the room, *of the two agonies* which were rooted in the single and only note of discarded humanity. In the silence the listeners paled, their hatred gone; the soldiers appeared the palest of all, and in their eyes one could read what might have been entirely new feelings *for those souls*. The lieutenant *at once* made a curt gesture to his troop, and in file they turned their back on the orator's balcony, marching out in a hurry rush. The impression that Malatesta's words had made on his men convinced the lieutenant that it was more prudent to leave and allow the meeting to proceed without any protection.

I won't *push* further, only to add that, even if Malatesta happened to attract sympathy from people whose circumstances *were most distant from his own* without meaning to, his great love for humanity was focused entirely on the humble, the disinherited, the poor, the weak, the defenseless, on victims of all sorts—without distinction—of the current social system. I remember when he got angry with a comrade one day, becoming red and silent because the comrade had *been permitted to* speak disrespectfully about a poor prostitute. And he demonstrated, not *just* in his words and writing, but in his acts as well, his feelings of solidarity with the unhappy, anywhere and everywhere the occasion would present itself. He was prodigal beyond measure and he gave *without counting*, in the most simple and spontaneous way, as if it were the most habitual thing. For example, everyone knows that in his last years, under the fascist regime, he lived in *strictness and only thanks* to the comrades abroad. But most people don't know that this help was given to him partly to help the rest as well, and he would often send some sum back across the border to aid a distant refugee whose misery he was aware of. He felt the *mishaps* of others as if they were his own—and *remember*, not only *those of comrades of faith*—those *in trouble* had his immediate and instinctive solidarity *beyond* all sectarianism and party *spirit*.

I want to relate an episode told by the old French anarchist L. Guerineau, in some paper, I forget which\*, of the period in which he found himself a refugee in

London with Malatesta. Once, in a moment of crisis, *his* friends *consented* that Malatesta try to earn something selling pastries in the streets and plazas. He procured a hand cart, sweets at a low price from a wholesaler, and more... But the first day, while he was in a city square thick with people, pastries on display, a poorly dressed kid asked him for one as a gift. He gave it to him immediately with an affectionate hug. A bit later he saw himself encircled by an infinite sea of poor children from the neighborhood, among whom news of the pastry vendor's generosity had spread in an instant, and he distributed so freely that in the end all of the merchandise had been devoured. Naturally it was the beginning and end of that type of business... Some days later Kropotkin, who knew nothing of this undoing, asked Malatesta how his new commerce was going. "I'm not lacking customers," he responded, smiling, "but I can't afford to buy any merchandise."

To be kind was what anarchy meant for him. In a short discussion *we had* by letter,<sup>3</sup> he wrote about justice and anarchy: "The anarchist program, founded in solidarity and love, goes beyond justice *per se*... love gives all that it can, and wants to give more each time... To do to others what you would want them to do (in other words, to do the maximum good) is what Christians call charity and we call solidarity; in sum, it is love."

All of his comrades know especially well how he felt about this ideal of love, since Malatesta's affection for them was immense: a true tenderness, as the most loving family *couldn't have given*. He had known *an infinitude* of comrades from the enormous anarchist family, vast as the world. He remembered everything and recognized everyone, even after a separation of decades. He took part in their joys and in their sorrows. In their houses he felt like he was in his own, and of course comrades went to his house like it was their own,

until the *continual fascist vigilance* made him retreat to his *suburb*. When he already had one foot in the grave, knowing full well that it was over for him, he worried not about himself, but about a distant comrade's illness, and in order to encourage him and not cause him pain, he lied that he was recovering himself. *Feeling* near death, he trembled at the thought of the pain experienced by his most loved comrades; he gazed at photographs like a bereaved lover. And in reality, what were the scattered comrades who *spun about* the world, if not his beloved family, a representation of the future family of humanity he hoped for with such faith over the course of his life?

## Legend and reality

This sentiment of humanity wasn't just an instinctive force in Malatesta, an indirect *animator* of thought and action, but constituted the fundamental rationale of his doctrine; it was the anarchist doctrine itself. We have seen this already. *According to him*, to be an anarchist *isn't enough* to believe with logic and theory that capitalist and statist organization is unjust and harmful to humanity; it isn't enough to simply display the conviction that a dispersed organization without exploitation and without governments is possible and would be beneficent to all people. These *alone* wouldn't add up, according to Malatesta, to being a good anarchist, if the anarchist didn't feel above all else the pain that social ills cause others more intensely than the pain they cause oneself. Only that feeling of pain at the suffering of others, the human solidarity that *rouses* and

the *necessity* that *provokes the remedy*, are able to push a man to action, to make a conscious rebel of a man, to form the complete anarchist who wants to emancipate not only himself from misery and oppression, but all the disinherited and oppressed of the world.

When presented with a problem which *was a question of* humanity, he wouldn't ask if a possible solution corresponded to this or that platform's strategic formula, but whether a real and lasting good would arise from this solution: something good for only a few, or for many; that wouldn't hurt anyone except the oppressors and exploiters. This psychological and mental predisposition of his goes a long way towards explaining certain apparent contradictions that dry formalists and doctrinarians, especially his rivals, have believed they have discovered *with great mistakenness* among the theories *affirmed by* Malatesta, and certain *expressions and shows of feeling* in painful or tragic moments during the social fight.

Once, to a *certain cold sectarianism* that seemed ready to follow Torquemada's example and sacrifice half of humanity in order to save for the other half the arid formula of principle, he said: "I'll give up every principle to save one man!" Another time, confronted with a terrorism that *was thought to be* revolutionary because mass executions *appeared necessary [to them]* if the revolution were to succeed, Malatesta exclaimed: "If victory requires gallows to be erected in the plaza, I would prefer to lose!" In July of 1921, at his trial in Milan, he ended his statements to the jurors with some words of sorrow at the fierce fighting brought about in their country by fascism, a fight "that is repugnant to all and doesn't benefit any class or party." And on these three occasions *they* didn't miss the chance to accuse Malatesta of being a Tolstoyan or worse.

However, it was Malatesta *who had reason*. One can imagine that this or that phrase, taken by itself and separated from the rest of his *reasoning*, particularly if the *moment* didn't allow for a long explanation, might be able to leave simple listeners with an unfair interpretation. But those who knew Malatesta's intimate feelings and the *complex* of his ideas knew that the meaning behind his words was in no way Tolstoyan, but perfectly coherent with his revolutionary sentiment and anarchist thought, in which it is not humanity that should serve a principle established before the fact, but principles which should serve the salvation of humanity. He considered a principle to be just only insofar as it served humanity. If its *application* would be harmful, that would mean that the principle was in error and would have to be abandoned. But he didn't abandon [it] *precisely* because he felt it just and human at the same time; and his words couldn't be interpreted any other way than as simultaneous premise and conclusion of the principle of human liberation that he *predicted* [anticipated?] his entire life.

*It is correct to say*, [though] setting aside the possibly bad faith in which his rivals could have misunderstood Malatesta's personality, that [at least] a poor understanding of his sentiments and ideas has greatly contributed to the legends that *were created* around his name in the long years which he was forced to live in hiding or in exile, *away from* direct contact with the people. The contradiction that some believed to discover in him when they saw him directly *in their work* and knew him, was only between the false legends and the true reality of *his being*. But some legends were already so well-rooted that nothing less than his [presence] personal, categorical denials *succeeded in fully undoing* them, and then by a not uncommon phenomenon, the legend *would have been given credit* among more than a few of his fellow-thinkers who didn't know him personally and were disposed to imagine him according to their own particular beliefs, perhaps through their own mental errors.

One of the injustices that Malatesta was long a victim of, and which was in 1919–20 aggravated by all of the malicious and ferocious things that his hatred of social class *inspired against*

him, was the legend that described him as a promoter of disorders, a theorizer of homicide, a violent man in propaganda and deed, a demon thirsting for blood. Hints of this rumor were found in not only the conservative, reactionary and police papers, but in some papers of progressive ideas. I remember, among others, a violent and ignoble article against Malatesta in *The Republican [Initiative] (L'Iniziativa Republican)* of Rome,<sup>4</sup> where assurances were made that *he had in his caprice provoked bloody tumults*, while it was plain enough that these had all been provoked by the Italian police with the deliberate aim of halting the progress of the revolutionary movement, or to create a favorable moment to rid themselves of the fearsome agitator.

Since 1870 he had mixed himself up in a quantity of movements and attempted European revolutions and insurrections, and at the same time the fabricated reports of the various countries' police, who bourgeois journalists and certain writers in the style of Lombroso, through a professional sense of servility or by ignorance took for the gold of law, had enabled the stupid legend to spread. This, especially in Italy in 1919 and more though before 1913, Malatesta was unknown to the great majority of comrades, especially those who had joined the movement in the last thirty years. [Through] 1885 he had gone to Italy several times, clandestinely it is true, but he saw only a few trusted friends; most people had not heard him spoken of more than as a distant and mysterious person. In 1897 he had been in Ancona for ten months, but in hiding for almost nine of them; and in the little time remaining he barely had the chance to spread activity beyond the Marches region before he was taken to prison,

*later in domicilio coatto, and later again in flight.*

It was 1913 when he could once again (a right denied to him since 1885) truly live a public life in Italy like a man of flesh and bone; but also this time the public took time to follow his activity for several months not exclusively through papers, when the "Red Week" and the persecutions that followed drove him from Italy once again, where he would only be able to return in late 1919. Therefore, when in this last period Malatesta threw himself anew into the whirlwind of Italian agitation, to the masses he was still the man of old legends, certainly not depriving him of an attractive, novelistic prestige, but it was always a great obstacle to the comprehension of his personality and to the [evolution] that would have been more useful. Despite all of his efforts to the contrary, an enormous number of people insisted on obstinately seeing Malatesta not as the man he really was, but only that which some desired and others feared and hated, welcoming—save the few who had the chance to know him better, outside the tumult of public meetings—the old and false legend which depicted him as violent, a champion of the most poorly [planned] disorders.

However, all of Malatesta's past life, the real one and not the novels invented by the police and journalists, was all a refutation of the legend that had grown around him. In his acts, words and writing he had always shown—and continued to do so until the end—that he was guided above all by that high and pure human love that I have tried to illuminate above, by the criterion of the best possible coordination of forces, wishing to avoid the sufferings and pains of his fellow-men, by the intention of saving as much as possible of not only the blood and lives of friends, but of enemies as well.

Malatesta was truly a revolutionary in the most complete way—and as such, a proponent of that type of "disorder" so feared by the reactionaries, which is the initial disorder of every revolution, not unwitting, but conscious preparation for a higher order—as have been so many people known universally across the centuries for their goodness, but who accompany the goodness with a clear vision of reality, for who the insurrectional violence appears to be an unavoidable neces-

sity, a sacrifice that must be faced to free men from greater sacrifices and from incomparably greater *ills* and suffering, blood and death.

Once he had arrived at the *conclusion of the necessity* of revolt and revolution, Malatesta didn't *dissimulate* the consequences. He disdained the subtle distinctions and hypocrisies of politicians, speaking his thoughts in their entirety; but this thought, if taken whole and not as some insignificant and isolated sentence *speculated on* in bad faith, is the true *negation* of all systems of violence.

## The orator and the writer

Additionally, his propaganda, even in the exposition of the most radical ideas and to in the defense of the most energetic acts of rebellion and insurrection, was in its form and mode of expression something totally different than violence or vehemence. I still remember the impression it made on me as a youth to experience one of his conferences for the first time — in Porto San Giorgio (in Marcas), 1897, while he was hidden in Ancona and presenting himself under another name. I barely knew him, and the terrifying legends about him still held sway over me. What an proof I had of the contrary! His ideas and their exposition, the reasoning, flowed from the lips of the orator; the sentiment that animated him was communicated to his listeners through his words, his steady gesture, and above all the expression in his lively eyes. The auditorium sat riveted by that calm word, spontaneous, like the conversation of friends, with neither pseudo-scientific pretensions, empty paradoxes, verbal attacks, invectives, nor barks of hate, and distant from all political rhetoric.

In the years of distance between that day and his end, I have always felt the same. He spoke in the languages of feeling and of reason at the same time; never in that of resentment or vengeance. He spoke to the mind and the heart, making them think and tremble; he didn't touch the nerves with the sole aim of exciting them. That isn't to say that he wasn't known to take the opportunity to echo tones of rage against the assassins and traitors of the people, and these tones were much more effective when less habitual, though his words sometimes climbed to the highest peaks of apostle's inspiration. At times some subtle irony produced a smile in the lips of the listeners, or instead, words of suffering and pity wrung tears out. In debates, he appeared invincible; interruptions wouldn't distract him, but would fuel further elaborations and confound the opponent, who would look as if torn to pieces by his persuasive and convincing dialect, accessible to everyone. The older people of Romagna still recall his debate with Andrea Costa (in Ravenna, 1884), when after a long session they had to pause until the next day, and the next... Costa had already left the city.

Malatesta's oratory was the most effective in anarchist propaganda. In my opinion it was best in expository or theoretical conferences on method, revolutionary teaching, critique, history, and above all controversies; but less apt in the committees of the plaza where the crowd demands more exciting words and less idea-substance. And if in these plazas he was warmly received, maybe it was more often due to his name, the fact that he said different things than the others, and the moment in which he said them, rather than because of the truthfulness and the success in itself of his type of oratory. Vulgar people and those same comrades who most love the words and rhetoric at the base of the fountains of artifice, sometimes didn't hide a certain feeling of disillusion after an event that Malatesta had intervened in. When they felt dissatisfied

by the lack of verbal massacres and too-few invectives, but instead heard reasoned and realistic affirmations; when they compared it with those who came before and after him, evoking all of the reincarnations of the apocalypse, they believed that he was their inferior. Some said: "We expected much more!" Oh, they didn't expect more than vain words, substituted for the thoughts that they fled from!

I believe that one of the grave errors of so many Italian anarchists in 1920 has been – and Malatesta himself agreed more than once – that of not having cut short the series of meetings in incessant repetition, useful at first, but dangerously draining energy later, and Malatesta had been obliged to shuttle from one to the other, forcing a type of activity upon him for which he was less apt, and in which he appeared less effective than the many sentence-makers; and not having given more than a few of his admirable expository and didactic conferences, in which he would have been able to much more methodically and completely teach that which should be done for the revolution, and in the revolution, and to imprint with these conferences a more effective direction on the movement, a more anarchist drive, more serious, longer-lasting.

Certainly, in those committees Malatesta should have conceded something to his environment, blended a little with the type in vogue; however his oratory was always in the least violent language of any of the revolutionary speakers spawning at the time. This memory wouldn't be useless either: that of the last big committee I heard him at, in Bologna, in defense of the political victims in October of 1920. Then too he had spoken as was his custom, full of passion and reason at the same time, but calm, with an exact perception of the critical moment, without useless shouting or high-sounding and incendiary phrases; that which the other anarchist orators made of the gathering. But what incredible violence of language the other orators hurled about, especially the socialists, and more than all a young professor who, only two months later, would be drawn in the most humiliating way to the rising orb of fascism! However, of all the orators in that meeting, Malatesta was the only one arrested, a few days later, and in the subsequent trial of Milan his discourse in Bologna figured among the principal charges against him.

Much of what I said about the orator Malatesta I would have to repeat about the writer. I have already spoken of the psychological substratum of kindness beneath his writings, and incidentally of his clarity, simplicity, and conciseness. These have the great merit of making one read him with appetite, though when they treat the less actual and impassioned questions, because Malatesta took from them the most human aspect and most in relation with the general interests, and at the same time with the specific interests of those in his audience, touching the most intimate strings of the soul and simultaneously conquering their minds with an coherently reasoned logic. He quickly came into a unison with the reader, speaking to him in a sensible, understandable language, easy and convincing, without a shadow of that type of intellectual bullying of the doctrinaire writers who pronounce from on high. Those who read him almost always have the feeling of seeing their own thought expressed, or good ideas very different from their own but not outside the common human reality, since these ideas are said naturally, from equal to equal, as if they were self-evident truths and acceptable to everyone.

How the halls and plazas filled themselves at the announcement that he would speak; almost every paper or magazine he began promptly reached the widest circulation and had the merit of soon leaving the circle of those already convinced, in which most regular propaganda and party papers have the defect of being confined to.

Almost every printing of his well-known pamphlets was swallowed up in the briefest time and reprinted hundreds of times in every language. Not only his personal influence and the efficacy

of his oral propaganda, but also the way he developed the propaganda with his writings, explains how just after publishing one of his papers in a given place, little by little the environment was raised and heated up, anarchists multiplied, the revolutionary spirit grew and was agitated like a tide, and not uncommonly, like by the action of a hidden yeast, important collective movements arose, better than what Malatesta hoped for.

A professional or pedantic attitude is never to be found in Malatesta's prose; no studied literary effects, no doctrinaire abstruseness, nor learned ostentations; no "difficult" words in scientific or philosophical jargon, nor citations of authors. Maybe this prejudiced it a bit among that special category of readers who might understand what they read quickly and well — and conclude that the author must have no depth or originality, and who discover originality and depth only in what they can't understand, or only understand laboriously, when within there is no more substance than a few common banalities or the most utter vacuity masked by the most grandiloquent phraseology. But Malatesta's intention was also to react against this trend towards an obscurity of language in propaganda; and on the other hand his success in penetrating into new environments and in making converts among workers of the simplest tastes and the least rotted by an intellectualism that is as false as it is cheap, compensated him with interest for the failure to please a few lovers of beautiful, incomprehensible writing.

He liked most of all to make himself understandable, and to be understood by the greatest number of readers; and he succeeded admirably, confronting the toughest problems and explaining the highest concepts in the most precise and clear way, with a plainness that had nothing to do with simplification.

Like in spoken arguments, in written controversies he found himself in his element. The long discussion, lasting almost a year in the columns of *L'Agitazione* of Ancona (1897), with his old friend Merlino who by then had converted to parliamentary tactics, is a model of the type. His numerous arguments with the socialists, the republicans, masons, syndicalists, and with the diverse anarchist currents that didn't share his point of view, were an example of how it is possible to discuss with all, defend one's own ideas and critique those of others, with all serenity, with dignified courtesy, respecting one's adversaries and without the need to suspect them at all costs of bad faith — but energetically putting in their place those who exceed the limits of fairness or show too obvious insincerity or some dishonest ulterior goal. He constantly had to argue with Andrea Costa, Bissolati, Prampolini, Zibordi, Ciripriani, James Guillaume, with an infinite number of comrades and, except for early in his arguments with Costa, the discussion never became violent. I remember that, after a brief debate between *La Giustizia* of Reggio Emilia and *Umanità Nova* in the summer of 1920, the editor of the former had to close the discussion with a very short private letter which ended by sending "dear Malatesta" his best wishes: "Giustizia and Umanità Nova!"

Malatesta conducted his discussions and reasoning with the method that the pedagogues call "Socratic," to a degree of refinement that doesn't appear to me to have been reached by others, at least among modern writers on political and social matters. His dialectic — I use this word in the normal sense of the art of reasoning and not in the extravagant and variable one that the ancient and modern sophists have given it — rose up beneath his pen and became so forceful that it held the adversary like in a vice, and the indifferent or doubtful listener or reader, absorbed (so to speak) the ideas almost without realizing it. This is what his propaganda writings in dialogue form the most successful at proselytizing, of which the most celebrated is the pamphlet *Fra Contadini* (Among Farmers).



The literature of dialogue certainly isn't the easiest, especially when the dialogue is developed around general and more or less theoretical questions. However, that has been the classic literary form of all those — from Socrates and Plato to Bruno and Galileo — who throughout the ages have been stirred by ideological, scientific, or political passions to diffuse among neighbors and the distant, and to hand down with the pen, that which they believed to be the truth and in which they had faith. Malatesta has also adopted the same weapon of propaganda, reaching the maximum of efficacy, not deprived of literary beauty. I am sure that in the future, when the ire and passions of discord blind us less, Malatesta's dialogues will be highly appreciated by those that are and remain contrary to the ideas propagated in them.

## **Lenin of Italy?**

I should add a few things to help clarify Malatesta's position regarding the issue of violence.

Later I will try to explain Malatesta's ideas, including those on violence, in a more organized way. Here I will limit myself to the heart of his thoughts on the matter: the idea that nobody has the right to use to violence or the threat of violence to impose their own ideas, their way of living and organizing themselves, their systems, laws, or anything else upon others, under any pretext (even that of doing them well). The logical conclusion is the right of individuals and peoples to rebel against governments and masters. He called this a "right of legitimate defense" against the coercive impositions of these rulers, who oppress and exploit the people by means of violence and the threat of violence, or its equivalent, the blackmail of hunger. The necessity of revolutionary violence against the conservative violence of the present political and economic organization of society stems from this.

Malatesta was opposed to any form of coercive violence, and the needed revolutionary violence was no exception — to the contrary of how all the Jacobin, Bolshevik, and in general authoritarian revolutionaries think. He didn't believe it was useful, considering it the worst evil, to violate another's liberty to bend that person to oneself, to one's own methods, to one's own particular beliefs. The revolution should free the people from all of the impositions of their governments and masters, not create new impositions. And he demanded this liberty for all people, starting today, whether they be in the orbit of the revolutionary movement, or in the relations with the external environment. Revolution is made "with force" — it couldn't be any other way — but it can't be made "by force."

However, these ideas were so poorly outlined in the legend of Malatesta as the "boss" of conspiracies and riots, which I have partially alluded to above, that upon his arrival in Italy in 1919 there were more than a few in the country who rushed to see him as — the reactionaries fearing it and the revolutionaries hoping for it — the "Lenin of Italy." As flattering as the name might seem, especially at the time, it immediately put Malatesta in the worst predicament and, since a few of his comrades had let the phrase escape from their lips or from their pens, he feared a dangerous shift in ideas among them. Aldo Aguzzi, an Italian anarchist in refuge in South America, told the story of his first encounter with Malatesta during a conference he held in Montevideo immediately after Malatesta's death. It ties directly into what I am saying, so allow me the pain to refer to it as literally as I can:

"I was a boy then, having left the Socialist Party a short time earlier along with my associates from the juvenile circle of Voghera, and we founded a 'subversive youth group' outside the Party.

We weren't anarchists, but something akin to what many communists are today, that is to say, opposed to the reformists and enthusiastic about Russia. At the time I believed that I was "almost anarchist," but in reality I knew very little about anarchy, to the degree that one could say that the only difference I saw between an anarchist and a socialist was that the former loved violence and the other didn't. I need this background to explain what happened to me.

"I came to Voghera early in 1920, called by the local anarchist group, Errico Malatesta, and other comrades of his including Borghi and D'Andrea. Malatesta was going to speak in an elementary school hall. I was asked to introduce him, and I presented him as the Lenin of Italy who, outdoing the socialists, would lead us to a revolution like in Russia. After my chatter he rose to the platform, thanking the crowd who wouldn't stop cheering him... with the title that I had burdened him with, and after addressing many other things, at a certain point he began to speak of the definition I had given of him. In truth he didn't mistreat me, even paying me some compliments; but he explained that he couldn't be, didn't want to be, and shouldn't be a Lenin. To summarize, however well I am able to summarize at twelve years' distance, and taking into account my confusion at the moment, this is what he said:

"The young man who introduced me might be sincere and enthusiastic, and might have believed that he would please me by saying that I am your Lenin. I think that he isn't an anarchist, and those of you who took up his cry must not be either. He and you are revolutionaries, you already understand that the old, reformist methods are worthless, maybe you have lost faith in your socialist leaders, so now you look for a man who inspires confidence and who brings you to revolution. I thank you very much for your confidence, but you are mistaken. I have all the desire to do well by you, and myself as well, but I am a man like all the others, and if I became your leader I would be no better than those you repudiate today. All leaders are equal, and if they don't do what you desire, it isn't always because they don't want to, but also because they *can't*. Speaking furthermore of the revolution, this is not a man who can make one: we have to make it together. I am an anarchist, I don't want to obey, but above all, *I cannot command*. If I become your Lenin as that "young man" wishes, I will lead you to sacrifice, I will become your master, your tyrant; I will betray my faith, because I would not bring anarchy about, and I would betray yours, because with a dictator you will tire of me, and I, turned ambitious and maybe convinced that I was doing my duty, would surround myself with police, bureaucrats, parasites, and would give life to a new caste of oppressors and privileged people by which you would be exploited and vexed as you are today by the Government and the bourgeoisie."

"I remember that Malatesta also said, 'If you really love me, don't hope that I become your tyrant.' But many details and phrases escape me now. Later he explained how the revolution should be 'made.' I remember that among other things he spoke of 'occupying the factories,' of arming the people, of the formation of armed groups, expressing himself calmly, calmer than the reformists of the day... To tell the truth, the public remained somewhat disillusioned (and I too, at first) because Malatesta didn't live up to the 'type' that had been imagined. But the fact is, after that conference I understood what anarchy was and what anarchists wanted, and I became one of them..."

This episode, similar to so many others — I repeat that for an instant the "Lenin of Italy" legend ran its course even among those who had been and believed themselves to be anarchists — demonstrates well the mistake originating in a misunderstanding of his personality and ideas by those who were outside his immediate environment.

That mistake, by its forceful contrast with reality, caused many to pass from one misunderstanding to an opposite misunderstanding. When Malatesta finally managed to make understood the difference that existed between what so many believed, on one side the reactionaries and enemies who with bad faith saw in the real Malatesta a fiction and attacked it with unprecedented violence like a wolf dressed in lamb's wool;<sup>5</sup> on the other side, the revolutionaries most taken by authoritarianism and the lovers of violence for its own sake, the Bolsheviks and the Bolshevizers, believed he had changed and saw in him, as we have already said, a Tolstoyan. The Bolshevik communist press, which had at first covered him in flowers, ended with its usual stereotyped phraseology and called him a counter-revolutionary, petit-bourgeois, and so forth.

However, Malatesta was always the same. If there was a man in Italy, who after fifty years of constant fighting, could repeat the poet Giuseppe Giusti's boast: "I have not flexed or hesitated," it was him. His words in the meetings of 1920 were the same as all his past propaganda since 1872. That "petit-bourgeois" had for half a century combated the bourgeoisie, small and large, and for all of his life had earned his way as a laborer by the sweat of his brow. That "old counter-revolutionary" hadn't done anything since he was a boy but propagate and prepare the revolution. That "Tolstoyan" had been and continued to be the advocate of all rebellions, had invited workers to occupy the factories and farmers the land, had "calmly" urged the people to arm themselves and the revolutionaries to form armed groups, and (now that he has died it can be said), wherever he has been able to, until the last moment, he didn't limit himself to encouraging others; but put his own hands in the dough, never stingy with those who were willing to do something, neither with his help, nor with his direct participation.

## **The man of action**

Errico Malatesta magnificently embodied Giuseppe Mazzini's motto of "thought and action". I can't say that he would have agreed to this formula, given his antipathy towards all formulas; but if it's true that in Malatesta's conception thought and will precede action, then it's also true that he had always, above all, tried to be a man of action, tried to ignite action around himself — preferably action of the masses, which he believed the most necessary, though he also worked inexhaustibly for group and individual action, since mass action is not always possible.

For him, ideas had no life of their own, other than through action. Action not simply as an end in itself; not like the fragmented outbursts of exasperated crowds that after a moment of fury become more passive than before, nor like the blind violence of individual desperation without a just and well-defined goal — he understood all of these and found their explanation and justification in the social injustice which provoked it, but didn't like them or approve of them — but instead through the acts of people or of individuals who were motivated by the premeditated will to do good, guided by reason and by a high sense of humanity. But it was crucial that they were deeds and not only words, actions and not vain academics.

It is enough to recall here that the old organizer of "propaganda by deed" of the groups of Castel del Monte and of Benevento, in 1874 and 1877, always continued, until his end, showing up wherever there was hope and the possibility of "fishing in the restless river" — to use the malignant expression of the international police — of usefully laboring for the revolution, following his intentions: openly wherever he could, clandestinely in countries which he had been expelled from or where he had trials and convictions to endure: in the Herzegovina insurrection and in

Serbia against the Turkish government before 1880; in Egypt, rising up against the English in 1883; in Paris during the First of May movements of 1890 and of 1906; in Spain in 1892 and Belgium in 1893 during the commotions of those years; in Italy in the time of the mutinies of 1891, later in 1894, in 1898 and later participating in the “red week” of 1914.

All of us remember his presence everywhere in Italy, after the war, in the occupied factories as well as in the streets and the plazas in the midst of the people. In 1921–22 he actively participated in all the actions that were attempted to dam the tide of fascism, encouraging the formation of the *arditi del popolo* and preparing for the last general strike that preceded the “march on Rome.”

No dogmatic assumptions stopped him from examining every chance for revolutionary action with ample support. If the situation appeared, he would use parallel movements of people far from his ideas — or maybe even wind his way through some adversary’s revolutionary objectives, like the enterprise of d’Annunzio in Fiume in 1920. He abandoned this soon, however, not bothering himself with it anymore as soon as he saw that there weren’t enough of the people he needed to overcome and defeat the worst enemy tendencies.

But in such delicate and dangerous cases he always knew how to stay balanced, and to keep the necessary distances, and it was important to him that he act on his own responsibility without compromising others, avoiding any possible underhanded, hidden motives of those who approached him, constantly remaining the most self-consistent anarchist who never lost sight for even a minute of the revolution’s purpose: freedom.

The dominant idea for Malatesta was popular insurrection, and this preoccupation accompanied him in all his other activities and inspired every one of his judgments about strategy and method. Because a serious work of preparation for popular insurrection, made openly and directly, would never have been tolerated by the massive government and bourgeois forces, which would have cut him off at all costs in the beginning and would have soon put him out of the game, Malatesta almost always initiated simultaneously or beforehand another “covering” work, legally permitted, which more required the attention of all and distracted that of authority — usually public agitation and papers concerning questions of general interest (imprisonment of the elderly, *domicilio coatto*, political victims, freedom of press) — that served the commonest and freshest goals of propaganda and at the same time indirectly guarded the flank of the other more important but less open work, nurturing a favorable spiritual atmosphere for it among the sympathizers, the affine elements and the masses in general. This was seen to happen frequently, for example in 1897, in 1914 and in 1920, as Malatesta knew how to aptly employ this system of his with optimal results.

Of the acts of individual rebellion — though convinced of the moral and political utility that the best directed can assume in decisive moments or for special motives, but conscious on the other hand of the great difficulty of reaching a union every time of the two rarest qualities in a single person, extreme energy and awareness which are however indispensable — he never made incitatory propaganda. In his conferences (in writings he sometimes made obvious allusions to it) he spoke only of those that were necessarily produced in the course of a true and natural insurrection. However, also outside of this case, though without instigating anyone, he didn’t hide the necessity that circumstances sometimes produced, nor denied his fraternal cooperation when the occasion arose to those who were voluntarily and irrevocably decided with justice and goodness on their propositions.<sup>6</sup> And the next day he didn’t wrap himself up in reservations or in prudent denials, but openly testified to the rebels the most moving and total solidarity of his thought and feelings.

This line of conduct, of the wise and full revolutionary, who let no small or large element of action escape that could influence events in a feeling of liberty and social progress, finds a parallel in Italian history in conduct no different possessed to that respect during the many years of his long exile, that other great apostle that Giuseppe Mazzini was, although the later stupid slander of his enemies and the opportunist prudence of friends has contributed in several ways to obscure and dissimulate this still very unknown side of the revolutionary activity of the greatest author of political liberation of Italy.

In action, Malatesta didn't know divisions of tendencies. And if he much loved the comrades who understood his thought in its best expression, he no less strongly loved those who had the same passion of revolt, even when they were divided from him by some dissent about theory or strategy. He didn't hesitate sometimes, to rudely show his disapproval of some his closest friends, when they appeared for a moment to subordinate the duty of solidarity with the rebels to considerations of uncertain opportunity and cold doctrinarianism. There were certainly violent deeds that he disapproved of and rejected; and if they occurred he clearly spoke his criticism. But he didn't involve the persons of the authors in an a priori fashion, in whom he saw no more than other victims of the reigning injustice, which was truly the most responsible; and if he knew the unselfishness and originating goodness of their intentions, he rose up in their defense, without a care for the so-called public opinion, against the legal vengeance which was unleashed on them.

When the necessity arose of some action that appeared indispensable to him, he didn't limit himself to giving advice about it, he didn't like to tell others what to do; he himself worked with the rest and like the rest. This was seen during the days of the "red week" in Ancona in 1914 and on other occasions. He didn't disdain modest assignments or the most dangerous. A friend told me that, in 1914, before the events of June — a general strike of the railroad workers and a possibly huge insurrectional outlet were predicted to be imminent, and there was a moment of fevered and pressured preparation of material to not be caught unprepared by a lack of resources — one day Malatesta crossed the middle of Ancona with a sack of explosives, under the nose of the cops who watched him. His friend asked him afterwards if it was true and why he hadn't entrusted that charge to others. "Because I didn't have the time," he responded, "to call upon the more appropriate people, and I wanted to prepare things so that it wouldn't occur to someone to use it prematurely for another act, which would have ruined all of our more urgent work at the time."

This last episode illustrates the feeling of responsibility that never left Malatesta, and might be thought of as a lack of prudence on his part. That would be a mistake. He accepted risks, but he didn't look for them without reason; and took all of the necessary precautions, without exhibiting useless fear. He sometimes took precautions which others around him, not understanding their causes, found exaggerated: especially when he was simultaneously working on some other initiative which interested him more, or when the risk could implicate third persons. In reality, he didn't lack the shrewdness to fool the police investigations and magisterial inquiries. But most of his shrewdness consisted of his spontaneous geniality and naturalness: illustrated so well by Edgar Poe in a celebrated novel, of hiding as little as possible or not at all, like when he lived for nine months in Ancona incognito and, while the police looked for him everywhere, he tranquilly strolled about the city, frequented all the public places and went where he liked with the only precaution of not being seen in the street together with the better-known comrades.

The truth is that Malatesta, during fifty years, had mixed himself up in a quantity of small and large acts and movements of revolutionary and subversive nature; he had been imprisoned

an infinitude of times, was always under suspicion, and often tried, since the police intuited his effective presence everywhere. However, he had almost never been caught, as it is said, with his hands in the bag. He might be the Italian revolutionary who, having done the most, was convicted the least — barely two or three times in all of his long life — and unjustly then, that is to say, without evidence, and for acts that weren't his or which didn't constitute a crime. "I have been convicted only when I was innocent!", he jokingly told me one day, but not without a hint of malice.

## The intellectual

This fever of action that always possessed Malatesta is perhaps what more than anything else distracted him from dedicating himself to a methodic and continual intellectual work, which would certainly have placed him among the most illustrious of the scientific and literary world, following the branchy of learning which had consecrated his most genial intelligence, and would have made him much better known than he is today as a principal theorizer of anarchism, which despite everything he was.

However, he didn't disregard in any way the joys of intellectual labor and he often felt an acute nostalgia for it. But he considered it a bit like the *otium* of the Romans in the old tempestuous republic, a bit before it was an empire, for who true work was only that dedicated to the worries of the State, to civil wars or conquest, the battles of the forum, the tribute, or the senate, while the learning of letters and philosophy was simply the pleasant repose of the days of truce between a military expedition in distant provinces and a bloody internal fight against a rival faction. In Malatesta the man of studies was constantly defeated by the man of action. He truly had those "devils inside" that Bakunin — who he so resembled in that subordination of theoretical work to agitation — desired above all in his comrades, collaborators, and disciples. The great Russian revolutionary immediately saw that in him, since his first meeting in 1872 with the fiery young Italian; and XXX to like him and consider him as his "Benjamin," which was the name that Bakunin gave Malatesta in the conventional language of conspiracy.

Malatesta had renounced the tranquility of pure intellectual work since the age of eighteen, when he began to neglect his studies and eventually abandoned them altogether to dedicate himself completely to propaganda, revolutionary agitation and to the fight, never turning back until his death. More than once, in the abandon of some intimate conversation, when he explained some of his original and new ideas about the most difficult problems of contemporary thought, and I asked him when he would decide to explain them fully and not just hint at them in occasional articles, he would respond to me, "Later, when I have the time; you can see that now there are so many more important things to do!" And honestly the practical work of the movement was always great, and all of us felt that his work was indispensable; but we also felt that the other work would be useful, especially when he would be no more! Some of us, two of the most insistent being Max Nettlau and Luigi Bertoni, often suggested to him to write his memoirs, that it would be useful to contemporary history and to an understanding of the affairs which he had found himself mixed up in; and he responded, "Yes, perhaps... But there is no hurry; I will think about that when there aren't other, more important things to do, when I am old."

But since he always found something more important to do and never recognized that he was old, his memoirs were never written. Basically, he didn't want to write them, a bit because

of an inner unwillingness to speak about himself, and a bit because his scruples didn't allow him to speak all of the truths. "History isn't written while the war is on," he would say, "and it's more important to make history than to write it." However, an English editor made him the most favorable offer for a work of this type while he was in London, and in his last years an Italian editor did the same. But he was also repelled by asking the means to live through purely intellectual occupations that would have distracted him from the movement.

He always saw the repose of old age as far ahead of him. "One is old only when he wants to be," he said, "and old age is an infirmity of the spirit," and laughingly advanced until the paradox arrived that "death is a prejudice." The following story is characteristic in this respect. Some young workers and students communicated to him one day (he was almost seventy) that they had created an "anarchist youth group." "Very good!" he told them, "count me in your group, too." He kindly criticized the erroneous tendency to separate the younger elements from the others and pointed out the truth, which he came to through long experience and by his spirit itself, that often certain young people are older than the elderly, and vice versa. In fact, at seventy-five he was still the youngest of any of us.

Despite all, to regard Malatesta as an intellectual of the first order, the few well-known pamphlets he has released suffice — in particular, *Fra Contadini*, *Al Caffè*, and *L'Anarchia* are the three masterpieces in content and form that are enough to establish a man's fame, but he would be recognized as such by those who could consult a collection of his writings, unknown to most today, which he has published for sixty years in papers and magazines all over the world. They would fill several volumes. The majority of these writings, even the briefest and the most current, almost never have an ephemeral character; and only with difficulty can one find anything that doesn't contain something originally his or that is for the most varied reasons worthy of being remembered, even in writing about fleeting and very minor arguments. But his articles are innumerable that, though dealing with uncertain facts or controversial questions of the moment, are lifted to general considerations and fully explain a whole framework of related ideas.

Certainly, it would have been hoped that Malatesta had left us a vaster, organically and systematically elaborated work on anarchism and revolution, to which he himself would have given a permanent and definitive character. But causes stronger than his — aside from the fever of activity which I have already mentioned — have impeded him: some intrinsic to him and other more material and external.

On more than one occasion he had resolved, and has spoken about it with his friends, to dedicate himself to a work of the necessary scale, which would be the expression of his personal thought. Since 1897 he talked to me about a book of his on anarchy, of which he had outlined the schema and accumulated the materials, and which would maybe be published by the editor Stock of Paris. He had put other materials together in London and had already written something by 1913 for a work about "expectation in sociology." In his last years, at the insistence of friends, he has elaborated the whole plan of a work to be developed in two or three volumes, something in-between memories and discussions about ideas and methods, in which he would have incorporated some of his less-known past writings, finished by a vision of how it would be possible to develop a revolution in which anarchists could play a preponderant part. He had also dreamt up a sort of utopian tale of an imaginary revolution, in which he had wanted to speak his practical advice on how to prepare and succeed in making revolution, and then to give it a reconstructive anarchist direction. In a letter of 1925 he said, regarding these projects, in response to something

I had written him, "You expect from me a workable and working anarchism that marks a step beyond Bakunin and Kropotkin; and to tell you the truth, I don't despair of satisfying you."

I don't know what he had made of all of those beautiful propositions. Maybe something could lay among his letters; but, if it is likely that there is nothing, there certainly is very little.

In his last time he would have been impeded by his constant poor health and the terrible peacelessness in which the asphyxiating and torturous fascist vigilance always kept him. But one of the strongest immaterial impediments was certainly, not only at the end, but always, his own almost instinctual mental abhorrence to all formal and definitive systemizations, and he tended to correct each solution, in which he always saw anew some defect. This, united with an invincible inner modesty, made him never content with what he wrote. So, when he didn't write about the sting of the necessity of the fight or debate, or when the typographer didn't tear the manuscript from his hands for the paper which couldn't wait, he put the filled sheets on one side to reread the next day, and the following day what he had done already displeased him, he saw a thousand flaws and often finished by tearing it up and throwing it all in the trash; or he rewrote it, corrected it, until external circumstances didn't allow him to leave the inciting work, so it remained permanently suspended for a while and later abandoned.

Despite all this, Malatesta's writings which remain for us constitute on their own a production so vast and have such great value that they would be more than sufficient, if relocated and reunited, to give us, if not the work that he could have, certainly not a work inferior to our desire. Perhaps, on the other hand, also from the strictly intellectual point of view, Malatesta's thought, developed and expressed fragmentarily in hundreds of articles, without an apparent logical order, between one battle and another, in a study that was always made in relation to the events he participated in, to the burning touch of the fight and real life it lived? more, in the middle of the proletarian and popular movement, under the constant sway of contrasts and controversy — maybe, I say, that Malatesta's thought is closer to the truth, more current and vital, more effective at guiding men in conduct and action, more dynamic (as is said today), than that which could have been elaborated in the calm solitude of a private study and to arise from an intellectual speculation at the table, always, despite all contrary effort, strongly separated from the continual movement of men and of ideas.

Malatesta himself, despite his unsatisfiability, didn't show himself contrary to a collection of his journalistic? writing when I finally proposed it to him; and knowing that I had amassed some of this material of his, he supplied me with others — and only asked me to wait to publish it so that he could mind to the selection, rearrangement, and some notes and corrections. Our separation impeded this work however; but Malatesta's death would oblige us to decide finally to proceed now to this republication of all of his writings, for which the legitimate delays had stopped with his disappearance.<sup>7</sup>

The thing isn't easy, but it is far from impossible. The greatest difficulties are posed, it is true, by the critical moment of this tumultuous and catastrophic historical period, in which anarchist collectivity, that would be the most interested in completing such a labor, and that which it is more of a duty to do, is more than any involved in the fiery whirlwind of social tempest, and more urgent assignments and debts absorb their energy and the material means of the militants who are so poor. But these difficulties should be overcome by men of good will, since there is for all a material interest that Malatesta's thought be presented in his most whole complex to the attention of revolutionaries of the younger generations and to all the workers and fighters



for liberty, which can extract light and advice of unparalleled value, exactly in which most are engaged today, and in the revolutions that appear imminent.

## **Laborer**

The intrinsic impediments of character that Malatesta found in himself, of which I have already spoken, wouldn't be enough, it must be said well, to make him not manage in the end, overcoming his incontentability, to reach on intellectual terrain the final and synthesizing crowning of his vast work that preceded, as he certainly desired as well, if he had materially been able to have all the tranquility and time needed. His exactingness would have contributed to rendering more perfect this work of his. But time and tranquility he would never have!

Apart from the demands of propaganda, the fight and of revolutionary action, that for him constituted the categorical imperative of all his life, he found ahead of him, continually, many material difficulties, extrinsic, which impeded him from devoting himself to a methodical cultural work with heart. I am not speaking here of the police persecutions, prison, and flight that left him little time; these entered the normal life of every militant revolutionary who, as Malatesta himself said, "are never free and always in provisional liberty." The major material impediment was that of always having to work to live.

It is also true that he had created this obstacle voluntarily. From a rich family<sup>8</sup> as soon as he could he freed himself of all his possessions, surrendering them to propaganda and to the poor, and abandoning his university studies to be better off "going to the people" (as was said in 1870, at the example of the Russian revolutionaries), he had wanted to learn a trade to live. From then on he had always been as poor as a reed. He made himself a mechanic in the shop of his internationalist friend Agenore Natta in Florence; and with that trade he had then been able to earn his daily bread, except in those intervals in which the higher causes of the fight constrained him to the work of agitation and journalism, and this also was too absorbing and feverish to permit him to concentrate on purely intellectual activity.

There were periods in which, if the manual labor of his occupation wasn't necessary, he would have been able to enjoy the relative tranquility needed for educational? activity, especially in the time passed in London in the rather long pauses between one and another of his trips on the European or American continent. But just then, in the time of his greatest virility, an exhausting work absorbed him from morning to evening, and many nights too had to be sacrificed to give lessons to supplement his scanty earnings from manual work. The electrical mechanic work confined him in his little shop in the neighborhood of Islington and obliged him to go around London with his toolbox on his back and take himself wherever he was called to adjust electric or gas appliances, economic kitchens, and so on. "He had to install gas pipes and electric installations, or repair them, in places that were cold and exposed to currents of air, sometimes on the ground on iced pavement or on hard stone."<sup>9</sup>

Pietro Gori told me that once, during his exile in London of 1894, he was walking with Kropotkin and some other comrade to look for Malatesta, found him on top of a ladder with a hammer and chisel making a hole in a wall, on the street, to hang the sign of a commercial firm. Kropotkin upon seeing him exclaimed, "What an admirable man!" And Gori responded to him, "Yes, Malatesta is admirable; but what a sad world this is, which constrains such a high intelligence to spend time, energy and health in work like this, that so many others would know

how to do, preventing him from doing that which only he knows how to do! And what a great mistake this is of our movement to not find a way to permit this man to do that work useful to humanity which he would be so capable of!" That Gori had more than a little reason I felt inside myself as well, when in December of 1906 I went to London to spend seven days of common life with him in the house where he lived, with the Defendi couple. The family told me that they were content with my arrival, because Errico to be with me had taken a week of vacation, of which (they added) he needed for his health, given the serious work he did.

But even this was not outside of Malatesta's will, not only because he had chosen that life to be *de facto* part of the working people in the midst of who and for who he fought, but because he had made it rule of conduct to not ask the movement and the party in which he served for the means to live. He himself had explained the reasons in some letters to personal friends published after his death:<sup>10</sup> the question wasn't raised of scruples or moral objections, but it was found that to live of propaganda was translated practically in a bad example, by the effect that it produces on the public, in excess inclined to see interested and personal ends in everything. He would have felt diminished and paralyzed by it, while to live by a work outside of propaganda allowed him a greater freedom of spirit and movements.

Also when, by dedicating himself to fixed initiatives of a certain duration and importance to the cause, that wouldn't have permitted him and other occupation, he had to give up work for some time, he preferred to live with the help of personal friends, rather than to weigh on these same initiatives. He remained faithful when he could to such a norm of conduct, until the most advanced age, obliged in spite of himself to make some exceptions in his last years. In 1923, after the three years of *Umanità Nova*, he still worked. He was already seventy, when in that year, taking myself to Rome to see him during the holidays of Pasqua?, it took me a day to find him in the same attitude in which Gori and Kropotkin had seen him about thirty years earlier, from the heights of a ladder in a large establishment in the capital delivering great blows to a wall with a hammer to put electric mains in place.

For almost fifty years this life of his of artisan and laborer lasted, less the short parentheses of the peaks of battle. His physical aspect too was completely assimilated to his condition. Nobody in London in 1900, or in Rome in 1930, had imagined the rich and delicate student from the University of Naples of thirty or sixty years past, in the man modestly dressed, of bronzed face and calloused hands, if it wasn't for a certain refinement of manners which revealed his fine education. Without telling when he did the most humble labor (porter, ice-cream vendor, etc.) which particularly difficult circumstances forced upon him more than once, he has worked in his trade of electrical mechanic wherever he stayed for long periods: even before 1880 in Paris, then in Florence, in Buenos Aires, at length in London and finally in Rome — until age, sickness and the isolation in which the fascist vigilance immobilized him forced him to abandon manual labor and to allow help with living to come from his family of soul-brothers and children that saw and so loved in the comrades of faith scattered all over the world.

In early November of 1926, the last shop in which Malatesta worked still three years before, in one of the streets of the old Roman papal, was invaded one night and devastated by a horde of fascists, in hatred of the noble worker of arm and thought who represented for them the living antithesis of despotic and rapacious violence that had taken hold of Italy's government.

## The complete anarchist

Having consecrated himself to the cause of proletarian emancipation and of liberty, Malatesta sacrificed himself in whole to that cause, without realizing he had done so and almost always with the impression that he wasn't doing enough. In the final days he wrote to Bertoni and me in bitter terms, and maybe to others as well. He would have wanted to live, but "to do something good," he who had done so much and offered sacrifices without ever resting, maybe because he never considered them as such. And of these not the least was certainly — though also maybe not perceived by him — that of willingly renouncing what would have given him the great privilege of intelligence, to whose fruits he would have had the right even from the most rigorous point of view of his ideas.

If he had been able to and preferred to dedicate himself to a labor of learning outside of politics, for example in medicine which he had left but which had always continued to interest him, or as well to physical-mechanical sciences which occupied him at intervals, or to historical and philosophical disciplines which he was learned in — although he often pleased himself in making fun of the *dilettantes* of philosophy — he would have been able to win the highest laurels and grow himself the same a fortunate position, without any need to abandon his anarchist ideas. By example of his friends Kropotkin and Reclus. But he didn't want this, though always studying for its own sake, stealing the time to sleep and rest in order to keep himself abreast of all of the most recent progress of learning and to keep his vast knowledge from growing old and rusty. But his broad and fresh learning fed him in his revolutionary role, with the goal of taking from it intellectual arms and materials for propaganda and battle.

He spoke and wrote in French and Spanish as in Italian, and well enough in English too, and he was an anarchist journalist and orator in all four tongues. He knew enough German to read it, which ultimately served him well by keeping him informed of the movement's currents through the German anarchist journals, which most easily escaped fascist censorship. For some time he was able in and passionate about Esperanto, not because he believed in the utopia of a universal language, but only because Esperanto gave him a way to stay in touch with revolutionaries of the most varied and distant countries. He was informed of the latest conquests in applied physics and chemistry, of aviation (with which he occupied himself in London, though before the first airplane plowed the sky), and so on; not only for curiosity, but because in each branch of those sciences he saw some practical use to arrive at forces of opposition adequate to the enormous forces of privilege and oppression.

As in the realm of thought, as well as in practical life, in the air of the fight and away from it, he never isolated himself from his environment, nor distanced himself from reality, more collided with them. Like the ancient philosophers, nothing which was human was foreign to him. He knew to discover the good, although it might be scant, even when it was hidden in the bad, and appreciated it. He wouldn't yield to the bad for any price. He knew how to collect all of the favorable opportunities to his cause, but disdained all opportunism. Severe with himself, he was the most indulgent of the weaknesses and mistakes attributable to human nature in those who seemed to have good intentions.

But regarding him, those simple and seemingly insignificant opportunisms were unknown to him, which in the breast of the same party sometimes pushed the weaker or more disinterested to indulge in a harmful tendency, to a mistaken preconception, to a utilitarian deviation, with an error in method or doctrine.

His active life as an anarchist was a monolith of humanity: unity of thought and action, balance between feelings and reason; coherence between preaching and practice; adherence of the inflexibly fighting energy to the man's goodness; fusion of a graceful sweetness, with the most rigid firmness of character; agreement between the most complete trueness to his colors and a mental agility that escaped any dogmatism and all made him affirm the uncertain needs of the camp of action ? – and all to understand the aspects of progress, although apparently in contrast, the camp of thought.

He was the complete anarchist. The use of the means necessary to win remained, in what he said and did, in constant rapport with the liberatory end being reached for; the enthusiasm and fury of the moment never lost sight of immediate and future needs; passion and good sense, destruction and creation, always harmonized, in his words and in his example; and this harmony, so indispensable to win with fertility of results, impossible to dictate from on high, he carried himself with efficacy among the people, confusing himself with them, without worrying if that made his personal work disappear in the vast and undulating ocean of the anonymous masses. That which, far from diminishing it as distinct individuality, made this shine even more luminously. The crowds, however, didn't understand all that had been necessary : they intuited well enough, about him, for some brief instant, that in his teaching was the road to salvation, but they didn't master it, or therefore make the effort needed to realize it. They acclaimed his name at times, but took very little of his spirit. But it wasn't through any fault of his.

Far from me is any intention of wanting to present Malatesta in these pages as a perfect man without any defects! He certainly had defects, though the pain of his departure and the great affection for him don't allow me to see them now, or would make me forget them. The same fact that he has been so universally loved is a proof that his humanity participated in the common weaknesses, but more those that grow close to the hearts of the people than those which distance. He would always confess himself to be full of flaws, and maybe his worst were these of excessive modesty and never being satisfied with himself, of which I have already said something, that sometimes and in some camps have excessively limited his work's development, and in some environments and circumstances have stopped him from giving all the fruits which could be hoped from him. But I don't fear, certainly, exaggerating or falling into vain adulation if I said that which, he being alive he wouldn't have permitted, that he, a man of flesh and bone, fallible as all mortals, was in every way better than many of his contemporaries, already seated in the future city of his hopes/auspices , and at the same time the closest to his times, ardent about the objective reality of human nature and of factual conditions, not as he wanted them to be in a distant tomorrow, but those which exist today with all their errors and their deficiencies.

This above all makes us regret enormously the emptiness he has left among us as a militant of the revolution, as an animator of the crowds, as a sustainer of energy, as a coordinator of efforts, in that total fusion of spirit of the idea with the sense of reality of which will be so necessary in the expected decisive days of courage and of the fight. The rematch will come, we can be sure, after the routs which made the sunset of life so anxious for him. However, he will not see it, already he can't help or cooperate, as had been the dream of all his life and the supreme of his last, disconsolate days. ?

## The Life

Malatesta's life is the best book he has written. It isn't possible, therefore, to comprehend the historical figure of his in the perennial value of feeling and of thought that remains through his writings, without having present the complete painting of his long existence through the social and revolutionary movement of more than half a century. From here the necessity, before passing a sufficiently complete exposition of his ideas, knowing at least summarily the history of his life.

Max Nettlau, known as a scrupulously documented historian of anarchism, had published ten or eleven years from Malatesta's death a very interesting volume about the life and work of the Italian anarchist agitator. Editions have appeared in German, Italian and Spanish, the latter being the most recently published (1923), the most complete and detailed.<sup>1</sup>

It was desirable that Nettlau complete this work with the story of the years leading to his death. Nettlau's book is a fundamental historical work for one who wishes to know the life of Malatesta in relation to his time and to the modern social movement. I should note that the pages which follow draw heavily from this book, since my personal memories of him are quite incomplete before 1897.<sup>2</sup>

The limits imposed by the proportions of the work don't allow me to stretch out all that I want and would suggest to me the affect about the man. To say it all and say it well — which I feel incapable of — I would have to give to the readers a work that would interest them like the most moving of novels. There are episodes of secondary importance that by force I will have to leave in the inkwell, which for the most diverse reasons would not only bring the tale to life better, but would also bring satisfaction of historical curiosity. I must also omit some of these stories for one of the same motives that stopped Malatesta from writing his own *Memoires*: that the hour still hasn't arrived in which to say certain truths about third persons who are still living and which it is a moral obligation to set aside. Other things, furthermore, though interesting and perfectly safe to relate, would enlarge this work too much.

The readers will excuse me, therefore, if the following biography of Malatesta has become, against all my desires, too cold and schematic. They will also understand the disproportion of means that comes of the fact that the tale until 1897 is a reference taken from what I have read or heard from others and from Malatesta himself, while the last thirty-five years are more from my direct knowledge. On the other hand, while the parts of the tale which refer to what has been published several times will be more concise, there will be more detail on the points about which little or nothing is known, or about which the popular knowledge is erroneous or unclear.

### **The student. — From republican to internationalist. — First arrests. — Meeting Bakunin.**

The son of the couple Federico Malatesta and Lazzarina Rostoa, Errico was born in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, near Naples in the province of Caserta, on December 14, 1853. His family

was wealthy and owned several houses in Santa Maria. But when the boy was a student in the Lyceum, while he was with them in Naples he lived in the Pignatelli mansion, on a street by the same name. In Naples, Errico studied classics as a boarding student of the Escolapios' ? schools (a religious order dedicated to teaching), where he made friends with the home student Saverio Merlino, though their friendship was still not political.

Since that time, the young boy showed the tendencies and spirit of rebellion. He was fourteen in 1868 when he wrote an insolent and menacing letter to the king Vittorio Emanuele II, signing it. As a result, on March 25 he suffered his first arrest. It cost him dearly since his father, a man of moderately liberal ideas, had tried to free him by making the whole thing look like a prank, setting into motion every connection he had with the official world in Naples. Errico was detained all of that day in the police station. At night, after a rough sermon from the *questore* who had wanted to shut him up in a correctional house, the young boy was returned to his father.

During dinner at home, his father tried to reproach him and to tell him to act more prudently at least, but the boy responded with such uncompromising stubbornness and determination that his poor old man ended by exclaiming with tears in his eyes, "My poor son, I hate to say it to you, but you'll end up on the gallows!"

The adolescent rebel digested what had already been a year or two of Republican ideas. The Republicans were the historical party of the Italian Revolution and irresistibly attracted the fiery student, who was full of classical memories of ancient Rome and the heroic acts of the still-unfinished *Risorgimento*. Even from his exile Giuseppe Mazzini, one of its champions, fascinated the young boy. Fifteen years later Malatesta explained his republicanism of the time, which he thought promised the realization of his hopes for complete liberty and social justice, but he later found a better reflection of his hopes in anarchist socialism.<sup>3</sup> Although frequently among the Republican crowd, he didn't belong to the party. He asked, together with his friend Leone Leoncavallo (the older brother of the musician), for entrance to the "Universal Republican Alliance." The request was transmitted to the Central Committee, that is to say to Mazzini, who rejected them because he judged that the two aspirants had excessively socialist tendencies and would soon defect to the ranks of the International.

Until that moment Malatesta had never heard mention of the International, and he wanted to know what it was. He sought and found it. He then met, among others, Giuseppe Fanelli, Saverio Friscia, Carmelo Paladino, and Gambuzzi, and under their influence (especially that of Fanelli and Paladino) he decidedly embraced — in 1870 — internationalist ideas.<sup>4</sup> It is known that in Italy at that time, socialism and the International owed their markedly revolutionary and anarchist character to Bakunin's influence, exerted since 1864. The events of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the ferment for those strewn everywhere reinforced Malatesta's newly embraced faith, his enthusiasm growing to a crescendo.

On August 4, 1872 a congress of internationalists from various parts of the peninsula met in Rimini, known later as the "Conference of Rimini," where the Italian Federation of the International Workers' Association was put together. Before this event isolated sections of the International had already been diffused about Italy — the most important of them being in Naples — workers' *fascios*, resistance societies, and so on. In Rimini a common organization was solidified. The president of the conference was Carlo Cafiero and the secretary Andrea Costa. Malatesta didn't participate in this conference, but soon became one of the most active members of the Federation. Since January he had been the Secretary General of the Neapolitan Labor Federation, whose program he had formulated. He had collaborated the previous year (1871) with Cafiero on *L'Ordine*

of Naples,<sup>5</sup> and he was a regular contributor to *La Campana*, also of Naples (1871–2), the most important internationalist paper of its time, thanks to the vivacity, seriousness and the density of its thought.

The Italian Federation founded in Rimini had a socialist-anarchist revolutionary program, was anti-Marxist in its methods, and had a public character due to its propaganda, but it was conspiratorial about the insurrection that it tirelessly tried to provoke. Malatesta threw himself into the work of the program body and soul, no longer worried about his studies<sup>6</sup> or personal affairs and gave all of his inheritance to propaganda and to the poor, as has been said elsewhere. Indefatigable in his activities as an agitator and conspirator, he was always in motion, able and serious, anywhere that something to do could be found. He radiated an enthusiasm which communicated itself to all who approached him. He was already a subtle and persuasive reasoner, soon successfully exercising an extraordinary influence among workers and the youth. This quickly made him into the Black Beast of the Italian police, who followed his steps and pursued him without rest, detaining him at every turn using the most trivial pretexts, or sometimes without even these. Later, at his trial in Rome in 1884, he threw into relief the fact that, without ever having been convicted of a crime to that day, he had already completed more than six years of jail.

The same year that the Congress of Rimini was held, Malatesta went to the anti-authoritarian International Socialist Congress of Saint-Imier (September 15 and 16, 1872), leaving several days earlier to go Zurich, where he met Bakunin for the first time. He remained in Bakunin's company a total of fifteen or sixteen days before and after the Congress, and promptly came into a complete communion with his ideas. He also participated in the "Alliance," a sort of secret revolutionary and anarchist fraternity which Bakunin had founded some years earlier under the name "Democratic Socialist Alliance" and which was later called the "Revolutionary Socialist Alliance."

Despite his great energy, the young Errico had fragile health, and it could be said that he was naturally sick. When he was about 15 or 16 his doctor believed that he would have trouble reaching 24. Bakunin noted this in his first encounter with him, when he saw Errico arrive in Zurich with a cough and a fever. On the fiftieth anniversary of Bakunin's death in 1926, Malatesta spoke of this trip, recalling how he met the great Russian revolutionary. Thinking he couldn't be heard, Bakunin had said to one of the comrades surrounding him in his house, "What a pity that he is so sick! We will lose him soon; he won't be around in six months."<sup>7</sup>

From then on the relations between Bakunin and Malatesta were close and frequent. They saw each other often and wrote, and for some time Bakunin had the young Italian anarchist as his secretary. Errico would be able to go and spend time with him, especially in the period in which Bakunin lived in the "Baronata," a country house near Locarno in Switzerland. Malatesta was at the Baronata in July of 1873 when Bakunin entrusted him with traveling to Barletta, where Carlo Cafiero then lived, to put together a rural feast with him in Spain. But Malatesta was detained there, taken to Trani, and shut up in the city jail.

From the jail in Trani he managed to send a letter to friends on the outside, but it was found by police in a notebook. An investigation was made, and resulted in the prisoner being isolated in a daunting fort called "the tower of Tiepolo," under the special custody of an ex-religious guardian. But he, who had been in a military prison under the Bourbons — a curious sort of patriot — became friends with Malatesta, and the young revolutionary's letters left the jail more easily than before. That guardian, who had been a member of the cabinet of the minister Silvio Spaventa under the old government, confided to Malatesta that he would love to kill the minister

to punish him for having abandoned his old comrades; and with the greatest secrecy he showed him the dagger he had been honing for that purpose at the end of every day.

In that period of imprisonment Malatesta also befriended the director of the jail, a certain Carlo Battistelli, also an old patriotic political prisoner. The friendship began with an enraged outburst by the director, when Malatesta mentioned some “police agent.” A discussion took place, and Battistelli became very sympathetic towards his prisoner. Malatesta stayed in jail for six months and was freed, all without any concrete accusation or trial.

These short episodes can serve to show the influence Malatesta exerted over all those who came across him. We will see another example in an episode not much later.

He suffered a little for his time in jail, but most of all for the great waste of his busy life — at the time he left the jail in Trani, he had been dedicated to work to prepare for the next insurrection in southern Italy, joined in Locarno by Bakunin, Costa, Cafiero and others — his health had been drained. His doctors ordered a period of complete rest and he was invited by Carmelo Paladino to vacation for a few days at his house in Cagnano Varano (during the carnival of 1874). Malatesta came into contact with the strategic group of that little city, which met at night in a pharmacy and in little time proceeded to come to grips with the devil [idiom] in the form of the town’s auditor, the priest, and the marshal of the guard, all from the pharmacy. For the final day of the carnival they put together a political masquerade: “The death of the bourgeoisie,” and the funeral was held in the streets of the town, the coffin surrounded in the funniest way by these four in disguises. After Malatesta departed, something should be felt in the highest: the marshal was transferred, the priest called by the bishop, and the auditor censured by the prefect.

## **The insurrectionary movements of 1874. — The Internationalist Congresses of Florence and Bern (1876).**

The insurrectionary attempt of 1874 was promoted by Andrea Costa and Bakunin, and was planned in the Bakunin’s house, the “Baronata,” (Baronage) in December of 1873, while Malatesta was still in the Trani prison. The youth left jail and headed for Naples where Cafiero caught him up to speed on things, and he immediately dedicated his cooperation in the affair. He freed himself ? in a brief parenthesis of repose in Cagnano (mentioned above), made trips to all of southern Italy, which was specially entrusted to him, and went to Locarno to meet with Bakunin. The end of July saw him in Puglia for the final preparations. Boxes of weapons were gotten from Naples, definitive dispositions were taken, and in August, while the Italian police had already intuited something of the affair and had made the first detentions of internationalists and from among a faction of the Mazzinians favorable to the project (the arrests of Villa Ruffi in Romagna), the movement was initiated in several points of Italy.

Is isn’t my task to tell that movement’s tale here, since it is already know well enough. Instead, I will briefly allude to the actions which Malatesta directly participated in, to illuminate his role and his position in the midst of them more than anything else. The movement was generally abortive, perhaps because the police were already prepared for it, or perhaps because the popular rebellions due to the misery of earlier in the year were already calmed. It also could have ended because of some dissent that arose at the last moment between internationalists (the rupture between Cafiero and Bakunin and the former’s departure for Russia), maybe because of other minor causes, among them probably Costa’s insincerity. However, small attempts took place



everywhere, which later gave rise to a number of trials in Rome, in Massa (Carrara), Liorna, Florence, Perugia, Palermo (or Giregenti?), Trani, and in Bologna.

These last were the most important, because only in Emilia (the group of the Castel del Monte meadows) were there remarkably dignified deeds, an armed excursion and encounters with the police and soldiers. The trial of Florence was also important, not for the concrete acts that weren't produced, but for the great number of people involved and the notoriety of some of them (among them Garibaldi), the scenes that were depicted, and so on. Giuseppe Garibaldi had made it known to Bakunin that he too would take part in the movement if it developed into something serious. It wasn't to be. Bakunin was clandestinely in Bologna, from where he managed with great difficulty to get himself to safety once the affair ended.

At the beginning of the events in Puglia, which Malatesta should have personally participated in, he found himself in Molfetta and should have gone to Terlizzi. He was warned in time of an ambush of police operatives to assassinate him, so he went by unusual streets and found almost nobody; from there with another he went to Castel del Monte. There, in the old castle of Federico II of Suavia, which was the decided meeting-place, he was joined by some other isolated elements. As Malatesta told the story later, "Several hundred conspirators had promised to find themselves at Castel del Monte;

I headed to the reunion, but at the meeting-place, of the hundreds who had sworn themselves in, we found six. It didn't matter; the box of weapons was opened... it was full of muskets. [?] No matter. We armed ourselves and declared war on the Italian army. We crossed the countryside for several days, trying to take farmers with us, but found no response. The second day we encountered eight soldiers, who believed we were a much larger group and didn't fire at us. Three days later we realized that we were surrounded by soldiers. There was nothing else to do; we buried the muskets and decided to scatter; I hid in a haycart[?], and in it I left the danger zone."<sup>8</sup>

The story, too brief, should have been finished, but they had too few members. Nettlau says that the small group of insurrectionists in those days was multiplied by activity and by constant mobilizations; it showed up in Anria, Molfetta, Corato and Minervino, giving the impression that other groups were involved, but it was always the same one. Malatesta told me that the farmers approved of and were interested in the propaganda, agreeing with what the conspirators proposed, but none to the point of joining the insurrectionists. An episode: in one of those incursions one day, at days [], taking a country road, the small gang saw a patrol of soldiers coming towards them, led by a carabinieri. They decided to fight and had their weapons ready, but when they were close enough to make each other out, the carabinieri made a sign to Malatesta as if he were a superior officer, stopped the soldiers and ordered them about, and then they marched away. Malatesta had recognized the carabinieri as his marshal friend from the masquerade in Cagnano Varano.

Today all this might seem puerile, but it wasn't in those times, still full of recent memories of the attempts made by Mazzini, Garibaldi, Pisacana, and so on, in which the small initiative spoke with such a suggestive power, while hostility towards the government was so great, the governing power of the new dominators still weak and the loyalty of their own instruments [people] still uncertain. The intentions were enormous, and from these was derived an optimism full of exaltation and a deep seriousness.

The castle of Frederick I was being used as an arms dump and repair point, of nocturnal rest and of rendezvous for the different sites of planned actions. New recruits were expected until the end, and this castle would be made into the center, the headquarters of a vast uprising. The six

insurrectionists had entrenched themselves there as in a fortress from which they made constant forays, and by night its occupants took turns as sentinels of an encampment. In the last of the enterprise's five or six days, the Castel del Monte gang took the road for Spinazzola. At a certain point on the road they stopped in a rural area to rest. Gugliemmo Schiralli (who would later be a well-known socialist in Puglia) arrived on a coach[/]cart, and notified the six that they were tightly encircled. It was decided to disband. There were haycarts there that had to leave; Malatesta and some others hid themselves in them, and crossed the cordon of soldiers unnoticed.

Malatesta succeeded in arriving in Naples, where he was hidden several days; then he left for Marcas, and was headed for the Baronata in Switzerland, where he was expected. But in Pesaro he was recognized and arrested. The carabinieri in the barracks were furious with him, having read news in the papers that he had shot at their fellow soldiers in Puglia. They stripped him and pretended to interrogate him. Malatesta knew that a beating would come, and announced that he had great revelations which could only be told to an examining judge. The judge came, but Malatesta only confided... that he knew nothing and had been unjustly detained. The first danger had been overcome; but the riflemen, after the useless interrogation, locked him in a type of iron cage for ferocious animals which was in the patio of the barracks, and everyone went to stare at him there.

Finally, the order came to transport Malatesta to Trani. In chains the whole voyage, he arrived in the city in Puglia and was led to the jails he already knew. The director Battistelli, seeing his old boarder enter, admitted him exclaiming sorrowfully, "Oh, you got yourself trapped!"

The usual prison time followed. The director's friendship helped the lawyers' preparation of the defense enormously; in anticipation they shared the versions of the facts and the witnesses in the jail. The lawyer Lamberto Valbois defended Malatesta. The trial, which took place from August 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>, 1875, was an enormous and continual propaganda meeting, which made the International much more popular than before. It all ended with a general acquittal,<sup>9</sup> thanks to a favorable verdict from eleven of the twelve jurors, some of whom wanted to join the International a little later.

Shortly later Malatesta was once more in Ticino canton, at the "Baronata," where Cafiero was, already back from Russia with his woman, Olimpia Kutusoff. Some other comrades were already there, but not Bakunin. The break between Cafiero and Bakunin was definitive, and the latter had established himself in Lugano. It had to do with a purely personal disagreement, without hostility, and they still exchanged some letters. Malatesta, who went to see Bakunin in Lugano, later told Nettlau (from whom I have these details) that each one had spoken of the other without resentment. I think that Malatesta tried then to reconcile the two old friends, but he had the impression that from then onwards, due to age and illness, Bakunin had finished his life as an active revolutionary. But he had also ended physically: the indomitable Russian agitator died eight or nine months after Malatesta's visit, on July 1, 1876, in Bern where he had gone to recover.

Malatesta remained in Switzerland only briefly, and by September or a bit later (1875) he made his first trip to Spain, where beyond busying himself with propaganda and organizing for the International (also, probably for the secret revolutionary Alliance), he took part in the attempts to free a comrade from jail by shrewdness and by force. He visited many areas (including Barcelona, Cadiz, and Madrid), but by the end of October he had returned to Naples.

He was in that city when, at his friends' insistence, he accepted a proposal to be admitted to Masonry, hoping to be able to repeat with better luck the attempt already made by Bakunin to urge the association to revolutionary ground. But he was soon disappointed and the only

result he obtained was to meet enthusiastic youths easily won by his ideas. He stayed there less than two years, and in the epoch in which Nicotera ascended to the ministry and the Masonry of Naples decided to celebrate with flags aloft, Malatesta indignantly left and ever afterwards fought Masonry like the most uncompromising enemy.<sup>10</sup>

A curious episode in Malatesta's life occurred in Naples at the end of 1875 or early 1876. He was denounced to be submitted to the "ammonizione" (Admonition)<sup>11</sup> and since the proceeding allowed preventative arrest, Malatesta had resisted. Without abandoning the city, he tried not to be caught by surprise and went by night to sleep at one friend's house or another. The police followed close behind.

One day, on a side street in Naples, he unexpectedly found himself facing the old director of the Trani jail, Battistelli, who turned to see him with great happiness and asked him a thousand questions. Malatesta told him that he was hunted by the police and didn't know where to hide himself to sleep when night arrived. "Come to my house," Battistelli told him, "I will hide you." "Where?!" "In the jail!" He said that he had been transferred from Trani as the director of one of the jails of Naples. Malatesta accepted. So for several days, to not be imprisoned, the feared internationalist took refuge... in prison!

In that period, the fever of action which the young revolutionary reveled in drove him to go to Herzegovina to participate in the insurrection that had broken out in 1875 against the Turks. By means of a friend (Serafino Mazzotti) he made his intentions known to Bakunin, who advised him not to, but he persisted in the idea and tried to accomplish it shortly after being in Rome at a conference of internationalists on themes of organization in March.

He left — I couldn't even give an approximate date<sup>12</sup> — and arrived by Hungary at the banks of the Sava river. While he prepared to swim across the river one morning in the open countryside, Hungarian police in civilian garb, who seemed to be there to work the earth, ran up to him and arrested him. They led him to the city (Neusatz) and from there he was taken to Fiume, where after his rough words against the Italian government, the consul turned the Hungarian police against him, who then made him travel almost entirely by foot. The trip was long and very painful (except the last brief trajectory through Austrian territory), he suffered much hunger, and when he was turned over to the Italian police a month later, he was unrecognizable, arriving dirty and with tattered clothes and shoes.

However, a second time a little later, he went to Serbia with the same goal, when Alceste Faggioli was also there, the famed internationalist from Bologna. Nettlau writes that Garibaldi then encouraged young people to those expeditions. Malatesta was certainly in favor, at some moments, either in the hope that the intervention of conscious revolutionaries might be able to give the insurrection a braver? direction, or as a type of demonstration of bravery and fighting spirit that could enhance the prestige of the Italian internationalists. But there, faced with similar cases, he totally changed his attitude.

Returning to Naples from the Austrian frontier, he stopped briefly in Florence where the Correspondence Commission of the Italian International was then housed. In Naples he began again the work of organization and propaganda. The Italian Internationalist Congress was already being prepared, which Andrea Costa was occupied with more than any, and in June it was decided to hold it in Florence. Everyone expected this to be an interesting congress, since meanwhile a notable ideological change had been outlined among the most known exponents of the movement.

It was in those months which preceded the congress, effectively, when by mail and live voice the question of collectivism and communism was discussed lengthily among comrades. Until that moment all of the International of the libertarian wing, which was the only one that stayed active (the Marxist wing had been extinguished a little after 1872), considered collectivism as the best form of social reconstruction above the economic terrain, following Bakunin's ideas. But that already didn't satisfy the thought of some Italian internationalists, including Emelio Covelli, Cafiero, Malatesta and Costa.

Malatesta told Nettlau that he, Covelli and Cafiero discussed much in Naples in those months, in long walks on the seashore, and arrived at formulating the conception of communist anarchism.<sup>13</sup>

The congress was fixed in Florence for October 1876, and the final agreements decided it for the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. But the police lay in waiting. The first internationalists arrived in Florence the 20<sup>th</sup> knew that the day before Andrea Costa, Natta, Grassi and others from the Correspondence Commission had been arrested, the congress prohibited and the spot where it should have been held occupied by the police. But luckily all of the documents were out of danger. It was decided, despite everything, to hold the congress. The comrade Fortunato Serantoni had been sent to Pontassieve (a city of the province a few kilometers from Florence) to see if there was a way to meet there or in the vicinity, and the response was positive.

At night from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> the congress-goers left Florence individually, arrive in Pontassieve at the meeting-place, where Serantoni — still a boy and unknown to the police — showed those assembled, just as they arrived, the street and point where they had to take themselves. This point was very far, in the hamlet? of Tosi, faction of the Rignano commune, already among the Appenine? mountains.

The congress could only be started on the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, after the congress-goers made a nine-hour march under a torrential rain. About fifty delegated attended from every part of Italy, not to mention the adhesions? sent by letter. The initial work was done by four study committees; then discussions began, that carried into the next day. But at a certain point news arrived that the police had managed to know something in Pontassieve; a company of soldiers, a strong number of guards and carabinieri had arrived in that little town. Nine congress-goers had been detained, among them Enrico Bignami, in the rail station. As a precaution, the day of the 22<sup>nd</sup> the congress was transferred *en masse* to the nearby woods, and in one of its clearings the discussions continued peacefully.

The most important discussion was related to the conclusion of adopting the principle expressed in the communist formula: "from each according to his strengths, to each according to his needs." All ideas of recourse to the establishment of any form of government were refused, and to that effect a great number of delegates had been given an imperative mandate from their sections. The anarchist character of international socialism was reaffirmed. Regarding tactics, participation in political and administrative elections was condemned "because they divert the proletariat and make of it an unconscious tool of the bourgeoisie." Later they addressed the press, relations between the sections, international relations, propaganda in the countryside and in the army, and above all among elementary teachers and among women (there was also a representation from a women's group of Florence at the congress). In the end, the congress was concluded after having named Errico Malatesta and Carlo Cafiero, present there, as representatives of the Italian Federation to the next congress of the International in Bern.

After the congress ended, a group of delegates continued to meet again in Florence, and there a protest was edited and communicated to the press, against the prohibition of the congress, the arrests and arbitrary violation of freedom of assembly perpetrated by the executive power. The protest carried seventeen signatures, among which I noted the names of Malatesta, Cafiero, Covelli, Serantoni, Temistocle Silvagni, Napoleone Papini, Tomasso Schettino and others.<sup>14</sup>

The eighth congress of the International Association of Workers began in Bern four days after the one in Florence ended, and lasted from the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of October. As Italian delegates, in addition to Cafiero and Malatesta, were Giovanni Ferrari and Oreste Vaccari, sent by other groups. I won't elaborate on this congress, of which extensive accounts can be found in numerous publications, and I will limit myself, for brevity's sake, to refer to what pertains to Malatesta, who represented at it one of the most important parts.

He made an oral presentation about the "relations to establish between individuals and groups in the reorganized society." He developed his new ideas and those of his Italian comrades about the anarchic communism (today too well-known to have to speak of them again here); he insisted on the necessity of laboring and organizing action not only against the authoritarian institutions, but also against the natural individual and collective resistances with moral means; he proposed "permanent revolution" as a complex of fights, actions and reactions against bourgeois society; he alluded to the necessity of studying the forms of future organization as an "effort to discover the future by the study of the present and past" without pretensions of guaranteeing the future. He also protested against the habit of calling ourselves and making ourselves called Bakunists, since — he said — "we are not him, we don't share all of his theoretical and practical ideas, and we aren't him above all because we follow ideas and not men, and we rebel against that custom of incarnating a principle in a man."

In that congress a separate section was made apart, in secret, excluding the public and the journalists, on the theme: "Solidarity in revolutionary action." It was then when the question of insurrection was discussed as "propaganda by deed," and Malatesta sustained the necessity of making insurrectionary attempts that, directly attacking the state and authority organisms and proceeding the most vast expropriations possible to the benefit of poor populations, they would make among these the most effective propaganda. It was in the course or as a consequence of these discussions that the project was aired of an attempt of this type in Italy, which would later coalesce in the movement of the known "Band of Benevento" the following year. Malatesta told me that, when he and Cafiero returned to Italy after the congress, they already agreed on that project.

(Perhaps it was after the conference of Bern when the reference to Malatesta's second voyage to the Balkans (in Serbia) should be placed, of which I have spoken earlier, after the account of the attempt to penetrate into Herzegovina. But I'm not sure, and I haven't found to that effect anywhere other news apart from a fleeting allusion in one of the notes taken after a conversation with Malatesta. Before the congress it would have been difficult to have the material time, and furthermore he himself told me that the Balkan movements continued still in 1877.)

Above all, the time was occupied in search of the financial means, pledges?, and so on, for the projected insurrectionary attempt. Malatesta and Cafiero struggled to find manual labor in order to earn something, but in vain. Always with the object of finding money, they made an escape to Neuchatel, where they met with Peter Kropotkin (Malatesta and Kropotkin saw each other then for the first time), but didn't obtain anything. Until, unexpectedly, Cafiero came up with five or six thousand francs, the last of his possessions,<sup>15</sup> and this plus a minor sum that a

Russian socialist had put at his disposition earlier, constituted the war fund for the revolutionary movement that was prepared.

## The Benevento Uprising (1877)

Max Nettlau points out a fundamental distinction between the movements of 1874 and the one in Benevento which Cafiero and Malatesta helped *stage* in 1877. The first promised to unleash an insurrection throughout Italy, while the second *had more of a demonstrative character* of making propaganda by deed. The movements of 1874 *were prepared and inaugurated* in several parts of the peninsula. In 1877, on the other hand, the action was specific to the Matese countryside, in the Benevento province. *Naturally*, we shouldn't overlook their hope that the movement would evolve and extend itself—as Malatesta had always put it, “deeds bring about deeds”—but the concrete objective was to *herald* the revolution by their example, regardless of what the eventual practical outcome might be. It should be mentioned that Andrea Costa was *adverse* to this movement and remained uninvolved.

The preparations went without a hitch, and a considerable number of farmers had promised their help in the intervention. Many had been won over by a certain Salvatore Farina, who could boast of having a local influence. In the past Farina had conspired against the Bourbons with his friend Nicotera, who was minister.\* This time, he betrayed everyone he knew and had them arrested, with the exception of Cafiero and Malatesta, who *knew how to skillfully* avoid police investigations. Contact with the farmers was interrupted by Farina's betrayal, but preparations went on. The Russian revolutionary Sergei Stepniak (Kravchinski) *found himself* in Naples *at the time* and wanted to *participate in the effort*.

The movement was *precipitated* by an unexpected and unwelcome situation, *not surprisingly in similar circumstances*. ? Stepniak, a Russian woman and Malatesta had rented a house in Cerreto under the pretext of an [the?] old woman's convalescence, but really it would serve as an arms dump.<sup>16</sup> The weapons arrived in large boxes on April 3, 1877. The house was *inadvertently* being watched by the police, and two days later a group of internationalists skirmished with the nearby soldiers who lay in waiting: two of them were wounded and one died of injuries later. There were arrests and the comrades, barely a quarter of the number they had hoped, *judged* that they must immediately begin their campaign, without waiting for the others. They left during the night, armed, and stationed [posted?] themselves in the surrounding mountains where they were joined by a few others who hadn't any weapons.

They numbered about thirty at that point, with Cafiero, Malatesta, Stepniak and Cesare Ceccarelli at their head.<sup>17</sup> They crossed the mountainous regions of Mount Matese between April 6 and 8—Pietravia, Montemutri, Fileti and Bucco—eating and sleeping by night in the houses of farmers (who were paid generously for everything), until they arrived at Lentino. They entered town flying a red banner and invaded the Town Hall just as the Council was in session. In the name of the social revolution, they declared the king an old fossil and demanded that the Council hand over official documents, arms seized from citizens, and the contents of the municipal coffers, giving a receipt of all this to the town secretary in these terms: “We, the undersigned, declare ourselves to have come into possession of the arms [which lay] in the hands of the municipality of Lentino, in the name of the social revolution.” The arms that had been confiscated, tools, and *the scant* money that *was found* in the treasury were distributed among the town's inhabitants. The scale

for weighing the tariff on farmers was destroyed, and all official documents irrelevant to the public good were burned. Speeches were made and approvingly listened to by the townspeople.

They continued to the neighboring city of Gallo. Before they entered they met the parish priest Vincenzo Tamburi, and obliged him to enter with them—he *preceded* them and calmed [pacified] the people by declaring himself a communist as well. They invaded the municipality and proceeded as they had in Lentino. After the final conference, according to Nettlau's account, a farmer took the spotlight and asked, "Who can assure us that you aren't soldiers disguised to discover how we think, and arrest us later?" Nettlau accurately observes that this mistrust could have been caused either by the fresh memory of Farina's treachery, or by the fact that the rebels were all Northerners. The Southern city held much resentment against the government of Savoy, *under* Piedmont, which had introduced obligatory military service in the South, and a degrading, exploitative system of tribute.

In the meantime, government troops began to occupy the region, while as with Puglia in 1874, the people listened with sympathy to the rebels' lectures, but were careful not to join them. On April 9 and 10 the insurrectionists fought the soldiers, eventually *making a* retreat. Malatesta went into Venafro one night to buy ammunition, was almost arrested, and saved himself only by fleeing into a forest. It began to rain, snowing on the high mountain. The situation was desperate. Their weapons, furthermore, had become unserviceable as soon as the cartridges *got* wet. They wanted to cross over to the neighboring province of Campobasso, but they would have had to scale a tall mountain—impossible! They discussed what to do, whether they should disband or not, and decided to remain united. Two who wanted to leave hung back a *short distance*. Malatesta and Cafiero would rather have saved themselves, but were alone in this, so they chose to stay with the others *to confront their shared responsibilities*. The twenty-six turned back and took refuge in the hamlet of Cacetta a few kilometers from Lentino, and there a farmer denounced them to the soldiers. Between eleven and twelve at night, the military surprised them in the house and detained twenty-three. Of the other three who had fled in time, two were apprehended nearby, and the third was caught in Naples some time later.

*Therefore* the enterprise, which had lasted ten or twelve days, came to an end. The arrestees were taken to the court prisons of Santa Maria Capua Vetere. More arrests were made. Twenty-six, including Malatesta, were in Santa Maria; eight were in the Benevento jail. The *idleness* of prison wasn't entirely wasted. Cafiero occupied himself by writing a *Compendium* of Marx's *Capital*, and Stepniak the book *Underground Russia*. ; Malatesta wrote a report to the Correspondence Commission of Florence about the details of the uprising, and several articles as well. They studied, discussed, and so on. At the Ninth Congress of the International held in Verviers (from September 5 to 8, 1877), a statement was read, signed by those involved in Benevento, addressing it from their jail as the "Internationalist Chapter of Mount Matese."

Meanwhile, the king Vittorio Emmanuele II had died on January 9, 1878, and that February his minister Crispi issued a general amnesty to political prisoners. The implications for the band of Matese should have been clear, but they were kept in jail because the magistrate doubted whether the amnesty applied to the death of a soldier in Lentino on April 5, 1877. The decision was made to send them before the Court of Benevento for judgment, where the accused submitted two questions to the jury: First, if the accused were guilty or innocent of the death of the soldier; second, if they were guilty, whether the death had taken place in the course of the insurrection or not. If the death had occurred in the course of the insurrection, it would be a political crime and the amnesty would apply. In April all of the accused were transferred to the Benevento jail,

and in August, 1878 the trial began. During the trial—a new chance for propaganda—the accused stated that they had shot over the heads of the soldiers; but regardless of all this, the jury found them entirely innocent of the act at all, and they were acquitted.

Among those figuring in the trial's defense was Francesco Saverio Merlino, Malatesta's trusted lawyer. Merlino was a lawyer in Naples at the time, without *firmly decided* political views; but when he read in the papers that his teenage friend was in jail and accused of the events of Matese, he offered himself to the defendants.

Malatesta accepted his help with pleasure, and in the long prison *colloquiums* between the detainee and his defense, he *took the opportunity* to explain his *own* ideas to Merlino, giving him *arguments to allow him to prepare a defense with some knowledge of his cause*. But to defend Malatesta, Merlino had to become an internationalist, socialist and anarchist, and when he pronounced their defense he had indeed become *all of these*. In the same year, Merlino published his first propaganda pamphlet: *Regarding the trial of Benevento: a [Bozzetto] on the social question* (A proposito del processo di Benevento, Bozzetto sulla questione sociale Regarding the trial of Benevento, Bozzetto on the social question).

## **In Egypt, France and England. — The International Congress in London (1881).**

When he left jail in August, 1878 and returned to Naples, police observation became more suffocating than ever before, and it had already been unbearable! The police were constantly at his heels, annoying and provoking anyone who came by, or *whose* house he went to, and among other things, this kept Malatesta from finding the work he needed to earn a living.

His parents were *already* dead, leaving him an inheritance that would have guaranteed his comfort in those times. I have already mentioned that he had devoted all of his liquid inheritance (a little over fifty thousand lira) to propaganda, and had spent it *in the work of* conspiracy and insurrection, *since* 1877. He had been left several houses in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, rented by poor people. Nettlau gives the testimony of an old comrade, *seemingly well-informed*, that shortly after leaving the Benevento jail he returned to Santa Maria and signed the houses over to the renters without any remuneration.<sup>18</sup> And thus he became the proletarian he *would continue to be* for the rest of his life.

Furthermore, the government *showed an obvious intent* to be rid of him. From moment to moment he was threatened by an arrest that would send him to "domicilio coatto" — a *preventative* measure of Italian police in which repeat offenders or those judged *incorrigible* were banished to the small islands lying along the coast of Southern Italy and Sicily. This *measure* had already been applied to some internationalists, arbitrarily from a legal point of view. Malatesta decided to remove himself from the country, at least for a little while, and left for Egypt where other comrades had already taken *refuge*.

In the last months of 1878, Malatesta had found work as a *private employee* in Alexandria, when on November 17, Passanante's *attempt* against king Umberto I took place in Naples. The monarchic and bourgeois element of the Italian quarter in Alexandria organized a demonstration that ended in a chant of "Die, internationalists!" The internationalists held a protest meeting in return, but on the morning of the *chosen day*, the police *proceeded* to arrest *various* comrades. Malatesta was detained a little later in the day as he left a friend's house for lunch. *Some [there?]*



had been bribed by Italian police agents to finger suspicious types, and they prepared an ambush to eliminate him.

In custody, Malatesta asked that he be handed over to Italy. His protests went unheard; he was taken aboard a boat and sent off, and only on high seas did the captain tell him that he would not be unloaded until Beirut, Syria. He disembarked there with only 20 francs in his wallet, and after walking a bit in the city he presented himself to the local Italian consul, reiterating his demand to be sent to Italy.

"*Forbidden*," the consul told him, "You are not welcome in Italy," adding his *irritated* opinion of the Italian government, and of his Alexandrian colleague who had sent Malatesta to him.

"But I don't have the means to live here, where I don't know what to do."

"Don't dwell on that; go to the hotel and everything will be paid for."

"I don't want to be kept," Malatesta exclaimed, "If you can't *repatriate* me, then arrest me and lock me in the jail."

"Impossible. Why would I do this for no reason?"

"I will give you the reason soon enough; I'll hurl this inkwell in your face..." (he made a motion to grab the inkwell from the table). The consul entered into [*arraignments*]: he couldn't send him back to Italy, but he could have him shipped to Smyrna. Malatesta refused at first, but eventually chose to accept. He embarked a French boat departing for Smyrna, the *Provence*. Onboard he met another comrade, Alvino, in approximately the same situation as him.

At sea, Malatesta forged a friendship with the boat's captain, a certain Rouchon, who agreed *not to make him get off* in Smyrna, but *allowed* him to continue the voyage *with him*. Malatesta and Alvino [*therefore*] wandered all the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, until they arrived on the shores of Italy. He stayed briefly in Castellamare, where the Italian police had been informed that Malatesta was passing through, [until?] arriving in Liorna. There, police agents boarded and tried to detain the two internationalists, but the captain refused to hand them over without an explicit order from the French ambassador. Liorna's comrades were also alerted and went to see Malatesta. In the afternoon the police came on board with the city *prefect* at their head, who respectfully gave the captain a telegram that "authorized" (not ordered) the handover of the fugitives. *But* the captain tore up the telegram and gave orders that "those gentlemen" be accompanied to the stairs and seen off. Meanwhile, the dock and a few boats were filling with many comrades and workers from Liorna, who met the empty-handed functionaries with a loud hissing as they climbed down from the *Provence*.

The steamboat continued on its way and the two Italians *stepped off?* in Marsella. From there, Malatesta proceeded to Geneva where he was caught up *in events*. He met Kropotkin there, who together with Herzig and Dumartheray [had?] put together the *venture* of *Le Révolté* and he helped them with the *material* work of the first issues.<sup>19</sup> But *at that moment* he was almost exclusively occupied with the events of Italy—in the *middle* of great misery, to the point of literally suffering from hunger. While the trial began against Passanante for his *attentat* against the king [in Naples], he wrote a violent manifesto that came to a close with these words: "Umberto of Savoy, they say that you are valiant. Prove your courage by condemning Passanante to death!" On account of that manifesto, Malatesta and the other Italian refugees were expelled from Switzerland.

From Geneva, he departed for Romania where he would stay for some time, painfully earning his meager bread giving French lessons, and he ill. He soon left for France. We met in Paris at the end of that year, 1879. He put himself to work as a mechanic. Soon, he was one of the most passionate in the movement, part of a revolutionary socialist group which included Deville, Guesde,

and Jean Grave. He began to speak at public meetings, participated in street demonstrations, and argued with Marxists in the papers. This went on until, after denouncing an Italian spy and agent provocateur at a public meeting, the French government *expelled* him, giving him five days' time to leave. He changed houses and names (taking "Fritz Robert") but didn't leave. He was arrested shortly thereafter, on March 8, 1880, and [soldiers] took him [and a group] to the border.

He went to Brussels<sup>20</sup>, to London, and then back to Paris in June, where he *had to complete* four months of jail for violating the expulsion order. He left for Lugano, Switzerland. He had gone *simulatedly*, in early 1881, with the intention of remaining there, *since* he wasn't safe from the expulsion of 1879 *which he had never been given official notification of*, and *doubted* that *he dealt with* an expulsion from only the Canton and Geneva, not all of Switzerland. Instead, he was arrested on February 21. After fourteen days of jail he was accompanied to the border. He set out again for Brussels, but he was detained there as well. Finally, he headed for London, in March, 1881.

After such risks, Malatesta *could* enjoy a bit of tranquility in London. But it was a very relative tranquility! Among other things, he had to [contar] how difficult it was to make a living, and to overcome it he tried a bit of everything, selling pastries and ice cream in the streets, and he *managed to* open a small mechanic's shop. In London too, he began to work on the movement immediately. He planned to publish an Italian paper that summer, *L'Insurrezione*—of which only the circular was released—signed by himself, Vito Solieri and Cafiero. The latter, his good friend, *more like* a brother, was already affected by the serious mental illness which would leave him utterly mad *a bit later*.<sup>21</sup> Malatesta *xxx* the first of the greatest sorrows of his life.

The International Revolutionary Socialist Congress was held in London that year (from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 1881), which could really be considered the last meeting of the old International and the first of the anarchist International. Malatesta was the main organizer, along with Gustave Brocher. His intention was that the congress attempt to revive the first International, which was already dead almost everywhere. This was the last conference. *He had to overcome the prejudices against the congress of Kropotkin himself, who from afar had suspected a [simulada] maneuver of Marx, completely nonexistent*. Not only were the last surviving sections of the International in different countries invited to *intervene*, but also the autonomous anarchist groups and revolutionary socialist circles. *Really* [de hecho] almost all the anarchists *intervened*—among the better known Kropotkin, Merlino, Herzig, Neve, Louise Michel, and E. Gautier—and some of the more advanced socialists.

"Malatesta represented the Tuscan Federation of the International, the sections of Forli and Forlinpopoli, the Figli circle of the Workers [Lavoro] of Alexandria, the workers' circle of Turin and Chiavasso, the revolutionary socialists of Marsella, the socialists of the Marches, anarchists from Geneva, the revolutionary socialist Alliance of Turin and the Federations of the International from Constantinople and from Alexandria of Egypt. In the session of July 15<sup>th</sup> he spoke at length. He said, among other things, "we want a revolution. We belong to different schools, but we all want a revolution. We all agree that insurrection is necessary, one which must destroy the *conditions* of present society. Political revolutions *aren't enough for our objective, which is to wholly destroy the bases of society*, and we can't *arrive at harmony* with those who want dictatorship and centralization. The autonomy of groups is necessary. Agreement [acuerdo] until the revolution. Is the International necessary? A new organization is needed, similar to the International, keeping its name, but which emphasizes *the principles* in a revolutionary way. The economic fight cannot stand alone, political *fight* is necessary; since property is not destroyed if

the authority which maintains it is not destroyed at the same time. In Italy, a political *shakeup* can make an economic uprising possible. Leave the choice of methods to each group. Mass *adhesion* to the International *with accentuation* of its principles, autonomy and solidarity for the truly revolutionary actions...<sup>22</sup>

Malatesta made every effort to have the congress accept his point of view. Formally, he was successful in part (an [apariencia] of organization was made concrete, an office of correspondence was named, and so on), but in *substance* his hopes were frustrated. Persecutions *in the different* countries absorbed *all the activity* of the comrades and the *full organizational work* and the necessary *ongoing* international relations; and on the other hand, *under the influence* of the French anarchist circles, already gripped *by that time* by a strong anti-organizational spirit. “Kropotkin’s exact tale, published in the *Révolté*”, according to Nettlau<sup>23</sup>, “makes it clear that Malatesta was one of the few who had a clear idea of how valuable a practical solution to the problem of organization would be. But there was a formidable opposition against him, so that *at a point* he *had to* exclaim: ‘We are *impenitent doctrinarians*.’ The majority of the participants in the congress both wanted and didn’t want an organization, that is to say, they considered all practical steps to *realize* it as an attempt against autonomy itself.”

Despite the precautions taken to guarantee the safety of the discussions in the face of international police investigations—among other measures, the delegates were given a number in place of their name—a French police agent participated in the congress in the person of a certain Serreaux, who *issued* a violent paper in Saint Cloud (near Paris) called *La Révolution sociale*, which he managed to have Louise Michel, Cafiero, Gautier and others collaborate in. Two months later that *subject*, who had aroused suspicions for some time, was unmasked by Kropotkin and Malatesta in particular<sup>24</sup>; but that didn’t stop certain details of the congress of London being used by the police against Malatesta and Merlino at their trial in Rome in 1884.

### **In Egypt again. — Return to Italy. — The trial of Rome and “The Social Question” of Florence. — With those sick from cholera in Naples (1884).**

The anarchist correspondence commission that Malatesta took part in, *named* by the London congress, didn’t show many signs of vitality. The fact that Malatesta only stayed in England a few more months speaks to this. When ‘Urābī Pascha *captained* the rebellion that broke out in Egypt in June of 1882 against the Europeans, and on July 11<sup>th</sup> the English bombed Alexandria, Malatesta *formulated* the project of going to join the insurrectionaries. In August he had *made it out* of Europe, together with Cesare Ceccarelli, Gaetano Marocco and Apostolo Paulides.

The military cordons drawn about the city and the continual small skirmishes—a story told many years later by Icilio Parrini, then living in Alexandria—kept them from reaching their goal. They planned to disembark in Abu Qir, and to reach Ramley overland, near the Nile. The most dangerous and risky decision was their attempt to cross Maryût lake, which was dry due to the Mahsnondich canal closure. As with the preceding attempts, *this last* obstacle didn’t stop them; however, the soft lake bed *obliged* them to retreat.<sup>25</sup>

In a final *attempt* by boat, they thought they had landed safely, but instead they found themselves surrounded by English soldiers, detained, and [devueltos] to Alexandria. From there Malatesta decided to return to Italy. I don’t know where or for how long he stayed meanwhile (maybe

in Alexandria itself); but *the fact is that* in spring of 1883, some time after March, he clandestinely disembarked in Liorna and *took himself* to Florence.

The police soon became aware he was nearby. He still *cherished* the idea of keeping the libertarian-leaning socialist forces in Italy united, and as we will see, he also held on to the idea of giving the internationalist movement new life. He wrote a pair of articles to that effect during a debate with Andrea Costa in [english] *L'Illota* of Pistoia in April. He had the chance to see his friend Cafiero in the mental hospital in Florence—what a state he was in! Though he recognized Malatesta (*not so with other friends*), poor Cafiero made such absurd and extravagant speeches that all possible hope of recovery was lost. *Among* the many comrades in Florence *at the time*, [M] he soon renewed his propaganda work, *particularly* to neutralize Andrea Costa's propaganda, who two years previously had abandoned the anarchist ideas of his early youth for good, had been named a deputy, and was a supporter of electoral and parliamentary strategies. But in May 1883, Malatesta was preparing to release a new paper, working for Agenore Natta as a mechanic, and he was arrested.

On March 18<sup>th</sup> of that year, the twentieth anniversary of the Paris Commune, commemorative revolutionary manifestos had been distributed in various Italian cities, thanks to the pen of Francesco Saverio Merlino, while Malatesta was still in Egypt, and heading for Liorna. Some well-known internationalists were posting the manifesto on walls around Rome and they were detained. During the persecutions *being made* left and right by the police, the manuscript of the manifesto was found. Merlino was detained in Naples, and *all were* notified that there would be a conspiracy trial against them. Malatesta had meanwhile disembarked in Liorna, and was detained later in Florence with no legal *reason*; since a pretext was needed to hold him captive, he was included in the trial against the prisoners from Rome and Naples. In the Roman jails, a spy by the name of De Camillis was put in a cell with *one of the most inexperienced* of the detainees, hardly a boy, and persuaded him to *cast* all of the blame on Malatesta, to say that he had written the manifesto and had given out the addresses to help send it to various locations. "Since," insinuated De Camillis, "Malatesta is out of the country, we'll save everybody without *harm to anyone*." And thus the proof against Malatesta was fabricated.

But the conspiracy trial was serious enough *to be left* to the competence of the Appeals [Assisi] Court, and *in its* hearing it was immediately certain that the jurors would have acquitted everyone. So the name of the crime was changed, "conspiracy" was scrapped for "association of ne'er-do-wells," a less serious charge, but under the jurisdiction of the correctional tribunal, whose mechanical [de carrera] magistrates, docile as ever to the government's orders, would condemn them. But the new style of *accusation* didn't allow for *preventative prison*, and so by November the accused were all set free, in provisional liberty, Malatesta having suffered six months of jail and the others eight. Malatesta went immediately to Florence, where the first issue of the paper *The Social Question* (*La Questione Sociale*) was released a month later (December 22, 1883).

This was the first important publication under Malatesta's care: a cultural paper, yet rich in propaganda and debate, both theoretical and practical.<sup>26</sup> Noteworthy articles *appear there* (I remember one piece about Bentham's ideas which lasted several issues, surely written by Merlino), a *part of* Malatesta's work, *Anarchy*, appeared later as a pamphlet, and *above all* lively, controversial writings about patriotism, masonry, the republic, parliamentarianism, and so on. The most heated debate was with the renegade Andrea Costa, *which occasioned* Malatesta's trip to Ravenna for a *controversy*, which Costa [acabo' por negarse]. An article appeared *there* in which Malatesta

explained his evolution from republicanism to anarchism, translated a little latter in *Révolté* of Geneva (I have said more above).

The paper was soon the object of police attention and suffered two or three brief interruptions. In the meantime, the hearings of the Rome trial were pursued, whose principal session was held the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1884; it lasted three or four days. Malatesta was present with the other defendants, who all made *energetic* and lofty declarations. Malatesta “speaks frankly, is assured, and biting to the point of impropriety, declaring himself a member of the International Workmen’s Association; his speeches at the end of the trial promised to cause a scandal until the *president* took the floor from him. The tribunal distributed the sentences: Merlino, four years of jail;

Malatesta and D. Pavani, three years; A. Biancani, two and a half years, C. Pernier and E. Rombaldoni, fifteen months; L. Trabalza and Vennanzi, six months. Their defense were the lawyers Pessina, Nocito and Fazio.”<sup>27</sup>

A detail typical of this trial was the *thesis sustained* by the king’s representative, who took pleasure in acknowledging that the accused, taken one by one, were honest and hard-working people; but, taken as a group, as associates, they became “evildoers.” [malhechores] And they were sentenced as such...

The trial over, they appealed their sentence and won the right to remain in provisional liberty, so Malatesta returned to Florence to continue editing *La Questione Sociale*. This *appeared* until August 4, 1884. At the summer’s end, Malatesta and some comrades from various parts of Italy went to Naples as medical volunteers, to care for those stricken by a cholera epidemic. The two anarchists Rocco Lombardo and Antonio Valdre died there, taken by the illness. The *known* anarchist Galileo Palla distinguished himself *in a special way* by his selflessness, energy, and spirit of sacrifice. Malatesta, as an ex-medical student, was entrusted with a *section* of sick people who would have the highest recovery rate, because he knew how to force the city of Naples to give food and medicine in abundance, which Malatesta then distributed liberally. He was decorated a sworn official of [beneme’rito], which he refused. When the epidemic ended, the anarchists abandoned Naples and published a manifesto explaining that “the true cause of cholera was misery, and the true medicine to prevent its return can be nothing less than social revolution.”<sup>28</sup>

After Malatesta returned to Florence in January, the Roman Court of Appeals *discussed* a final [recurso] appeal by *those charged*. Merlino’s prison term was lowered by a year and Trabalza acquitted, but then six months of police surveillance were added to each sentence. Those sentenced went to the Supreme Court as a last resort, which only confirmed the sentences; but before *this was definite*, they had all taken refuge *outside of the country*. Malatesta was one of the last to flee and the order to catch him had already been issued. He found himself in Florence at Natta’s house, whose shop *he had been* working in. *One day* the house was surrounded by police. Malatesta pretended he was ill, avoiding an immediate arrest. Meanwhile, his escape was organized. He was shut up in a big box of sewing machines and moved from Natta’s shop to a wagon waiting outside. A policeman politely offered to help lift the box into the wagon. Shortly after, Malatesta set out on the road to the border, and *proceeded* to get on a boat for South America (I couldn’t give an exact date, but it should have been in March or April, 1885).

*It should be recalled* that it was during this period of his stay in Florence that Malatesta published the *well-known* pamphlet, “Among Farmers” (Fra Contadini), a dialogue which later became a huge success. During the same *period*, he *relished for some time* the idea of resurrecting

the old International or at least its Italian *wing*, and even [incluso] anonymously published a *projected program*. But the project held no hope of practical realization.

### **A refugee in South America. — “La Questione Sociale” of Buenos Aires (1885). — In search of gold. — Return to Europe (1889).**

Malatesta’s emigration to South America had to be *planned in concert* with some other comrades. In Buenos Aires, he found other comrades who had actively *militated* with him in the files of the International: Agenore Natta, Cesare Agostinelli and others, some *of them* younger like Galileo Palla. Natta and Malatesta set up a small mechanic’s shop to get by, and Malatesta began his propaganda work anew, either amidst the numerous emigrated Italian workers, or among the indigenous element, whose language he was soon familiar with. He put together a socialist circle, in which, or for which, he gave continuous conferences, debates, etc. He had frequent discussions and arguments with the republican element, then numerous among Italian expats, *and for some time* published a little Italian paper, *to which he came to give the name La Questione Sociale*.

I have been able to consult an incomplete collection of this little paper in Italy, but I don’t remember any precise dates. No more than ten or twelve issues were released, which were published in and around August 1885. The paper, almost entirely full of local questions and discussions, never assumed the importance of its Florentine namesake, from which it *reproduced some* of the most salient articles. Malatesta’s important activities were, instead, to promote the rise of workers’ resistance organizations, and memories of him *are still kept alive* in Buenos Aires, where his propaganda became raised in such feeling the formation at that time of the bakers’ association, which was one of the most Florentine of those that followed, the *most animated* by the spirit of liberation and revolution. His best collaborator in this work was Ettore Mattei, dead some years later, who was one of the most renowned and valiant apostles of workers’ anarchism in South America.

In 1886, news spread that there were rich yields from the gold-laden sands of Argentina’s extreme south, so the idea came up among a group of comrades that they would *go after these*, hoping to obtain a considerable sum to dedicate to propaganda. Malatesta, Agostinelli, Palla, *some* Meniconi and another departed in steamer for the straits of Magellan and disembarked on the beach in Cabo Virgenes. Laboring for local businessmen, at 14 degrees below zero [C?], they met their needs for three months, plus the funds for a [casilla], and headed for the golden zone. But it was *disillusioning*. The highest-yielding zones had already been *hoarded* by a *company of speculators*; in the others there was little *to do*. The gold was scarce, barely earning enough to live, and it cost them hard toil. The five fed themselves by hunting nutrias, [a rodent?] abundant in those lands. They also worked for some time on *the company’s* payroll, *being* scandalously robbed.

They remained in the area of Cabo Virgenes for more than seven months, through the deep polar winter, until they were convinced that there was really nothing they could do, and decided to depart. Malatesta rode by horse for Gallegos River, with the thought of securing a steamboat there for the comrades who preferred to stay put and wait for it to pass by Cabo Virgenes some days later. The steamer arrived, but didn’t wait. The news *broke* on the coast, and the boat turned to get underway while the four comrades, *still distant*, ran towards the beach. *Then* Galileo Palla dove into the water, in that almost frozen sea, and swam towards the steamer while the rest

waved a shirt and shouted. The steamer stopped, threw a launch into the water to recover Palla and took him on board. But once there, the captain refused to look for the other three; and then, Palla, though still soaked and stiff with cold, *made ready* to throw himself into the water again and return to his comrades. He was forcefully pinned down, but he made so much noise and yelled so that the passengers were moved and *obliged* the captain to send a launch in search of the rest.<sup>29</sup> When the steamer arrived at Gallegos River, Malatesta—who had lived there for that time working as a [mozo de cuerda]—also boarded the boat, meeting the comrades who had left fifteen days earlier, and together they proceeded to Patagonia, where they were *let off* like *shipwrecks*. And when the next steamer left Patagonia for Buenos Aires, they all returned to the Argentine capital.

After this tormentuous parenthesis, Malatesta resumed his earlier life and, *save* a brief escape to the neighboring Montevideo in Uruguay, stayed in Argentina until the middle of 1889. Shortly before he left, the daily papers made a fuss over him, naming him the chief of a band of counterfeiters.

Italian police would take advantage of this incident during the trial against him in Ancona (1898), but the truth was soon unearthed. Galileo Palla had been arrested by the police, and in a *break-in* they had found a false Argentine bill. Given that he was known as an anarchist and as Malatesta's friend, the police organs insinuated that he and Natta had made false money. But it all came to an end there. Recognizing Palla's good faith and innocence, he was set free and nothing was started against Malatesta and Natta, the latter remaining in Argentina for years. Malatesta departed soon after (in late 1889). The previous year, Cesare Agostinelli had gone to Italy and upon returned to his Ancona, he founded the anarchist paper *The Free Pact* (*Il libero patto*, 1888–1889).

### ***L'Associazione* in Nice and London (1889–90). — Congress in Capolago. — In Switzerland, France, Belgium and Spain. — The Italian movements of 1891 and 1894. — International Socialist Workers' Congress in London. — *L'Anarchia* (1896).**

By 1889, Malatesta found himself in Nice, and the first issue of *Association* (*L'Associazione*) was published on October 10<sup>th</sup>. The paper's platform and intention were to *found* an international socialist anarchist revolutionary party, [preconizando] resting on agreement, mutual support, and reciprocal understanding between anarchism's diverse schools. He was especially interested in bringing communist and collectivist anarchists closer together, [the latter?] who were still a majority in Spain at the time.

He couldn't stay in Nice long due to his expulsion from France ten years earlier. When he used the pages of *Association*<sup>30</sup> to unmask the old spy Terzaghi, revealing that he had renewed his nefarious work from Geneva under the false name of Azzati, the French police hunted for Malatesta, but before they found him, he had taken refuge in London. After three issues of his paper were written in Nice, another four were released in London. *Association* had to be shut down after issue 7 (January 23, 1890) because a *foul* comrade, *one* Cioci, disappeared one day and took all of the paper's money with him.

It was a great shame, since *Association* had been *perfectly* [*mucho esmero*] edited and full of interesting material. Merlino had also collaborated in it. He published noteworthy writings about parliamentarianism, the *choices of* protest, communism and collectivism, organization, the practice of theft, etc.

Malatesta, who had in the meantime set up his usual small mechanic's shop in the neighborhood of Islington, didn't lose his spirit. He published a series of pamphlets, including the definitive edition of *Among Farmers (Fra Contadini)* and the first edition of *Anarchy (L'Anarchia)*, and returned to writing for Italian and French anarchist papers. Most of all, he worked to establish relationships with Italian comrades, and *give a stronger push* to the movement on the peninsula. One result of this thrust of *organizing work* was that comrades decided to arrange an Italian anarchist congress the following year.

These were the first years of international First of May demonstrations and they had developed a strong revolutionary character *everywhere*. Sensational events were anticipated, especially in Paris, so Malatesta left for that city at the end of April 1890 in the hope of being able to participate in a serious movement. A later, critical article<sup>31</sup> clarifies his intent, or at least what he believed he would be able to do, and what he certainly would have advised comrades to do: encourage great demonstrations in the streets, and use the occasion to *take* all of the anarchists and *a part* of the demonstrators a few of the *richest* [altos] neighborhoods of Paris, such as Monmartre or Belleville. *using the fact* that all of the police forces would be concentrated in the area of the Seine, and it would be possible to entrench themselves in those [popular] neighborhoods, raising barricades and defending themselves. Perhaps they wouldn't have controlled the *battlefield* more than a few days or hours, but meanwhile the expropriation could begin and the masses would see it, deeds which would serve as windows to the revolution. Given the situation in France and Europe at the time, it would have made an enormous impression and been tremendous propaganda. Malatesta's hopes weren't realized, however, and he returned to London days later.

We owe Malatesta's *pen* for a long and energetic abstentionist manifesto published in November 1890, on the occasion of general elections in Italy. It was a type of "declaration of war" and "war to the death" to the Italian *dominators*, signed "[por encargo] by charge [?] of anarchist groups and Federations" by seventy comrades residing abroad, among which *are found the names*, aside from Malatesta's, of the most famous comrades of that time: Luigi Galleani, Saverio Merlino, Amilcare Cipriani, Nicolo Converti, Francesco Cini, Galileo Palla, Attilio Panizza, and others.<sup>32</sup> In *those times* Malatesta clandestinely went to Paris, while Amilcare Cipriani and Andrea Costa were both there. *Through* Cipriani's *intervention then*, Malatesta *made up* with Costa, with whom he had violently broken off all relations around 1880, when Costa abandoned his principles, but their reconciliation was very superficial.

Preparations for the Italian congress *continued*, and it was decided that it would be held in the Ticino canton. Publicly it would be held January 11, 1891 in Lugano, and socialists of every *current* were invited to participate. (There was still *no permanent* separation between anarchists and socialists, despite their deep theoretical and practical disagreement; the so-called official separation occurred in Italy at the Genoa *conference* of 1892, and in the series of *international conferences* in London, 1896.) The work of *local preparation* in Lugano had been done by Attilio Panizza, Francesco Cini and Antonia Cagliardi. Cini was arrested and expelled due to an incident provoked by the police, and Amilcare Cipriani, who *at that moment* declared himself an anarchist, was to substitute for him. The Swiss police were alarmed and all the European police agencies sent their agents to Lugano. At the last moment, the congress was outlawed and an announcement



made that any congress-goers who had previously been expelled from Switzerland would be arrested. But on the day of January 7, word spread that the congress had already been held, in Capolago, and had completed its work. It had lasted three days (January 4, 5, and 6) and many delegates had participated, among them Cipriani, Malatesta, Merlino, Gori, Molinari, and Luigi Pezzi (Galleani was arrested during the trip).

The anarchist position *triumphed* at the congress (barely two or three socialists attended, and remained spectators *moreover*) along the lines Malatesta had already sustained in *Association* while in London. Their resolutions were published in a pamphlet, and also in *The New Society* (*La Société Nouvelle*, Brussels), [*illustrated*] by Merlino. The most important two resolutions were: the constitution of a revolutionary socialist anarchist organization in Italy, and the preparation of great demonstrations in every city for the next First of May. Agreements were secretly made to try to give those demonstrations an insurrectionary impulse. After the congress, despite investigations made by the Swiss police, Malatesta slipped away and departed like all the rest. He returned to London without inconvenience, and was still *there* in March, since the 18<sup>th</sup> commemorated the Paris Commune.

*In consequence* of the agreements made in Capolago, Cipriani began a tour of conferences and meetings a *little later* in central and southern Italy, which concluded with the great meeting of Rome on the First of May, in the Santa Croce plaza in Gerusalemme (), *ended* — as you will recall — tragically and with the arrests of Cipriani and a number of other comrades. *Grave* events also took place in Florence that day. Malatesta had clandestinely arrived in Italy in April and was there until some time after the events. He visited northern Italy and part of the central regions. I don't know whether he was in Rome or Florence on the First of May. He stopped for some time in Carrara, where there was, *and had been for a long time*, a powerful anarchist nucleus ready for action. When he abandoned Italy for Switzerland, he stopped in Lugano, in Isaia Pacini's house where, tipped off by an Italian spy, the Swiss police finally managed to detain him (July 22, 1891).<sup>33</sup>

Tried for violating the expulsion, he was sentenced to 45 days in jail, at the end of which he was kept in prison because the Italian government had in the meantime asked his extradition. The pretext was that Malatesta had organized the Capolago conference, that the events of May 1<sup>st</sup> had been decided there, and that these were ordinary criminal deeds. *But* the federal tribunal of Lausana denied the extradition with a ruling that *was a slap* to the Italian government. It said, at a certain point: "The Italian government pretends that Malatesta and his companions are ne'er-do-wells, which obscures the political nature of their crimes; rather, these very documents sent by the Italian government turn out to deal with its political enemies, those who it wants to get rid of, slandering them as evildoers." But the satisfaction that might have given him didn't prevent Malatesta from serving another 45 days of jail for it, three months in all, after which he returned to his London refuge.

He must have left London shortly after that, because at the end of the year and the beginning of 1892 he was in Spain; first in Barcelona, where he stayed some time and wrote for *El Productor* (*The Producer*)— in it he had a debate with P. Schicci, who then wrote for the *Porvenir anarquista* (*Anarchist Future*), which tended to be anti-organizational — then in Madrid, Andalusia, and so on, holding a tour of conferences together with Pedro Esteve. He was still there when on January 6, 1892 the Jerez revolt of the Border broke out, which was suffocated in blood. The Spanish police, who suspected his hand in events, hunted for him frenetically, but he disappeared and arrived in London a few days later.

In those years, 1891–92, Malatesta waged long, heated, and sometimes rough debates with anarchists who disagreed with him on the the broadest range of questions: organization, syndicates, morality, assassinations, and so on. At the time of the Capolago conference, *Le Révolté* criticized him bitterly as well. In London, violent manifestos were issued against Malatesta, Merlino, Cipriani, and others. In Paris some sheets entitled *Il Pugnale (The Dagger)* appeared *in the same tone*. Those discussions naturally had repercussions in Italy and continued for a while. To support his ideas, Malatesta wrote many articles in several papers (*La Révolté* and *En-dehors* of Paris<sup>34</sup>, *La Campana* of Macerata, *La Propaganda* of Imola, and more). An interview with Malatesta about the assassinations appeared in *Le Figaro* of Paris. He also gave conferences on these arguments, and had spoken discussions in London's anarchist clubs. He exercised more than a small influence in that period, from 1892 to 1895, over the French anarchists living in London during the persecutions which followed the frequent assassinations of those years. This influence is also responsible for the impetus with which some refugees who returned to France gave themselves over to a methodical work of penetrating the labor movement.

But he continued to interrupt his stay in London, where he always worked as a mechanic, with secret escapes to the Continent, any time the chance for a popular revolutionary movement presented itself. Though he had been banned from Belgium since 1880, he went there with Carlo Malato in 1893<sup>35</sup> during the big socialist labor agitation for universal suffrage. It ended in a general strike that at one point looked like it would become a revolution. Amilcare Cipriani was also there, but for his job. The next year, 1894, during the more or less socialist movements in Sicily, and the insurrectionary anarchist *attempt* of Carrara, he was again *clandestinely* in Italy — this time in concert with Saverio Merlino, Carlos Malato and Amilcare Cipriani, but each in different, determined areas — visiting the greater part of the northern and central peninsula. He spent a few days in Ancona as well, where he edited an issue or two of the anarchist paper *L'Art. 248 (Article 248\*)* which was published there, and the pamphlet *Il Commercio (Commerce)*. The Italian police knew he was nearby, all the papers *spoke of it*, he was hunted ferociously, *but after being where he wanted to be* (in Milan, meeting with Filippo Turati), and after the unfortunate end of the movements, returned to London unscathed. Cipriani and Malato likewise made it to Paris, but a spy denounced Saverio Merlino and he was detained in Naples.

From mid-1894 to early 1896 there was a period of strong reaction against anarchists in almost all of Europe, and its press fell silent almost everywhere for more than a year. It was still possible to do something in England, and many refugees took shelter in London, especially those from Italy (Gori, Edoardo Milano) and France (Emile Pouget, Guernieau, Malato, and more). The house and the business of the Defendi couple, where Malatesta lived, 112 High Street in Islington, was a convergence point for everyone that arrived in London. How many stormy and brotherly discussions were had in the little kitchen *through?* the grocery store of the good Defendi family, that served an an Athenaeum! And how many projects, hopes, sorrows... The French police had marked that address at all the post offices, in order to seize all the mail sent there.

It was amidst the strong number of anarchist refugees from various countries in the British capital, that a *regular?* and well-organized *intervention* was *concerted* in the latter half of 1895, agreed upon by all the English comrades, of the anarchist forces and workers of a more liberatory and revolutionary bent, in the next international socialist labor Congress that would be held in London the following year. Malatesta was one of the most active authors of the ensuing preparations: he wrote a long manifesto, solicited an envoy of delegates and delegations for the comrades in London, made propaganda among the English elements, including those who

weren't anarchist, and so on. The hope that many at the conference would affirm their anarchism, even if they weren't quite a majority was made possible by the libertarian stance taken by many French syndicates, under the urging of F. Pelloutier, Pouget and Tortelier; *by the determination* of a strong anarchist current among the nucleus of German socialists that followed Landaver; by the anti-Marxist tendencies of some English socialists, like William Morris, Tom Mann and Keir Hardie; by the prevalence of libratory socialism in Holland, with Domela Nieuwenhuis; by the Germanist faction of French socialism; and so on. Such that, when in July (from July 27 to August 1, 1896) the congress met in London, the social democrats and Marxists would *only* have a majority because of the great number of its German, Belgian, and English delegates, and because of the largely fictitious representations and delegations which had arrived from the most distant and tiny places.

Malatesta played a *notable* part at the congress<sup>36</sup>. He was one of the few anarchist orators who managed to impose and make himself heard, despite the systematic and noisy *obstructionism* of the disciplined Marxist majority. He was the delegate for most of the libertarian Spanish workers' associations (who weren't able to send their own representatives due to the reaction), for some Italian anarchist groups, and for a French syndicate. Fernand Pelloutier was the delegate of the Italian Bureaus of Labor; Pietro Gori, of Italian groups and workers' societies of North America. Regardless, the Marxist majority imposed itself and easily managed to vote the *definitive* exclusion of the anarchists, of the anti-parliamentary socialists and all the labor unions that didn't accept the *conquest of the public powers*, from future international socialist congresses. Malatesta wrote a lively tale of the Congress's sessions in two or three articles for the *Italia del Popolo*, a republican daily of Milan, and summarized his ideas *to that respect* in the pamphlet *L'Anarchia*, which he published after the congress (Longon, August 1896).<sup>37</sup>

*This* pamphlet *L'Anarchia*, beyond specifying the position of anarchism and socialism, in contrast to social democracy, also aimed to reaffirm anarchism's *socialist* and humane character in contrast to its individualist *tendencies*, to defend the practice of anarchist and labor organization and to *react* against the amoral and *inconsiderate tendencies* of some *forms of* anarchist propaganda and activity. *That publication* was very influential *over* the Italian anarchist movement, and *it can be said that* it laid the foundation for a well-defined and methodical *orientation*, which Malatesta himself would go to Italy and personally propagate and defend shortly afterwards.

### **Hidden in Italy. — “L’Agitazione” of Ancona (1897–98). — Italian movements in 1898. — Arrest, trial and verdict. — Jail and “domicilio coatto.” — Escape. — “La Questione Sociale” of Paterson (1899–1900).**

Only a few months later, in March of 1897, Malatesta was underground in Ancona, Italy once again, this time to publish a new paper: *L'Agitazione*. About a month after his arrival I had the great pleasure of seeing him for the first time, as I have related in the Introduction. His 1884 sentence would be enforced within a few weeks, but he arrived with the urgent desire to quickly dam the devastation threatened by Saverio Merlino's recent shift towards parliamentary socialism.

Merlino's extraordinary ingenuity and learning, his obvious good faith, and the influence of his name made the menace that much more dangerous. Malatesta didn't hesitate to take a stand

against his old friend and comrade, though preserving the utmost calm and cordiality in the argument they held. A brief discussion between the two had already taken place through public letters in a popular Roman daily,<sup>38</sup> and it was pursued at length in *L'Agitazione*, in the first issue (March 14, 1897), and all through that year. When the controversy ceased, its effects were evident. Almost no anarchists followed Merlino—the *only* notable exception was the young lawyer Genuzio Bentini, who later became one of the most eloquent socialist representatives. Merlino remained isolated, too revolutionary, eclectic and independent to be accepted in the socialist scene, but too legislative for the anarchists although they continued to remain on the most friendly terms until his death. Malatesta gave Merlino *the widest* freedom to develop his ideas in *L'Agitazione* that year, and, naturally, refuted him in the most *complete fashion*.

The need to remain hidden made practical action and public propaganda next to impossible, but this didn't *take away* from his intellectual work. The new paper, which I believe has been the most historically and theoretically important of those which Malatesta has edited, had more the character of a magazine than a broadsheet, and its impressiveness brought it to the immediate attention of both comrades and adversaries. Due to his influence, more than a few new members, *especially* socialists, *crossed* to the anarchist camp: among others, Giuseppe Ciancabilla, editor of *Avanti!*, and Mamolo Zamboni of Bologna (father of the Anteo Zamboni who made an attempt on Mussolini's life in October of 1926). It was *L'Agitazione*, in conjunction with the activity he stirred up at conferences, which ignited an anarchist movement of coherent ideas and deeds in Italy, never nearsightedly absorbed in the moment.

The ideas and tactics that Malatesta proposed in this paper were the same as those expressed in the first issue ? of *L'Anarchia* in London. In that he had emphasized a critique of Marxism and individualism, he reacted against Kropotkin's tendencies towards harmony and spontaneity — though without polemizing against him directly, and almost without naming him—he insisted on the necessity of organizing anarchism into a party, and of propagating the first wave of syndicalism and direct action in Italy.<sup>39</sup> The language he used to argue propaganda and critique the active institutions was serene, completely devoid of verbal violence and rhetoric. There were comrades who reproached him at the time for being “too English,” but he replied that he preferred to speak in a way that would be accepted and understood by the public, rather than writing in a grating fashion that would only appeal to the converted, distancing him from the people or provoking the seizure of the paper. That would be the same as not saying anything. In *L'Agitazione* he experimentally showed how the most transgressive and audacious things could be said with the least violent and most reasonable words.

The tone of the paper and its rapidly rising popularity worried the Italian government. Its agents had already discovered that Malatesta had disappeared from the outskirts of London and they began to suspect that he was in Ancona or a suburb. A cloud of spies, in the most assorted and comical disguises, fell upon the little city. All over the province of Marcas they barged into the houses of old internationalists and they seized days worth of the paper's correspondence, but in vain. Surprisingly, Malatesta rarely hid himself physically. The only precaution he took was to leave the house alone and never in the company of other anarchists. At times known rivals would stumble across him, and he didn't refrain from holding several conferences in the area (including the cities of Iesi, Fabbriano, Porto S. Giorgio, and Foligno), where he simply presented himself by the name of Giuseppe Rinaldi. A bit later he published a letter in *L'Agitazione* pretending to be written from a distant little Italian city, in which he protested against the snooping police. In it he acknowledged that he had been in Italy all along, but wrote that he was avoiding public attention

in order to stay out of prison, since the old sentence from Rome was still a threat regardless of whatever right he had to be left in peace.

In the end, after nine months of remaining hidden, he was discovered by chance in November. To unearth the secret of her husband's mysterious visits, a woman went to the house where Malatesta had been living, 24 via Podesta. Ignorant of everything, she believed he had been seeing another woman who lived on the top floor of the building, and got in her face on the street. The offended neighbor shouted that the woman's husband had been seeing "someone hidden." It was a small scandal and a meeting was held. That night his friends advised Malatesta to quickly change houses; but he chose not to. He preferred to face whatever would come. The next morning police went to the house and had to do no more than push an open door to find an unknown man writing at a table, in the middle of a mass of books and periodicals. He immediately told them who he was and was arrested, then taken to the precinct with a pile of his letters; but a few hours later, and with only brief explanations to his interrogator, everything was given back to him and he was left free.

Then, able to move about with liberty, he took a more active part in the movement. He multiplied his lectures in the city and province, held debates with speakers from other parties, organized meetings, and so on. Sadly, it would be for only a short time. In January, the riots over the steeply rising price of bread began in the South and eventually propagated to the province of Marcas, and later engulfed all of Italy for about half a year. During a popular demonstration on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, Malatesta was arrested with a group of comrades on a city street. Also arrested were Adelmo Smorti, the administrator of *L'Agitazione*, Felicioli, Bersaglia, and others. In great numbers they were subjected to trial for the crime of "criminal association." There was a novel development in this trial: until then anarchists brought to trial regularly denied the fact of being organized, entrenching themselves well in a conception of anti-organization, but Malatesta and his comrades declared themselves to be organized, reclaiming the right of anarchists to associate in a party.

This sparked an agitation in all of Italy "for the freedom of association," promoted by the Socialist Anarchist Federation of Rome, and conducted with fervor through the columns of *L'Agitazione*, which continued printing despite the repeated seizures and the successive arrests of the various editors who arrived from abroad to take charge of the work (Vivaldo Lacchini, Nino Samaja, Luigi Fabbri). More than three thousand comrades, in the name of an infinitude of anarchist groups and circles, pressed a public manifesto — in which they declared their faith, affirmed their association as a party and their total solidarity with those on trial in Ancona. The protest spilled across the borders. Comrades and sympathizers of other European countries and famous members of other popular parties were associated with it, among the first [?] Giovanni Bovio.

The trial became a true civil war for public liberties, aside from being like so many others an optimal medium for anarchist propaganda. The sessions took place before the Correctional Tribunal of Ancona from April 21 to 28; they were rich in incidents, the accused making energetic declarations, and finally Malatesta making a self-defense that moved everyone. Numerous witnesses spoke in favor of those on trial and of the freedom of thought and association, including Enrico Ferri, Saverio Merlino, and Pietro Gori, the latter making use of the occasion to give one of his captivating conferences in defense of the anarchist ideal. Despite all of this, the desired acquittal was not obtained; Malatesta was sentenced to seven months of detention, Smorti, Felicioli, Panfichi, Petrosino, Bellavigna, Baiocchi and Bersaglia to six months, and Cerusici was acquitted.

This time, as had also taken place in the trial against Malatesta, Merlino and comrades in 1884, the representative of the prosecution paid homage to the personal honesty of the accused, who had become “delinquents” only by the fact of being organized. The public Minister said more regarding the morality of the accused: he noted with prestige That when Malatesta’s propaganda had begun in Ancona, there had been a noticeable drop in delinquency in the city, especially disputes, violent acts, drunkenness, and things of that sort. But, he added, delinquency had diminished only because much more grave things were in the works! For this reason, the sentences were handed out, however not the tributes for the official accuser...

However, from a political point of view this verdict was a victory because the accusation of “criminal association” had been ruled out, radically changing Italian jurisprudence with regard to the anarchist associations, which were not yet considered to be composed of evildoers, but merely subversives. It was also a benefit materially, since criminal association could imply sentences of up to five years of seclusion [?] and seven for the leaders, or supposed leaders, while seditious association couldn’t receive more than a maximum of 18 months of detention. The verdict was later confirmed in appeal and in and therefore became definite.

During Malatesta’s time in prison the popular disturbances had been communicated from the South to the North of Italy; a few days after the trial, May 8 (1896), there were outbursts in Milan more violent than the previous, followed by a fierce repression with much death and injury. The reaction unleashed on all Italy was of the most implacable type. *L’Agitazione* was suppressed and the few editors who remained free either were detained or fled. The Parliament approved extraordinary laws, *domicilio coatto* was overhauled and outfitted with worse systems than before. Malatesta should have been freed in mid-August and the rest a month earlier, but they were all kept in jail and condemned to five years of *domicilio coatto* on the islands. Malatesta was transported to Ustica, later arriving on Lampedusa.

He wasn’t on the island for long. The idea of escape presented itself immediately and spontaneously, faced with the Mediterranean, while on that type of sterile and inhospitable boulder he felt that he passed his days bored and useless. His transport from Ustica to Lampedusa was motivated precisely by the government’s fear of an escape, easier from the first than the second island. Instead, in Lampedusa the task was easier thanks to a circumstance similar to his friendship with the director of the Trani jail in 1874. Malatesta inspired such a vivid [?] sympathy in the head of the penal colony that he told him and the other political prisoners about all the favorable conditions, closing his eyes to everything. Many deportees lived outside their destined places of captivity, had correspondence with the mainland, and made excursions to the interior of the island. The preparations for escape were made with ease. I know he was also helped by the socialist Oddino Morgari, who visited the colony once in his capacity as Parliamentary representative. The truth is that on the night of May 9<sup>th</sup> (1899), in the most total darkness and a choppy sea, Malatesta, the comrade Vivoli from Florence, and a fellow prisoner swam to a fishing boat which (the Sicilian socialist Lovetere on board) they hoped would take them away, and once aboard they set course for Malta.

The director of the colony still didn’t know of the escape, when the following day a government inspector arrived on the island. It appears that some word of Malatesta’s projects had already reached Rome. The inspector asked to see Malatesta, but... Malatesta couldn’t be found. In a word: the flight was discovered and the news telegraphed to Rome and Girgenti. New prisoners were arrested, friends and comrades of Malatesta suspected of complicity, and the directory of the colony quit a few days later. Those arrested and transferred from Lampedusa to Girgenti, finding

themselves in the jails of this city, received a visit one day from the ex-director who wanted to say hello. He shared their joy over Malatesta's escape, only exclaiming with bitter sorrow and almost with tears in his eyes, "Malatesta had no trust in me; if he had told me, I would have escaped with him, too!"

Malatesta arrived in Malta. He was there eight days waiting for the boat which would take him to England, and some time later he was in London, in his old lodgings in the neighborhood of Islington.<sup>40</sup> He didn't stay long. Accepting invitations which came from North America, in particular from his old Spanish friend Pedro Esteve who lived in Paterson, N.J., he conceded to go and spend a few months propagandizing in the United States. By August he was in Paterson.

Nettlau recalls in his book that while Malatesta was a prisoner on the island, socialists and republicans proposed to make him a candidate in the communal elections to oblige the government to free him; but he refused energetically with a letter to the *Avanti!* of Rome (January 21, 1899). Saverio Merlino, who perhaps consulted with the socialists and republicans who made that proposition, tried it again in May after the jailbreak; but Malatesta protested again with a letter to Jean Grave from London (*Les Temps Nouveaux*, Paris, June 9).

In Paterson, N.J. the anarchist paper *La Questione Sociale* had been published since 1895 with a communist anarchist program in the name of the group "Diritto all'Esistenza" (Right to Existence). But it had been entrusted to Giuseppe Ciancabilla since 1898, who abroad and during his stay in Paris had turned little by little towards anti-organizational individualism. The paper changed its orientation some, but the Diritto all'Esistenza group remained faithful to their original program. When Malatesta arrived in Paterson, the contrast between the group and the paper became more acute; in a meeting it was decided by eighty votes against three that the paper remain faithful to the original organizational program; Ciancabilla retired and founded another paper in West Hoboken, *L'Aurora*. *La Questione Sociale* was then entrusted to Malatesta, who enlarged the format and gave it his usual personal touch.

*La Questione Sociale* under the editorship of Malatesta was like a continuation of *L'Agitazione*. As was inevitable, in several issues it sustained an animated debate against *L'Aurora*, and the divergence of ideas assumed a personal character for a moment, due to the special temperament of Ciancabilla and maybe that of Malatesta. It was during this debate, and as an unintended consequence of it, that during a conference, in the heat of discussion, Malatesta was shot with a revolver and lightly wounded in the leg. But Malatesta energetically refused to give importance and continuity [?] to the incident; he didn't speak of it in the paper, and when distant friends insisted on making vehement protests, he intervened with these simple words, in an impersonal way: "The comrade Errico Malatesta — seeing the protests that are published in the Italian papers, in addition to those that were sent directly to us, regarding the little disgrace that occurred to him and which we believe isn't worth the pain of discussion — thanks the friends who have wanted to express their sympathies in this manner, but begs them... to cease."<sup>41</sup>

During his stay in the U.S. he gave numerous propaganda conferences in Italian and Spanish in the most important cities from the Atlantic to the Pacific, sustained various arguments, including several with the socialist representative Dino Rodani. In the paper that he edited, he published some essays on theory and tactics, some of fundamental importance, which were translated and reprinted more than once in other countries. Notable among these was a series of articles on "Il nostro programma" (Our Program) that he used later in 1920 while in charge of editing the program of the Italian Anarchic Union in Bologna. But personal reasons soon decided his return to London.

Before going back to England traveled to Cuba to give a few conferences. He arrived February 27, 1900, and gave the first conference on March 1 in the Workers' Circle. The local government had prohibited it, and only at the last moment allowed it on the condition that the subject of anarchism not be treated. Malatesta made a complete exposition of his anarchist principles without ever using the word "anarchy," and at the very end, ironically pointing to where the government delegate was seated, said, "As you can see, since there wasn't any other choice, I have spoken of everything but anarchy." He gave three other conferences, evading the governmental prohibitions as he could, but these were finally so constraining that Malatesta decided to leave, and embarked once again for New York on March 10.<sup>42</sup>

In April, he was in London.

### **A worker's life in London (1900–13). — Papers and pamphlets. — Anarchist congress in Amsterdam (1907). — In prison in London. — Return to Italy (1913).**

After his departure from the United States, Malatesta remained in England for thirteen years without interruption, save for brief trips to the continent.

In the year of his return, July 29, 1900, King Umberto I was shot to death with a revolver in Monza park by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci. He had come from America expressly to avenge, in the person of the monarch, the victims of the war in Africa and the workers massacred from 1894 to 1898. He hoped to put an end to the anti-liberal and reactionary regime that oppressed Italy, for which the king carried the greatest responsibility, and he tried to push Italians to rebellion by the example he set.

It was recognized later, in articles by Enrico Ferri, Filippo Turati and others, that the assassination made the Italian situation much more democratic. At the time, however, the deed brought on stupid shows of feigned pity and [pageantry] love for the dead monarch, in reaction to which Malatesta — who had known Bresci in Paterson and become his good friend<sup>43</sup> — published a pamphlet in defense of the hero of Prato, *Cause ed Effetti* (London, September 1900), explaining his gesture as a logical "effect" of the "cause" embodied in the tyrannical and bloody monarchy.

In London, naturally, he took up work as a mechanic (he was an electrician as well now) in his little workshop in Islington, close to his apartment. As I have already had the occasion to say, work absorbed the majority of his time and above all exhausted him, in a way that left little to dedicate to his constant and continual intellectual work. He would also devote his nights to giving lessons in Italian, French, and general culture to any student that fell on him, to supplement the miserable earnings of his manual labor. Moreover, he dedicated much of his time to following the intellectual currents, not only of the particulars of anarchist practice and ideology of different countries, but also of the developments in contemporary scientific and philosophical thought, which he paid attention to with great interest. Nothing was foreign or uninspiring to him, and as an electrical mechanic he wasn't content with the day-to-day work which his clients engaged him in, but through books and magazines tried to extend his knowledge more and more.

The idealist and the combatant, however, were always alive in him, even when his interests lay in things that appeared furthest from the object of his dominant passions of a revolutionary and anarchist. In the various currents of contemporary thought he always found new arguments to



support his own ideas, and these ideas grew fresher. In the progress of mechanics, physics and chemistry he looked for weapons that could give the revolution ways to confront the dominant class's formidable arsenal of death and destruction. But he didn't exaggerate the importance of his knowledge. He saw things as they were, finding what little use he could take from them and leaving the rest aside. For example, it was during this stay in London that he diligently cultivated Esperanto, without believing in any way that grandiose results would come of it. He contented himself with being able to, by the medium of Esperanto, have friendships with comrades of the furthest countries, where the differences in language had impeded all correspondence.

Neither the everyday work, nor the necessities of life, nor the constant study that was indispensable to his intellect prevented him from doing what he could for propaganda and for the movement, however tightly poverty constrained the means of his activity. Always remaining in contact with the English movement and the few Italian comrades in London, he contributed from time to time to the papers of different languages and followed the events of Italy with passion.<sup>44</sup> In 1901 he founded, with a group of comrades, the publication *L'Internazionale*, of which only four issues were printed; in 1902 *Lo Sciopero Generale (General Strike)*, in Italian and French (three issues) and *La Rivoluzione Sociale* (nine issues); in 1905, *L'Insurrezione*.<sup>45</sup>

He also shared the hopes of many anarchists of that time about the development that direct action labor syndicalism had taken in France, of which he had been a precursor, in a certain way, since 1890. [?] In 1906 this movement was at its apogee and anarchists exercised a preponderant influence in it. On the eve of the First of May it was dreamt that the French working class, especially in Paris, would take the opportunity of the traditional demonstration to take to the streets and openly wage battle for the eight-hour day. Malatesta was then hidden in Paris and stayed there until the next day. He published a pamphlet in Italian, *L'Emancipazione*, to which Cipriani, Malato, Felice, Vezzani and others also contributed. It didn't create many illusions: "this movement will not mark," it said, "a great conquest, maybe it won't even be a great battle, but at least we hope that there is a big demonstration and a great experiment that will bear fruit for futurity."

But he returned to London disappointed. At the year's end, invited by Malatesta and charged by a group of Italian comrades from North America, I went to London and stayed in his house for a week in December, 1906. I slept in an improvised bed at his side, and as can be imagined the conversations stretched across day and night. He had taken a week-long vacation from work, and could spend the entire time with me. What surprised me most was his diminished faith in the syndicalist movement, which had been so great in 1897 and later. Paris had given him the impression that syndicalism was already in a declining phase and that it followed was decreasing rather than bolstering the liveliness of the anarchist element. Above all he had the impression that the fighters' beautiful tempers had immobilized them and put them in positions of responsibility and leadership within the syndical organizations; and that on the other hand, the hostility of the revolutionaries found gory and violent expression only against the pettiest little wheels of state machinery, the police and urban guards, or against the unknown strike-breaking scabs, while they never took action against those most responsible, or against the capitalists, who they instead went and discussed with in a friendly way, with hat in hand.

"Imagine," he said, "that on the First of May, in a demonstration, the police chief Lepine accidentally found himself somewhere in Paris, lost and separated from his agents in the middle of a crowd. They didn't touch a hair; people encircled him respectfully and even cleared the street

so that he could retake it with his people. If it would have been a poor isolated agent or a scab, they would have obliterated him with blows.”

I didn't share his opinion yet, maybe because in Italy revolutionary syndicalism was still in its ascendant phase and it allowed me many illusions; but three or four years later I saw that his previsions had been realized there as well.

More, he told me of his fear that the spirit of rebellion was fading among Italian anarchists as well, indicated by their tendency to take the easiest roads, though without falling in a true and proper incoherence with their principles. “Syndicates, groups, federations, strikes, conferences, demonstrations, and cultural initiatives — yes, they are all beautiful things and also necessary, but all this becomes useless without the fight and the direct and active takeovers, without concrete revolutionary deeds. These deeds may ask grave sacrifices and may seem to ruin for the moment the practical work and particularly sympathetic initiatives, but are those which keep open the doors of futurity and of real victory.” One day when we were talking in his little room, I saw a manuscript of his on the table about “Anarchists and violence.” Knowing his ideas on the debate, I asked if he would have it published. “No,” he responded, “this isn't the moment. Today it seems to me that anarchists suffer from the opposite defect of the violent excesses that occupied me in this article. It's better to react now against the tendencies towards accommodation and living quietly that are showing in our environments. Now it's more urgent to resuscitate the revolutionary passion that lies languishing, the spirit of sacrifice, the love of risk.” About all this I found myself in total agreement with him.<sup>46</sup>

I remember that, a few months after Mateo Morral's *attentat* against the king of Spain in Madrid, Malatesta told me that the editor of an important and reactionary English daily insisted on tearing an interview from him, or at least a few words denouncing the act. Malatesta had refused: “You are enemies, and explanations aren't given to enemies.” Since the editor was insistent and kept talking of the innocent people hit by shrapnel, Malatesta at some point grew impatient and interrupted him, “Honestly, that poor gentleman wounded to death was without exception innocent.” The journalist, on leaving, said to him, “It's alright that you haven't wanted to concede me an interview; but I have already done it, and I'll publish it just the same.” “Believe interviews now!”, Malatesta concluded.

I returned to Italy as if it were a bath of enthusiasm and faith. Malatesta had promised me, that he would soon return with us, work on our papers, and so on, and I therefore went to several Italian cities in preparation. But I wouldn't succeed in persuading many people about the projects that had been suggested, and the circumstances Malatesta believed indispensable for his return to not be in vain would wait many years yet. Another reason that he didn't move from London was to make it easier to attend the next year's international anarchist Congress in Amsterdam, which was held from the 24 to the 31 of August, 1907.

At that congress, Malatesta played a crucial part, with noteworthy discourses, including some on anarchist and syndicalist organization, which helped a position equally distant from individualist exaggerations and syndical unilateralism gain prevalence.

He argued in particular with Pierro Monatte, exponent of the syndicalist current.

Having gone to the congress myself, together with the late comrade Aristide Ceccarelli, who I had the pleasure of spending the seven days with. (I remember his brother was with him, a shopkeeper in Egypt, then traveling and only at the conference by chance since he wasn't a comrade.) At the congress, when I went to vote on syndicalism I signed a different motion than theirs (Monatte, Duvois, etc), however I later also gave the vote to them, for it didn't seem to

completely contrast with what I preferred. On that occasion Malatesta gave me an interview, this one authentic, for an Italian paper. I lived for journalism then, and they had asked me for some articles about the congress, helping me earn part of the trip's expenses. The interview was published upon my return in *Il Giornale d'Italia* of Rome (I don't remember the date).

Malatesta wrote a long account of the congress, summarizing and making commentaries, expounding his ideas on the most important arguments, in *Les Temps Nouveaux* of Paris.<sup>47</sup> In similar articles he discussed syndicalism in *Freedom* of London and *Il Risveglio* of Geneva (1908 and 1909). In Amsterdam he had been named a member of the Correspondence Commission of the "Anarchist International" that he had dreamt up with R. Rocker, A. Schapiro, J. Turner, and G. Wilquet, its headquarters to be in London. But the comrades of various countries, more worried about the internal movements of each one of their nations, sadly didn't take the international project seriously, and so little by little the function of the "Bureau" of London ceased.

Max Nettlau describes in his book the years of Malatesta's life which follow in minute enough detail; his relationships with Kropotkin, Tcherkesoff, Tarrida of Mármol, E. Recchioni, Arnold Rollor, and more. He notes that in this period Malatesta began to feel the weight of age, together with the hazards of his profession. He once cut his hand while working badly enough that it was a wonder he avoided a blood infection. Often he would have to install ducting for gas and electricity, making repairs, and was frequently obliged to work in cold places, exposed to wind and sometimes laying on the freezing pavement. This started another attack of pulmonary inflammation that put him in danger of death some weeks; and if he was saved it was only by the attentions of his guests, especially the woman of Defendi, who took the most careful and incessant care of him.

In December of 1910 Malatesta had an adventure as unpleasant as involuntary, that could have serious consequences for him, even without his cold blood and the general opinion of his health's eventual consequences. He had permitted a Russian terrorist from Letonia to work for his wages in Malatesta's Islington machine shop. The Russian, abusing his hospitality, had taken a cylinder of oxygen which was used later in a robbery attempt. Discovered, he and his comrades, caught red-handed, defended themselves with shots and were followed to his house on Sidney Street, where they were bombarded and died with the valiant dignity of a good cause. The act had extraordinary repercussions. The police soon discovered the origin of the cylinder and its passage through Malatesta's shop. He proved what had happened and wasn't bothered any further. But imagine the consequences for him in a different environment (Italy, for example), or in England itself if things had gone otherwise and the truth of his words could have been cast in doubt.

The incident gave Malatesta the opportunity to write one of his clear and precise articles about the practice of robbery and the relationship between the legal robbery of the bourgeoisie and the illegal: "Capitalists and thieves," in *Les Temps Nouveaux* of Paris.<sup>48</sup>

When in 1911 the Italian government, with Giolitti at its head, brought the country to conquer Tripolitania and Cinerica, with the clear goal of shifting popular attention from internal questions and to alleviate the more and more urgent pressure of the working masses, it seemed to Malatesta that the conditions lacking in 1907 would be realized in Italy (although outside the anarchist party). He wasn't mistaken: the African war revitalized revolutionary spirit in the proletarian opposition, which before had appeared sunken in the dead valleys of predominant reform. He wrote to several of us about his intention to return to Italy.

I had an indirect proof of such propositions from Malatesta upon seeing enter my house one day, in Bologna, to a type, a certain Ennio Beelli, who called himself an anarchist and sometimes

wrote in prose and verse in our papers, residing in London, who Malatesta had point out to me in 1906 and told me to stay on guard because, without concrete or sufficient positive elements, he was very suspicious that he was a spy. Belevi told me that he had arrived in Italy “charged by Malatesta” to study the terrain for his possible return. He was obviously a liar; but certainly smelled something and he came on the bill of whoever paid him to make sure of it. I understood that the doubts about him were increasingly founded: Belevi was an agent of the Italian government in London, with the special assignment of watching over Malatesta and his surroundings. There wasn’t a sure proof though and I tried to not let him understand anything. But he surely intuited all the same that there were suspicions, he saluted me after having accepted a meeting the next day, and then didn’t return to see me. I learned a little later that he had returned almost immediately to London.

Regarding his intentions to return to Italy was an article that Malatesta sent those days to the paper *L’Alleanza libertaria* of Rome (*Che fare?*, in no. 133 of September 21, 1911), in which he for the moment didn’t recommend holding a congress which that paper had planned and said his ideas about that which anarchists should do before to accomplish the destiny of the movement.

Meanwhile, the war in Africa was pursued and turned into war against Turkey. Socialists and anarchists had taken a position against it. An anarchist soldier, Augusto Masetti, had shot at his colonel in the barracks in Bologna, while he was lined up with his companions in the streets to leave for Africa. The environment was increasingly irritating. In London, Malatesta also made propaganda against the war among the Italian element. He published a pamphlet too, *La Guerra Tripolitania* (London, April 1912). It was then when the spy Belevi was revealed as what he was. He had the shamelessness to accuse Malatesta of being... an agent of Turkey! Malatesta prepared to unmask Belevi in a manifesto, signed under his own name: *Errico Malatesta alla Colonia Italiana di Londra. Per un fatto personalo*. He proposed that a judge and jury be put together to decide whether he was a slanderer or Belevi a scoundrel. Belevi steered clear of accepting the challenge and preferred to denounce his accuser before the English tribunals for offense to his honor (without the help of proof, naturally); and given the English jurisprudence, Malatesta’s conviction was inevitable.

In effect, on May 20<sup>th</sup> he was condemned to three months of prison, without the ability to appeal, and recommended to the government for expulsion from England. That provoked the indignation of the English public and the workers’ unions. The *Manchester Guardian* dedicated an in-depth article to Malatesta’s defense on May 25<sup>th</sup>; an eloquent letter from P. Kropotkin appeared in *The Nation*; an agitation committee sprang up; there were reunions and meetings, and so on. The government recognized that the expulsion couldn’t take place, and when Malatesta left the jail he could remain in London without anybody bothering him. In the meantime there had been concrete proof from Rome (by way of Arnold Roller) that Belevi was truly a spy in the service of the Italian government; and the documentation was published in the pamphlet *La Gogna*, edited by the Italian anarchists in London. Belevi disappeared from his London environment and was known to have returned to Italy.

Gustave Hervé, having gone to London at the end of that year, still in that uncompromisingly socialist revolutionary time, to give a conference, Malatesta was to hear him in Shoredith Hall. Although declaring himself always revolutionary, Hervé alluded, since some time past, to a change of strategy — to a “rectification of point of view,” he said — but in his words, Malatesta intuited the future turncoat; he took up word against him and reaffirmed the goodness of the insurrectionary method which Hervé had abandoned, stopping himself, among other things, about the

relations between war and revolution. Those ideas of his he expounded synthetically in an article a little later in the magazine *Le Mouvement Anarchiste* from Paris (nos. 6–7 of January–February 1913).

As his health continued to be delicate, still more compromised by his recent stay in English prisons, he thought already of abandoning England, when a circumstance presented itself that decidedly persuaded him to depart for Italy.

### **“Volontà” of Ancona (1913–14). — The “Red Week” mutinies. — Flight to London (1914).**

Since 1911, the Italian anarchist scene was belabored by disgusting internal and personal disputes, fomented above all by two or three individuals of an argumentative character who soon defected to the bourgeois camp, and I — who bore the disgrace of being friendly with some of the contenders, and who made the mistake of getting drawn into those disputes — had separated myself from the movement, had stopped writing papers, and had retired to a country town in Emilia to become an elementary-school teacher. It was the spring of 1913 when an old and esteemed comrade, Cesare Agostinelli, one of Malatesta’s most faithful friends, proposed that I cooperate on a new anarchist paper in Ancona, where he lived.

He sent word of his project to Malatesta as well, who approved of the idea, replying that a new paper would be useful in bringing peace to the anarchist camp and putting an end to the quarrels; and that the Italian scene, worn raw by the war in Tripoli, demanded our engagement in a “practical” work, which a well-done paper would *serve excellently for*. He promised he would collaborate, suggesting that we give the paper the beautiful title of *Volontà* (Will), and also promised, if the paper was well *presented*, that he would come to Ancona to edit it as soon as he could arrange his affairs to leave England.

Agostinelli told me that he was very content with this good news; he put me in charge of editing a circular to announce the paper, which I did immediately, and in short, the first issue of *Volontà* was released on June 8, 1913. After reading a pair of recently published letters written at the time to Luigi Bertoni in Geneva,<sup>49</sup> one can see that Malatesta was immediately passionate about this new initiative. According to him, it should serve above all as “cover for a more practical work,” in other words, a work of spiritual and material preparation of a revolutionary and insurrectionary nature. Apparently he saw in Italy the conditions indispensable to that work, conditions he felt were lacking after my trip to London in 1907.

The new paper in Ancona soon had the strong marks of Malatesta’s previous papers. Although he didn’t sign it, Malatesta wrote the paper’s platform in the first issue and other articles, both signed and unsigned. He continued his copious collaboration from London for about two months, until his doubts gave way and he departed for Italy. He made a detour through Milan and was well received by the socialists; on that trip he met Mussolini, director of the *Avanti!*, who had an editor interview him and extended his cordial relations. He went by Bologna, where I could hug him and learn his intentions, and before mid-August he arrived in Ancona, from whence he sent out an ardent “Call to the comrades of Italy,”<sup>50</sup> in which he happily confirmed that there was a great awakening among the popular Italian masses, who were marching towards revolution, and he encouraged comrades to show *that they were* a match for the *escalated* situation, concluding the essay with, “One more time, to work!”

From its first moments, the paper *Volontà* had a *clear and obvious* tone of preparing for revolution; which didn't stop it from simultaneously being—as Malatesta's other publications had been—a laboratory of ideas. Articles and interesting discussions appeared there about socialism and parliamentarianism, syndicalism, the general strike, anarchist organization, insurrectionism, individualism, *theft*, education, atheism, protectionism, free trade, the republic, war, militarism and so on. The ten dialogues of "In the Café" were printed anew, having been interrupted in 1897 in *L'Agitazione*, and he added four new dialogues—still not the last. A long debate took place between Malatesta and James Guillaume (writing from Paris) regarding syndicalism, focusing on its history and theory, in which both summarized unpublished memories and details about the first International and about Bakunin.

The "cover" work obviously wasn't any less serious and interesting than what was "covered." But it was the latter which most interested Malatesta, and he dedicated himself to it in body and soul. Before anything else he managed to end the old disputes, which weren't even mentioned two or three months later, and he redirected the anarchist element towards a path of accord and common action, pushing theoretical differences to second place. At the same time, he contributed to a spiritual gathering together of the dispersed revolutionary elements in the different subversive movements, entering into relations with all the people who seemed to have a revolutionary good will or who might be helpful in an insurrectionary movement, surveying the terrain in all environments, with no need for contracts or negotiations of any type with the various official parties, towards which he remained absolutely uncompromising.

He was in several Italian cities (Rome, Milan, Florence, Bologna, Liorna, Turin, and more) to give conferences and hold meetings, and in each place he established relationships, met new people and learned things. As a journalist, he attended wherever popular and proletarian forces met — a gathering of ex-internationalists in Imola, the socialist Congress of Ancona, a republican one in Bologna, and a meeting of syndicalists in Milan, etc. — and on those occasions he studied which elements would be most inclined to a serious united movement. He was partial to the work of the Italian Syndical Union which was founded shortly before and seemed to be the most opportune for his intentions and closest by the participation that some anarchists had in it. He personally intervened, though not as an official delegate, in the syndical congress of Milan (December, 1913) and was invited to speak in a session on the margin of the congress's ordinary sessions. At the republican congress in May of 1914, he was called to the platform after the session's conclusion and delivered a revolutionary and anti-monarchical discourse that excited those present. He heatedly participated in the antimilitarist agitation for the liberation of Augusto Masetti and against the disciplinary companies?; and on and on like this.

He still took the opportunity, two or three times between August 1913 and June 1914, to meet with Benito Mussolini. The latter's revolutionary, Blanquist language and the audacious and antimonarchical position he emphasized in the *Avanti!* had allowed Malatesta to momentarily trust that the restless Romagnan could, at the right moment, contribute strongly to precipitate the Italian situation. But he didn't fool himself for long. One May night in 1914, during the syndical congress of Milan, the two of us went to a meeting with Mussolini at the *Avanti!* They spoke at length, and I listened. Malatesta entreated Mussolini to explain his position on the argument for a possible Italian insurrection; but he didn't manage to extract a single word from him indicating a precise will. The director of the *Avanti!* was totally dominated by his aversion to the reformists, entirely internal and partisan, and he showed the greatest distrust and hatred of the syndicalists and republicans; he was sick to death with the house of Savoy, with the generals,

with Giolitti, and so on. But as to the revolution, he showed a superhuman skepticism and shot flames against “quarantottism” (against the mentality of 1848). Upon leaving and already on the stairs, referring to Mussolini’s off-handed judgment of Giulio Barni and Libero Tancredi,<sup>51</sup> who he called hypercritical and nothing more, Malatesta told me, “Did you catch that? He called Barni and Tancredi hypercritical, but he is the one who is hypercritical and nothing more. This guy is only revolutionary in the paper. I want nothing to do with him!”

Italian anarchists were preparing a national congress for the following summer, with Malatesta’s support, when the events of the “Red Week” burst out in Marcas and Romagna, which interrupted all work. As often happens, the revolutionary preparations, barely begun and still insufficient, were prejudiced by a serious, improvised deed that precipitated before the events.

Demonstrations all over Italy had begun the first Sunday of June, the official holiday of the Statute, to demand the release of Augusto Masetti and the abolition of disciplinary military companies. That morning, on June 7, 1914, police had broken up groups of demonstrators in the streets of Ancona and had arrested Malatesta, setting him free a few hours later. The announced meeting was held that afternoon in Villa Rosa, the seat of the Republican party, and orators of various parties spoke, including Malatesta. At its conclusion, the thousand or so demonstrators found the street entrances blocked by guards and riflemen; unavoidable conflict ensued. Under the guards’ fire, three people were left dead on the pavement and several were wounded.

The proletariat immediately took to the streets. A general strike was proclaimed. There were assaults and robberies against the armories, customs guards were expelled, and the public force was obliged to retire to their quarters. The following day the whole city was in the people’s hands; the movement was propagated like a wildfire to all of Marcas and Romagna. In cities and towns, from Foligno to Rome, and from Imola and Ravenna to the North, we saw the public force disappear, and the insurrectionary crowds remained the masters of the situation. The trains stopped running and only the agitation committees’ automobiles went from town to town; food was needed; in the countryside all vehicles were detained, demanding safe conduct from the Committees?. In Fabriano, a company of soldiers fraternized with the workers; in Forli a church was burned; near Ravenna a general of the army was taken prisoner.

Meanwhile, news of the events of Ancona spread out like light throughout Italy. The proletarian, syndical, and political organizations declared a national general strike.<sup>52</sup> But this, outside of Marcas and Romagna, didn’t last more than two and a half days, cut short in the culminating moment by a traitorous order to end it from the General Confederation of Labor. However, Marcas and Romagna were abandoned and remained in the breach until the next Sunday. Anarchists, socialists and republicans maintained their posts in the streets in a touching unison, day and night. In Ancona, Malatesta, among the first, inexhaustible, always in the middle of the crowd, in the Chamber of Labor? and in the plaza, repeatedly entreating the people, advising, encouraging. On Friday the 12<sup>th</sup>, he? published a proclamation in which rumors were referred to that the revolution extended through? Italy and that the monarchy was at the point of falling, suggesting the most urgent means to the provisions and for the extension of the movement and pointing to not believe or lend an ear to news of the order to cease the strike from the Confederation.

But in the meantime, the Italian government sent colossal masses of the army to everywhere in the rebelling regions to interrupt the resistance. By Saturday it was recognized that the party was over. Military trains began to arrive about the lines put in conditions by the battalions of Zapadores. On Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup>, the military occupation was complete everywhere, even in the smallest towns. On Monday the strike ended even in Marcas and Romagna; the “red week” had

gone by. A day or two later, Malatesta could stay in Ancona, with the only precaution of switching houses. He still prepared an issue of *Volontà*. The in-depth article of his was titled “And now?,” and continued: “Now... we will continue. We will continue more than ever full of enthusiasm, acts of will, of hope, of faith. We will continue preparing the liberating revolution, which will secure justice, freedom, and well-being for all” (no. 24 of June 20, 1914).

Unexpectedly, even before the paper was released, it was noticed that the police had gone to his usual residence to arrest him. He had vanished. An automobile took him to Southern Italy, where, in a small station, superficially disguised — he had simply put a fashionable wind-breaker? over his clothing and had shaved — he took the train for Milan in first class. At night he passed by the Ancona station, militarily occupied, and arrived in Milan; from there, by Como, he arrived at the Swiss border, which he crossed without any holdups. By Lugano and Geneva, through Paris, he arrived a few days later in London. On June 24<sup>th</sup> the *Avanti!* published a brief note from him greeting friends and comrades, letting them know that he had returned to his old home.

## **The World War. — Arguments against the war and interventionism. — Return to Italy (1919).**

Friends had been able to see him in Paris, en route, and some dailies (among others *La Guerre sociale* and *La Bataille Syndicaliste*), interviewed him. In London, Malatesta reconstructed the events of Ancona in another two extensive and detailed interviews for Italian dailies (*Il Secolo* of Milan, June 30, and *Il Giornale d'Italia* of Rome, July 1, 1914). He wrote an article about the argument for *Freedom*, the known anarchist organ of London, of which an Italian translation appeared in the *Cronaca Souversiva* of Lynn, Mass. (July 25, 1914).

This other parenthesis from battle closed, in London Malatesta again took up the life that was habitual for him since he was 25. Despite the years gone by, he returned to his trade of electrical mechanic, not neglecting to scan the horizon in search of precursory signs of a new tempest that would call him again to his favorite terrain. And already, precisely in those days of his return to London, the European horizon was covered in clouds, the first thunder was heard, and the air was cut by the first beams of the tremendous, imminent war.

But his attention was diverted for some time from the external affairs by a serious misfortune that affected the Defendi family, whose guest he had been for many years. The woman Emilia, who had given him the attention of a caring sister in his previous illnesses, grew sick herself and died after a bitter agony, amidst great spasms. He helped the family tend to her throughout the course of her sickness, until the last instant. The friends who had the occasion to see Malatesta in the intimacy of his London refuge, among that family who considered him as their own, surrounded by the many children, big and small, of the Defendis, who loved him like the most appreciated relative, can imagine the state of his soul, of a heart so big and so full of tenderness for all those about him.

But the personal misfortune didn't stop him, however, from feeling the deep universal misfortune that befell humanity in that tragic summer. And when the painful spectacle was had of such a part of European socialism dragged, even morally, into the general disaster, taken to renege in an instant the internationalist preaching of half a century, and put itself on the side — in Germany as in France, in Austria like in England — of the bourgeois governments and the militarisms of their own countries; when Malatesta saw even anarchists, but from the best and



among his most loved friends, following by an able action of the spirit the same path of collapsed ideals, a pain still greater invaded his soul. He didn't hesitate then to separate himself from the friends who had been diverted in such a pitiful way, and to say high and strongly his faithful thought to revolutionary anarchist internationalism.

After Kropotkin published his famous declaration swearing himself to the cause of the allied English-French-Russian armies, Malatesta published in *Freedom* (London); in *Il Risveglio* (Geneva); and in *Volontà* (Ancona) (no. 42 of November 1914),<sup>53</sup> a concise and consuming article: "Anarchists, have you forgotten your principles?" which expressed with exactness the opinions and feelings faithful to his ideas. The friendship between him and Kropotkin which had lasted almost forty years was broken, though saving for each other, regardless, mutual esteem and respect. "It was," he told some years later, "one of the saddest and most tragic moments of my life (and I dare say for him as well), that after a discussion in extreme duress, we separate as adversaries, almost as enemies."<sup>54</sup>

Like the above article indicates, Malatesta had said at some point that, disregarding all, he foresaw the rout of the German armies as the least evil, since that would have provoked revolution in Germany, Mussolini — who a bit earlier had crossed from the most absolute neutralism to the most warlike interventionism and had founded against his party and in favor of war the new daily *Il Popolo d'Italia* in Milan — latched on to this isolated phrase to accuse Malatesta of contradiction and to sustain the need for Italian intervention against Germany. Malatesta responded with an article letter, dated December 1, 1914, where he showed the contradiction to be nonexistent and said that the first condition for a revolution to be produced, is that the revolutionaries not betray their cause in any country. Mussolini took care not to publish that response, which appeared later in the anarchist papers (*Volontà* no. 46 of December 24).

Despite the censorship of press and mail, Malatesta never ceased his propaganda against the war for an instant, either personally in London, or elsewhere with articles, letters, calls, and so on. Some of his writing sent to the headquarters of *Volontà* were intercepted by the English post, as he pointed out in a letter to Luigi Molinari on October 9 (published in *L'Università popolare* of Milan). But later he managed to get some to Italy, France, and Spain. In March 1915 he helped edit an international antiwar manifesto, dated in London, but signed, in addition to him, by a number of known anarchists from every country: Domela Nieuwenhuis, Emma Goldman, A. Berkman, L. Bertoni, C. Frigerio, E. Recchioni, L. Combes, L. D. Abbot, Hippolyte Havel, A. Schapiro, and more (*Volontà*, no. 12 of March 20). One of his most important articles, very extensive, was: *Mentre la strage dura* (*Volontà*, no. 14 of April 3), in which he predicted the unleashing of the war, which had later been fully realized. And when, nonetheless, Italy was also dragged into the fiery crucible by the monarchy, he shot a cry of anguish and cholera in *Freedom*, "Italy too?"<sup>55</sup>

In 1916, the world having diffused anguished voices and hopes of peace, the interventionist anarchists who followed Kropotkin published a manifesto in protest against "the premature peace" and for war carried out until the German military potential was completely crushed. This was the "manifesto of the sixteen," so-called because there were sixteen signers, including Kropotkin, J. Grave, C. Malato, M. Pierrot, A. Laisant, C. Cornelissen, and P. Reclus. Malatesta protested in turn against them in an article in *Freedom* (April 1916), that was later clandestinely printed in Paris with the title "Government anarchists." In Italy all publication attempts were halted by censorship.<sup>56</sup>

In the same year, 1916, Malatesta asked the Italian consulate in London for a passport to return to Italy; given the state of war, it would have been impossible to return in any other way like he

had done in the past. On one side, in England the military reaction impeded, in what followed, all movements or manner of showing self-thought; and on the other, Malatesta had foreseen that in Italy, where the people had remained unanimously hostile to war and revolt germinated under the yoke of militarism, an increasingly revolutionary situation was growing. That impression was confirmed later by the discussions of the Italian socialists who went to London and who he had the chance to meet. He had, in truth, the order to capture and try him hanging over him for the events of the "red week;" but despite that, he wanted to return at all costs and desired to face the trial which awaited him in Italy.<sup>57</sup>

He was inexorably refused. And he continued living in London another two and some years, which I will ignore entirely. What can be affirmed is the happiness with which he had to greet the outbreak of the Russian revolution in February 1917 and the growing interest with which he would follow its development all of that year. I knew that he had intended to leave for Russia, but it wasn't possible; and then he dropped the idea because of the impotence his ignorance of the Russian language would have kept him in. But I am not certain of all this.

Since 1917 I don't remember more than one letter, to Armando Borghi, where he repeats his wish to return to Italy and speaks of the Italian government's insistence on denying him a passport; he speaks of the uselessness of the anarchists' participation in the congress of parliamentary socialists in Stockholm and about how useful an International upon other bases would be instead; he disapproves of the Italian Syndical Union pledging itself to the Zimmerwald movement, despite the pleasure he viewed this with; and finally, gives news of the little to no importance of the revolutionary socialist currents in England (*Guerre di Classe*, Florence, no. 53 of November 16, 1917).

I don't know if he occupied himself with the Russian revolution in any special way. It would be necessary to consult *Freedom* (London) regarding that. But his ideas about the triumph of Bolshevism in his breast, could be predicted since then, given his uncompromising, anarchist irreducibility. Basically, such ideas, radically adverse, though initially sustained by a certain sympathy (especially before the triumph of the Bolsheviks), were reaffirmed in a letter he wrote me from London on July 30, 1919 and which I published in the rearsen *Volontà* (Ancona) (no. 11 of August 16, 1919). He felt the greatest sympathy then for the Italian socialists, who not withstanding certain incongruent attitudes and the patriotic conduct of its reformist factions more towards the right, had honorably held high the banner of internationalism against the reigning chauvinism and militarism during the war, and the most active opposition possible in the circumstances and their mentality. A sign of this sympathy is found in his intervention in a meeting in London, convoked by the local section of the Italian socialist party in November 1919.

Meanwhile he insisted several more times on obtaining a passport. The ministers changed in Italy, but all posed the same negative, though two successive amnesties erased all legal imputation against him. Finally, only by mid-November 1919, the consulate in London had an order to give him his passport, due to the intense agitation made on the peninsula to this effect by the Italian Syndical Union. But it was as if he hadn't obtained it. Prompted by the Italian government, the official France denied the necessary visa to cross its territory and the English police stopped all boat captains from carrying the prohibited rebel. Then Italian comrades interested the captain Giuseppe Giulietti in the affair, who was secretary of the Italian Federation of Sea-Workers [ital], and he sent his brother Alfredo to London to prepare Malatesta's flight. Truly he, by his intervention, finally managed to embark disguised in Cardiff on a Greek cargo boat which took him to Taranto, where Alfredo Giulietti went by land to wait for Him. He, to pretend the thing

and cover in some way the boat captain's responsibility, took Malatesta up quickly and without anyone catching on to Geneva in a fast wagon-bed, where they arrived together after crossing all of Italy absolutely unrecognized.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Umanità Nova* of Milan (1920). — Committees, conferences and congresses. — Occupation of the factories. — Arrest (1920).**

Therefore outstandingly disembarked in Geneva on December 24, 1919, Malatesta triumphantly returned to public Italian life. In the great Ligurian city he was accepted by an enormous crowd that applauded him. The boats anchored in the port sounded their sirens and hoisted flags in happiness, the popular neighborhoods were decorated with red banners and the people announced? Malatesta in the streets and plazas with a type of delirium. In a great meeting, where he spoke to give the greetings of Italian anarchists to that magnificent orator Lugigi Galleani — also recently returned from North America — he also took the stage to give thanks to? and to say right away what he would later have to repeat everywhere: that the hour of revolution had arrived and that we had to quickly prepare ourselves to make as soon as possible, before the hour slipped away.

He immediately started a feast of propaganda from Geneva and of exploration of all of northern and central Italy. In every city — Turin, Milan, Bologna, Ancona, Rome, Florence, etc. — and the same in the little provincial and country centers, innumerable masses of people pressed to acclaim him and listen to him. In Bologna, where he stayed in my house and I could have a first exchange of ideas with him, in a great meeting in the Communal theater he insisted on the need for revolution, since, he said, “if we let the favorable moment pass we will have to pay later in tears of blood for the fear that we now infuse? the bourgeoisie with.”

“The anarchist Malatesta,” said the *Corriere della Sera* (Milan) on January 20, 1920, “is for now one of the greatest figures of Italian life. The city crowds run to meet him, and they don't hand him the keys to their doors as they used to in another time, only because there aren't keys and there aren't doors.”

He, though being naturally content with the revolutionary significance that the great popular acceptance? had, a few days later thought he should put the brakes on those homages which seemed to him to assume an overly personally apologetic character, and printed a short letter to friends, in which among other things he said, “Thank you, but enough! ... Hyperbole is a rhetorical form which shouldn't be abused, and exalting a man is politically dangerous and morally unhealthy for the exalted and those exalting.”

While he was at the point of ending that first feast of propaganda, approximately two months after his arrival, in mid-February, the terrified Italian government wanted to arrest him. On the occasion of a trip between Liorna and Florence, the police took him off the train in the small station of Tombolo, and transported him in a car to the Florentine jails. But the immediate, spontaneous protest of the people in the Tuscan cities, where he had gone to proclaim a general strike, forced his liberation. The next morning found him in Bologna.

A personal memory: Malatesta, some months earlier, had written me from London, extending himself to explain to me his ideas about what should be done to make an Italian revolution. He told me that the movement should be started “in a low key,” gradually elevated, and meanwhile to work intelligently on practical terrain, solidifying relations, making contact with other

revolutionary forces, and so on. He came to speak of those ideas in my house upon his arrival to Bologna, after the arrest in Tombolo, and he interrupted me in conversation: "It's impossible to follow that road! I didn't think I would find a boiling? like this. It already isn't a matter of preparing the terrain — it's ready. It's precisely, instead, to make what we can as soon as possible, because the revolution is already underway, much closer than I thought writing you from London." I shared his opinion, and only later did the most anguishing doubt come to me about the revolutionary character of that remarkable popular enthusiasm and the fear that this wouldn't make the real depth of things seen.

Corresponding to those first weeks of 1920 was the idea that was held for some moments among a small circle of revolutionaries, to utilize the situation created by Gabriele d'Annunzio with the occupation of Fiume at the head of some remnants of the army faithful to him, made a month earlier and lasting until December 1920. The thing wasn't accomplished and it stayed secret for two years, and not even later was much known about it, because those who had occupied themselves with the affair had closed themselves in, all for understandable reasons, in the utmost reserve. Now it can be said that Malatesta was one of the few (even the primary one) mixed in the brief negotiations at the time about the project. But he, appealed to several times, always refused to give explanations, impossible without the consent of everyone interested. In a letter from June 1920 he told me that the part of the truth which could be made public was this:

"It deals with, basically, an insurrectionary project in 1920, a type of march on Rome, if you want to call it such. The first person to conceptualize the thing, which would have been able to get support from Fiume of men and especially of arms, put as a *sine qua non* condition the assistance, or at least the approval, of the socialists, for the best chance of success, or because he feared being denounced as an agent of d'Annunzio. A couple of meetings were held in Rome regarding this; the socialists didn't want to know anything, and did nothing." I don't feel authorized, not even now that Malatesta is dead, to say more. Who can imagine the course that events would have taken then, if the socialists had a little more practical revolutionary sentiment?"

In late February, meanwhile, Italian anarchists managed to make the daily *Umanità Nova* appear in Milan (February 27, 1920), which Malatesta had accepted the direction of from London, and written the programmatic circular. He fixed his residence in Milan. But from there he continually attended all of Italy when comrades called him, to give conferences, hold assemblies, reunions, strikes, and more. Everywhere, his presence gave rise to imposing demonstrations, often tumultuous. It should be said that his condescension? was much abused, robbing him therefore of the time to accomplish more positive work, that only he would be able to do. He was called to a city for a day; he arrived and found that tasks had been prepared for him for a week, that assemblies and gatherings were convoked for all of the province, with theaters and paid halls, and so on. And he, seeing the sacrifices already made by comrades, didn't know how to refuse and stayed there.

The Italian police, increasingly irritated?, tried to provoke some "outrage"? everywhere to capture or assassinate him. Their intention was visibly understood on several occasions. In Milan, Piacenza, and Florence, among others, the police were seen to open fire ostensibly at points where he was found. Then the press most unashamed by scandal reproached him for not having been assassinated, assaulted him with all types of injuries, ridiculous slander, and true and proper incitations to homicide.

Meanwhile, *Umanità Nova* prospered. In vain, sneakily, the government tried to create obstacles to its publication, refusing or slowing paper that had already been paid for from the authorized paper mills. The miners of Valdarna presented a threat at one point of striking the lignite mines if the anarchist daily wasn't given paper, and only then did a government telegram consent to hand it over. The rebel paper reached a release of 50,000 copies, and a revenue that exceeded a million liras.

In *Umanità Nova*, as usual, Malatesta developed his propaganda, calming and fiery at once. He always insisted, like a refrain, on the concept affirmed in his first conferences: to make revolution soon, to make use of the favorable hour, under penalty of paying later for the enemy's fear. His line, as in the past, had two aspects: clarification of anarchist ideas and preparation for the revolution. He pursued the propaganda of anarchist communism, with a great feeling of comprehension and conciliation of all the anarchist tendencies. He favored the revolutionary "united front," but the first agreement should be stability among anarchists; then, the most possible, without betraying principles and preserving total freedom of action, with all the other proletarian and revolutionary forces, the anarchist forces alone couldn't be enough to defeat the resistance of the state and the bourgeoisie. He insisted often on practical means in the time of revolution: particularly on the necessity of destroying everything that is noxious, but guarding oneself well, save in cases of extreme impelling necessity, from destroying what might be useful to the life of the insurrectionary populations, like houses, means of transportation, tools for working, edible items, and so on.

He continued propagandizing and defending the libertarian conception of socialism and of revolution in contrast to the authority of the social democrats and the Bolsheviks. In the paper he sustained more than one debate with the one and the other; conserving, however, in the limits of the possible, the greatest cordiality of the form. The Communist sectarianism hadn't become so weighty and irritating, by which only in the last times the debate with this sector had become a little bit more bitter. The relations with the social democrats were tenuous, especially with certain confederate reformist factions, which in the most decisive moments pressured to throw water on the fire or discredit the popular rebellions. As soon as he arrived in Italy, he had to deal tiresomely with some Lobardan politician who had injured and prejudiced, before the authorities, those clearly implicated in a movement in Mantua. But he didn't like to attack anybody without serious motives.

He dedicated much activity to organization as well, called from party of the anarchist forces. Since April 1919 in a congress in Florence an Italian Anarchic Union (*Unione Anarchica Italiana*) had been constituted, following the principles and strategy that he had favored since before 1890. When he arrived in Italy he had sworn himself to its action, participating in it constantly. In the two congresses of July 1920 in Bologna, and November 1921 in Ancona, his intervention was one of the most active and influential; he compiled, on the foundation of something old he had written, the Union's program approved by the congress of Bologna; he was a member of the general Council; he represented it in various conferences, political and proletariat, public or secret; he defended it serenely, but firmly, against critics from the anti-organizational comrades; he edited motions and manifestos for it more than once, the last of which, that of the first of May, 1926, when the Union had already been taken to a miserable clandestine life under the reigning fascist terror.

He furthermore flanked the activity of the Italian Syndical Union with the most ample spirit of solidarity, intervening directly in all agitation or movement in which he could concur — the

known organization of class of revolutionary syndical tendencies, that since 1914 onwards was inspired and directed preferentially? by anarchist comrades — though conserving and reaffirming his particular opinions (adverse on many points) facing syndicalism and the varied questions that were referred to him. He didn't view the division of labor on syndical terrain favorably, but understood the unavoidable relationships that derived from the past, and realized the uncertain usefulness of the Syndical Union, as such it was, for the cause of revolution, considered imminent. He therefore accepted, without discussing it too much, the state of affairs, and stayed together with the labor organization that most approximated anarchism, and only opined that it become a responsibility for anarchists to be organized, and to be better in one organization than in another. The important point for him was that anarchists, organized or not, or adherents to the trade organizations of whatever tendency, stay anarchists and help develop anarchist action wherever they found it.

All sectarianism and exclusiveness of tendency was not to be found in him, about the question of anarchist organization and about the syndical organization, content to collaborate on the practical and revolutionary terrain, on every possible occasion, with all anarchists, even those who dissented from him. And until the end he wanted *Umanità Nova* to be the organ for all the anarchists, and not solely of its own current, though recognizing that in normal times it would be preferable to make a paper of homogeneous orientation.

The paper culminating Malatesta's activity was the summer of 1920, when it appeared that the revolution would break out from one moment to the next, between the mutiny of Ancona in June<sup>59</sup> and the occupation of the factories in September. They were multiplied; interproletarian reunions, secret negotiations for action, practice for the acquisition of arms, conferences and assemblies, agitation for the political victims, and son on, until in the occupation of the factories they were handed over, day and night. Meanwhile since the paper advised what to do, he? intervened personally in the factories occupied in Milan to sustain the resistance, ran to the more or less clandestine reunions between anarchists and supporters, to sustain the most opportune propositions, and he opposed himself everywhere to whoever advised the limitation or cessation of a movement so well begun.

That which he sustained then in public and in private was this: that an occasion could never present itself which would be better to win almost without spilling blood; to extend the occupation of the metallurgy to all the other industries and lands; where there weren't industries, to take to the streets with local strikes and rebellions which distracted the armed forces of the State of the large centers; from the smallest localities, where nothing could be done, to help the larger, most near places; entered in activity of action groups; to arm ourselves in the greatest possible numbers, and so on. It would be too long to say it all, and maybe it still isn't the time. It is known how the movement was frustrated by the deliberation of the General Confederation of Labor, dominated by the social democrats, to return the factories to the owners under the promise of the Giolitti government from a law that would introduce worker control to the factories.

In vain, the anarchists (and Malatesta in the most energetic way) opposed themselves to and fought here and there to galvanize the movement, particularly where by their numbers, or with the daily *Umanità Nova*, or through the Italian Syndical Union, they had major influence. In all of Italy the proletariat beat a retreat, and began to lose heart, the uncertainty and disillusion began among the masses. The general enthusiasm was extinguished and the will to fight remained in the most restricted revolutionary minorities, that the government managed to quickly isolate. The bourgeoisie came to rear its head, and crossed from the defensive to the offensive.<sup>60</sup>

About a month later, the day after grandiose assemblies in all Italy in defense of the political victims, and of an afternoon of general strike, October 14, ended in some cities with bloody tumults, the government began the reaction against anarchists.<sup>61</sup>

In those days Malatesta was in my house in Bologna, where he slept for two weeks. A very relative rest! It was in those days when — beyond participating on October 10 in the reunion of the General Council of the Anarchic Union — he worked on the revision, reordering, and ending, with other final dialogues, of his little book of discussion, *In the Café*, published a bit later in its first full edition. Without mentioning it to him, comrades announced him as an orator in the Bologna meeting — he opened it by reading the manifesto which we have referred to — he basically spoke that day together with other orators in Umberto I Plaza, before an enormous crowd. After the meeting he went to the Chamber of Labor with some of us to write a letter refuting the *Resto del Carlino*, which had accused it of being a “sleeping house”; and while we were there news arrived of a serious confrontation between demonstrators and public forces in the center of the city, near the jail, with dead and wounded from both groups. Two days later he left for Milan where, as soon as he arrived, October 17, 1920, he was arrested.

A day or two earlier other editors of *Umanità Nova* had been detained as well, and still earlier, Armando Borghi and other militants from the Syndical Union. Other detentions of anarchists followed in different parts of Italy. *Umanità Nova* continued being published all the same, some of the detainees were set free; but Malatesta, Borghi, Corrado Quaglino (editor of the anarchist daily) and Mario Baldini were kept in jail and tried in Milan. Dante Pagliai, the paper’s manager?, and some others, editors, administrators and contributors were implicated in the trial as well; but these last, except Pagliai, missing, were left out of the accusation later, during the trial’s hearing.

### **In prison (1920–21). — Hunger strike. — Trial and acquittal. — The fight against fascism. — The “March on Rome” (1922).**

The blow was strong. A conference of syndical parties and organizations was immediately held in Florence, and despite the promises made earlier, all protest action was refused. Anarchists were left standing alone. At the meeting, Serrati, who directed the *Avanti!*, called Malatesta’s arrest a “transitory episode” and said that nothing could be done about it. This attitude gave even more air to the government and bourgeoisie; the reaction was intensified. Fascism had arisen a year and a half earlier, and until that moment it had been insignificant and ridiculous. To everyone’s surprise, it saw its ranks swell, reared its head, and in Bologna on November 21, barely a month later, it inflicted the first and most serious defeat to the proletariat socialist forces, robbing them of the streets and municipal responsibilities?. This was the beginning of the debacle which would end two years later with the “march on Rome.”

Malatesta and his three comrades, in the meantime, were still in jail. The powers of justice couldn’t manage to base and plausible accusations against them, but nevertheless they didn’t want to let go of their prize. The hearing threatened to be inconclusive, and the trial was postponed endlessly. The defendants, exasperated, decided to resort to a hunger strike so that the court would either free them or specify the charges against them and take them to trial, and they began on March 18, 1921. At the end of a few days the news spread that Malatesta, due to his age and uncertain health, was reduced to such exhaustion by the hunger that he ran a serious risk of death. All of labor and subversive Italy trembled, but without an effective attitude of efficacy.

Local strikes in protest broke out in Romagna, Tuscany, Valdarno, Carrara, and Liguria, but the ceased almost immediately and no success? was in sight.

Among anarchists exasperation reached a climax. *Umanità Nova* published anguished and urgent calls. Meanwhile, in different parts of Italy, almost like a challenge, the fascist violence mounted, and the most lethal and bloodiest of these episodes was had in Milan itself: the assault of the socialist circle of Bonaparte street, the night of March 21, with the death of the socialist Inversetti. Two days later, the night of March 23, a bomb exploded against a side door of the Diana theater, in Port Venice, killing twenty people inside and wounding many more.

The terrible attempt, as is understood, had a vivid repercussion in all Italy, and more still in Milan. The source wasn't immediately known; the most contradictory guesses were made. But it was easy to predict — as events later confirmed — that it traced to an individual act of anarchists, decided by exasperation and desperation, arrived at paroxysm. Malatesta who, though understanding and explaining acts of such a type as an inevitable product of social injustices and the provocations of the powerful, had always showed in his propaganda the most determined adversity to them, experience the most painful sensation, more lacerating still by the thought that the object of affection towards him shouldn't be foreign. He and his comrades, after having consulted among themselves, ended their hunger strike.

Meanwhile, the fascists, on the same night as the attempt, an hour or two later, assaulted as a gang the offices of *Umanità Nova*, closed and deserted, at midnight, and destroyed everything. But they didn't completely succeed in the proposition, because barely some months later, May 14, the anarchist paper they so hated restarted their publication in Rome — at first bi-weekly, then, in early July, daily again — under the provision direction of Luigi Damiani.<sup>62</sup>

The trial against Malatesta was held before the Court of Appeals? of Milan, from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, 1921. The blamed Malatesta and Borghi, beyond their personal positions in relation to the accusations which were made against them, illustrated the Italian situation as it had been since 1919, and affirmed their ideas. In the defense was, with other lawyers, Saverio Merlino, the old and indefatigable friend of Malatesta. But the light of discussion the accusations against the blamed seemed so clumsy and unsustainable, that the king's prosecutor himself was seen forced to exclude all existence of a crime. Therefore, Malatesta who intended to end by speaking a self-defense, that, like in the earlier trials, would have been able to make good anarchist propaganda, was robbed of the opportunity to deliver it, and limited himself to a brief declaration invoking, even in the unavoidable fight, a near future that would be more civil and human than the barbaric violence which fascism in Italy provided in that moment — and would have to continue giving it in what followed — a spectacle so sad.

It all ended with a general acquittal, and the afternoon of that final day of debate, Malatesta was free again among us and the comrades of Milan. Fifteen days later, in Rome, he returned to his post as the direction of *Umanità Nova*.

Meanwhile, during the ten months that Malatesta was in prison, fascism — aided secretly? by the government, financed by the high bourgeoisie, supported by the police and government, supported by the police and military forces and by all the antisocialist parties — was imposed in almost half of Italy. It was already undisputed master in Emilia, Tuscany, Polesina and in other minor points. Resistance to fascism was posed, more or less, by anarchists, communists, socialists, republicans, in addition to the various syndical organizations. Malatesta immediately threw himself into the contest, and with *Umanità Nova* and his personal activity, and in some cases as representative of the Italian Anarchic Union, participated actively in all the attempts of



proletarian resistance against the new whip. He intervened, as in the past, in all the reunions possible, public or clandestine; he favored the formation of squads of “arditi del popolo” that organized themselves for armed resistance; he contributed with his advice to the formation of the Alliance of work concerted among the various Italian syndical organisms; he stimulated in every way the different initiatives of individual and collective action.

I have already noted his participation in the anarchist congress of Ancona from November 1 to 4, 1921. Malatesta’s intervention regarding this could be interesting regarding the discussion that was had there about the Diana attempt in Milan. Immediately after the event, the correspondence commission of the I.A.U., before even knowing the authors and under whose responsibility, had made a public declaration where it expressed its anguish for the mourning of the dead and the resultant blood, threw the responsibility on the ruling class, provocators and killers of freedom, putting anarchism in safety and referring to ideas about some similar acts explained at other times by Malatesta. As some comrade in the congress made reservations about such a declaration, Malatesta defended it, declaring himself in agreement with it and sustaining that the Commission had completed an anarchist debt to express its own opinion on that occasion. In another of his discourses, regarding the mission of anarchist in the labor movement, he fought the ideas of those who would have wanted to make allegiance to the Syndical Union mandatory for anarchist workers. Though expressing towards this body the greatest sympathy and the warmest preference, he upheld the freedom of the comrades to belong to the syndicates which they believed would do the most useful work, on the condition that this action be uncompromisingly inspired by anarchist ideas.

Some month later, April 23, 1922, Malatesta was with other comrades (Pasquale Binazzi, V. Cantarelli, Fabbri, N. da B. and H. M.) in representing the Anarchic Union in a conference in Spezia with the anarchist-Bolshevist Hermann Sandormirsky — chief of the press committee of the Russian sovietist delegation to the interstate conference of Geneva — in search of information and for an interchange of explanation of the position of anarchists in Russia faced with the Bolshevik state that they pursued. On that occasion the fascists in the place intended in vain to disturb the reunion, kept at a distance by the improvised intervention of the proletariat of Spezia. At base of those conversations, which were developed in depth, a brief debate was held between Malatesta and Sandormirsky in the columns of *Umanità Nova*. From May 9 to 31, the trial took place in Milan for the Diana tragedy of March 23 of the previous year. The anarchists Giuseppe Mariani, Ettore Aguggini and Giuseppe Boldrini were directly accused as authors, the first two confessed, the third innocent and declared such by the other two. There were another fourteen accused of minor acts, arbitrarily linked to the events of the Diana under the generic title of association to commit crime. Mariani and Boldrini were condemned to military prison; Aguggini, a minor, to thirty years of reclusion. The others had sentences varying from 4 to 16 years of reclusion. Three were acquitted. A trial was held later for one abroad.

In that trial, Malatesta, though showing his well-known good judgment about the act, took the most ardent defense of the accused, not only of minor acts and the innocent, but also of those most responsible. He offered himself for testimony and spoke to the jury in their defense; but his offer wasn’t legally admissible or advisable, according to the lawyers. In substance, in some articles that he dedicated to the trial in *Umanità Nova*, he sustained that the authors of the attempts had committed it in an irresponsible state of passion, that their excitation had been from wholly idealist motives, altruistic and disinterested, and for that he rallied all the attenuations and discriminations possible in their favor. However, words of such high human sentiment were

too high for that low environment to which he directed them, to be able to be heard. And so the first tragedy was crowned and aggravated by a new tragedy!

Fascism disgracefully proceeded, with methodical, criminal abuse of power and its absolute impunity, the submission of other Italian regions, like Puglia, Lomellina, and Veneto; in July the gangs of blackshirts concentrated in Ravenna and mourning and destruction were sown in almost all of Romagna. The Alliance of labor wanted to play the last card and proclaimed a defensive general strike on July 30, 1922 in all of Italy, which anarchists, communists, and revolutionary socialists proposed since a moment. Malatesta, who pressed for such a thing in *Umanità Nova*, used the weight of all the personal influence that he enjoyed among the greater part of the exponents of the proletarian organisms, with which he was in contact day and night in those times, so that the strike would be declared. It was, but the hopeless attempt didn't reach the effect it pursued, and was suffocated in blood by the fascist gangs and the official police. Fascism planted itself as master, with the most ferocious violence, in Marcas and Milan as well.

The camp of intervention directed by Malatesta was restricted bit by bit, and was increasingly limited to Rome and its surroundings, where the labor resistance on one hand, and on the other the hypocritical and opportunist politics of the government, dictated in the capital for diplomatic convenience, to save face, still impeded the open penetration of fascism. *Umanità Nova* could be published, but already couldn't be diffused in the provinces, outside a very few places: everywhere, like most all the antifascist press, the paper was either seized in the mail, or taken from the vendors and burned, and vendors, subscribers, and buyers were beaten with sticks in the streets. Daily publication had to be suspended and it became a weekly, after the last disastrous general strike in August (with number 183, August 12).

A short serene and elevated parenthesis in Malatesta's tormented life in this period was had by an escape to Switzerland in September. Though expelled from there since 1879, it was to hold the fiftieth anniversary of the historic anti-authoritarian conference of Saint-Imier, where — Bakunin and Malatesta present — in September of 1872 the modern anarchist movement had been born. Malatesta, searched for in vain by the Italian and Swiss police, passed across the mountains, stayed peacefully in Bienne the 16<sup>th</sup> and Saint-Imier the 17<sup>th</sup>, participated actively in the international anarchist reunions that were convoked, and returned across the border, peacefully, to Rome. Of the discussions held in those conference of Malatesta about the different problems of revolution — in particular with the anarchist Colomer, crossed later to Bolshevism — a colophon of argumentative articles appeared a bit later in *Umanità Nova* and in *Le Libertaire* (Paris).

A month after Malatesta's return from Switzerland, or a little later, the famous "march on Rome" took place — in late October — with which fascism managed, thanks to the king's complicity, to assume power officially, breaking the last formalities and obstacles of the Italian constitution.

On this eve Malatesta still didn't lose hope for Italy's salvation. We had seen a few days earlier, in a private reunion among comrades from different parts of Italy in Rome — on the occasion of the reunion of the administrative council of *Umanità Nova* — and he was still optimistic. But his optimism was totally refuted by events. The consequences that befell Italy are well known. In Rome some small group of audacious people tried in vain some resistance in the neighborhoods of San Lorenzo, Porta Trionfale, and Città Giardino. The fascist forces that converged from everywhere and entered Rome on the side of the army, as soon as Mussolini was called to the Quirinale by the king, made all opposing force impotent. A ridiculous detail: in Piazza Cavour,

fascists found a caricature of Malatesta in one of the houses they invaded and devastated, and shredded it with their bayonets, then burned it.

But Malatesta wasn't personally molested. Only on the night of October 30, in the distant neighborhood of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, the editing and press of *Umanità Nova* was assaulted and partly destroyed. A new invasion, some days later, completed the destruction. Malatesta succeeded, however, to publish another two issues in other presses, in an energetic and direct language faced with the triumphant enemy. But then the government intervened directly, first using police to formally prohibit the typographers from printing the paper, and day? later with an order to arrest the administrator Giuseppe Turci, which meant the seizure of all the papers, accounting books, and the money that remained in the coffers.

*Umanità Nova* therefore died, whose last issue (196) was from December 2, 1922. A trial began later against Malatesta and a number of editors and contributors to the paper in Rome and other parts of Italy; but it was a simple pretext to oblige its suppression, since nothing more was spoken of it later.

### **A year of manual labor (1923). – “Pensiero e volontà” of Rome (1924–26). – Persecutions.**

The quill broken in his hand, Malatesta didn't lose his drive. He looked for and found a small place for rent, 87 San Giovanni, in Laterano, near the Coliseum, and there he set up a modest electrical mechanic's shop. He returned, then, after three years of journalistic battle, to the profession he had taken up on occasions in London from 1882 until 1919.

Work wasn't lacking, maybe because he was still able and strong enough despite his sixty-nine years, maybe because of the great sympathies he enjoyed in the most diverse environments. But soon a difficult fight of another type began for him, with the fascist police who followed him everywhere he went to work on electrical installations, gas stoves, repairs, and so on. The agents annoyed and tried to intimidate those who regularly gave him work. In April of 1923, the papers were occupied with an improvised break-in of the house of a high military chief, in the neighborhood of Città Giardino Aniene, where Malatesta was installing electrical equipment.<sup>63</sup>

In the intervals that work left free, he continued to occupy himself with the events of the anarchist movement. Besides the persistent work of stimulus and propaganda that he developed with his personal influence among those who came close and of the skills with which he maintained the files of comrades in coalitions, that which naturally escaped all documentation, we found a pair of articles of his in two publications done in Rome by Temistocle Monticelli: *Per la prossima riscossa* (the pamphlet *Solidarietà*, Rome, February, 1923) and *Perché il Fascismo vines e seguila a spadroneggiare in Italia* (in the paper *Il Libero accordo*, Rome, no. 78 of August 28, 1923). In the paper *Fede!* that was started in Rome that year by Luigi Damiani, earlier the editor of the suppressed *Umanità Nova*, I remember among other things a pair of articles of his arguing with the communists (nos. 7 and 11 of October 28 and November 25), and a report written by request of the Italian Anarchic Union to the anarchist Congress of Paris (that should have been held at the end of that year, but wasn't): “Conduct of the anarchists in the labor movement” (*Fede!* no. 3 of September 30).

Malatesta turned seventy at the end of the year (1923), and war displays of sympathy and affection arrived from various parts of the world from comrades and friends. Meetings were held

in Paris and Buenos Aires in memory and solidarity with the old warrior. In Italy these displays stayed contained within modest limits of familiar intimacy due to the observation and the fascist reaction. But his closest friends took the opportunity to offer him the means to a work more useful to the cause, and at the same time less dangerous and more independent. By the initiative of the paper *Fede!*, with the cooperation of comrades in Italy and abroad, several thousand lira were collected to enable Malatesta to start a new, regular paper of his own. And so it was that on January 1, 1924, the semimonthly magazine *Pensiero e Volontà* appeared in Rome.

In its beginnings the fascist regime consented to, in Italy, a legal mask of freedom of press, obligated to this by the old official political constitution that couldn't be entirely abolished at once, though later this freedom was limited as much as possible, illegally, with the private violence of its bands of thugs and arsonists, and by means of arbitrary and exceptional police measures. Malatesta's new magazine would make use of that surviving gust of freedom.

*Pensiero e Volontà* had the character of all of Malatesta's other publications: clarity and serenity of language, dignified before the enemy, intransigent in its ideas, sharp observation of the facts, depths and thought. Given the situation, he was obligated to escape or elude certain arguments of real life, or better to treat them in a manner imposed by the circumstances. But when it was necessary, Malatesta would frankly say what pertained to the all-powerful dominators of Italy, and to Mussolini himself, signing what he wrote, as he did, for example, when Mussolini spoke of a pretended "Albertini-Malatesta ring," to insinuate the existence of fantastic relations between the anarchist hostility to fascism and the opportunistic and moderate opposition of a few conservative monarchists, or when he dared to brag in the foreign press of the liberty shown by his government to the known anarchist agitator.

The life of the magazine was soon difficult and laborious because of this. Barely six months later, on the day after the fascist assassination of Matteotti, the government established censorship of the press, *Pensiero e Volontà* began to be the target of seizures, which were so frequent that throughout early 1925 the magazine couldn't publish regularly.

Often, after the first edition was seized, the expurgated second and third drafts were as well, not to tell of the postal sabotage and arbitrary fascist seizures in each locality. The twenty-four regular issues could only be printed the first year; in the second (1925) only sixteen issues were released, and sixteen in the third, with five more installments of the censored issues.<sup>64</sup> The final issue was no. 16 of October 10, 1926. Number 17, given to the printer in early November, with an article by Malatesta against the death penalty proposed by the fascist government, would never appear. The government completely suppressed *Pensiero e Volontà*, as it suppressed all of the antifascist or merely independent Italian press after Anteo Zamboni's attempt on Mussolini's life in Bologna, in late October.

Malatesta's voice was thereby constrained to the most total silence, and he was cut off from any way of living through intellectual labor. Although his advanced age would have permitted him, he wouldn't be able to return to his manual labor, since his electrical mechanic's shop on S. Giovanni street in Laterano, entrusted to his worker friends three years ago, had been invaded and devastated by the fascists after Zamboni's attempt. Anyway, in the situation that followed, nobody would have given him work.

So since then, Malatesta could live – together with his companion Elena Melli, with who he had been together with since 1921, and with her daughter Gemma who he adored like his own daughter – only with the help of the comrades who were most nearly like friends and others who, though distant, took interest in him. This help never failed him, until the end, the modest

bread that he needed; though it couldn't be anything more than the help of poor people to a poor man. He who knew Malatesta couldn't do less than think of his spiritual displeasure in a similar position, he who had always given all to others and would never have wanted to cost anyone a cent. But it wasn't more than an inevitable consequence of the enemy's prepotency, like the material and moral aggravations of imprisonment, and of the flights of his past. In reality, his was the condition of a prisoner, whose children and brothers try their best to alleviate the sufferings of prison.

A prisoner he was, truly, despite all appearances, since fascism little by little isolated him in plain Rome from all contact with the surrounding world. More than once among the near and distant advised him to flee; but he didn't want to. Since the beginning of November, 1926, all freedom had been suppressed, the government adopting the most draconian means and the bloodiest persecutions against all free men and enemies of fascism, the exodus of Italians who felt most menaced had intensified, or for who the Italian atmosphere was most unbearable. For a certain time, Malatesta was allowed to leave and the opportunity was offered to him by Swiss and French friends. But he preferred to stay, and advised others to leave: it was just (he told them) to stay in place, to set an example of resistance to the rest, to look forward to the occasion of an action impossible from far away, to do what little could be done, to remain in a condition to stay informed of the ? events that would be decided from one moment to the next, and so on.<sup>65</sup> Later, especially when the Spanish revolution took place, he had wanted to depart; but then it was too late.

Through the end of 1926, the persecutions against him, although in a simulated and hypocritical form, grew progressively. Already by September, 1926, after Gino Lucetti's attempt against Mussolini, he had been arrested (and his partner too) and held in prison for 12 days. After the other attempt of Zamboni in Bologna, he had escaped arrest only by hiding himself for several days. But at the end of the year, after the flight of Turati from Italy, and more still through mid-1927, after the clandestine exit of other people who were known to be his friends, the vigilance against him intensified until it was literally asphyxiating, and furthermore dangerous for those who came near him. They didn't stoop ? to imprisoning him, lacking all visible pretext for that, and on account of his age – those older than 70 weren't sent to confinement – and fascism feared the enormous repercussion that his arrest would have had outside of Italy, and maybe the spirit of retaliation that the deed would have raised among his comrades. It was preferred to have him as a hostage, in a type of house confinement, surrounding him with an ostentatious and insuperable barrier of police.

Already since the end of 1921 or the beginning of 1922, some months before the "march on Rome," Malatesta had rented, with his small family, an apartment of two rooms and a kitchen on 8 Andrea Doria street (then Piazzale degli Eroi), on the third floor, in the Porta Trionfale neighborhood. His apartment, for which he paid a modest rent, formed a part of the vast complex of the People's Houses Institute of the Commune of Rome. And Malatesta lived there until his death.

## **An unseen prison. — Life under tyranny. — Contributing to the foreign anarchist press. — Sickness and death (1938).**

Since the beginning of 1927, the fascist government had installed a type of police guard in the doorway of the building where Malatesta lived, posted there day and night and outfitted with cars and motorcycles. Later there was also a sentinel on the third-story landing, by the door to his apartment. When Malatesta left, he was followed everywhere by an escort on foot and in vehicles. If he entered a house, the police would pretend [?] to enter as well, or would prevent Malatesta from entering. If someone went to Malatesta's house, they were detained and left free only if they weren't a subversive; and it was intimated that they never return. If somebody said hello or stopped him in the street, they ran the same risk; the least that would happen would be that they were entered in a register.<sup>66</sup> His partner Elena Melli and her daughter Gemma were also followed as they left the house. The police dedicated to Gemma, a student, would also enter the scholastic locales ? and wait for her outside the hall during her lessons.

It would never end if we began to tell of the details of this oppressive observation and the incidents that took place. I will relate some of the most salient:

The building Malatesta lived in had a secondary exit, which the police sealed with a wall. Of two friends, a father and son, who came to visit him once, one was sent to confinement and the other subjected to "ammonizione" (special observation for the public security). An English woman who Malatesta had known in London, met him and invited him to her house, and because of this had so many annoyances that she repentantly broke off all relations with him. A known lawyer who had arrived in Rome from the provinces wanted to make a courtesy visit to him, and that sufficed to have him arrested for an entire day, and that briefly only because his friends, highly placed people and well-seen by the regime, made a serious effort to liberate him. Another time Malatesta, interested in one of his daughter's professors, wanted to go to one of his lessons at the university: that was enough for the professor to see his conferences suppressed and himself submitted to a hearing. In one instance, a grave incident took place to the young Gemma; a policeman had bothered one of her comrades from school and she had protested. In revenge, the policeman waited for her near Malatesta's house and hurled her into the chairs near a café, wounding her seriously.

Those that know the sociable and affectionate nature of Malatesta will understand the emotional suffering brought about by this isolation, and even worse than the isolation, the constant danger of bringing harm and misery to those who were driven by affection to approach him. It was he himself, for the most part, who since the first moments told all of his friends to abstain from visiting him to avoid disagreeable irritation. When he saw in the streets some friend or acquaintance in the distance who looked like they would approach him, he winked and made signs to the incautious person to pass him without a word, lest they fall into the hands of the police who followed him.

This grievous situation was aggravated by the most rigorous censorship that his letters were subjected to. All of the foreign periodicals were seized; and it was a solemn event for him when, by some error of the surveillance, some friend's paper arrived in his hands. The same often happened with books; what was seized included the known English book by Ishill about Elias and Elise Reclus. It was intended, without success, to prevent the Banks from transmitting the money that was sent to him from friend outside the country. One check was returned to the bank that it came

from, a first time, with the motivation of treating it as “antination money.” The bank in turn expedited the check, making the ridiculousness of the event observed.

All of the letters that arrived were read by a special office and then handed over, often with long delays, to the recipient; and some periodicals weren’t given back at all. But complete interception was renounced, clearly because the government had found it more useful to its goals to send the letters on their way, to read all that which could have been of interest. Astute, but useless, because Malatesta had warned everyone to only write what they would be able to write to a person in jail. At times, with the certified mail that hadn’t already been opened in the office, one of the police guards entered the house with the mailman and pretended that Malatesta opened them in his presence, particularly to seize imprints or of periodicals that were in them. These preventative measures didn’t impede others of a repressive nature. From time to time Malatesta’s house was broken into, some book or paper would be seized, or some article he was working on or hadn’t sent off, or a letter. An article he had written in French for Sebastián Faure’s *Anarchist Encyclopædia (La Enciclopedia Anarchista)*, about “determinism,” met this fate in the hands of the police. In another instance an English article about “Science and anarchy” was confiscated as he was about to send it. But generally, the pretext for going to his house was to interrogate him or... to stay informed of his health, simply with the goal of making sure he was home if he didn’t leave by his usual time. There was no shortage of more serious incidents. In 1928, after the explosion of a bomb in Julius Caesar square in Milan, his partner Melli was detained, only because she had lived in that metropolis of Lombardy for a long time. She was held in jail for about two months without being questioned by anyone, and without and motive at all, besides the obvious one of tormenting Malatesta’s family.

It was unavoidable that with the passing years, Malatesta’s always indecisive health would fail him. In early 1926, he had one of his bronchial attacks, complicated by a strong hemorrhage which alarmed his doctor, who advised him to spend the summer season by the sea. In July he went with his partner and her daughter to Elena, a small town at the edge of the Tirreno, near Gaeta. But, the police wouldn’t leave him in peace. As would happen later in Rome, whoever approached him was arrested. Moreover, those who arrived in town from the outside were detained if they were known leftists, as happened to the lawyer Di Mambro from nearby Cassino when he got off of the train, “Because Malatesta is in town,” he was told. After two or three days, the friend who enjoyed Malatesta’s hospitality was cruelly pelted and beaten by the fascists. To avoid other incidents with his friends, Malatesta was pressured into returning to Rome. The same thing, more or less, was repeated five years later. His condition had grown serious, he was very weak and the doctor came to recommend that he leave to breathe the ocean air of some beach. Malatesta went with Gemma to Terracina, not very far from Rome. This time a truck of policemen and their chief followed him from the capital. It is pointless to recount the new vexations he suffered, along with whoever approached him or the girl. It was pointed out and prohibited to speak a word to the waiters who served him in the café. ? A poor girl of 14 years who had met Gemma on the beach and went to visit her was called by the police and threatened in such a way that she became sick and bedridden with a fever. The youth of the place began to show a malhumor and Malatesta, to avoid other incidents or endangering people on his account, interrupted his cure almost before it began and took the train for Rome.

The greatest fear of the government and the police was that Malatesta would find a way to escape and take refuge in another country. It is true that their intentions changed little by little. He already wasn’t of the opinion that it was best to stay in Italy. I had written him more recently

that I regretted having left, he responded that he had made a mistake and that he was convinced that his sacrifice to remain there had been useless. It had become unbearable for him to live that way. To be a type of bait for the police, who lay in waiting with the aim of catching and putting under their power those who showed affection or interest in him, humiliated him and made him suffer. More than once he told me and wrote that he preferred the confinement of jail a thousand times to that “liberty” of his, false and hypocritical.

When later the fall of the Spanish monarchy grew in this birth unexpected revolutionary situations, he felt more strongly the weight of the immobility forced upon him. On April 25, 1931 he wrote to me: “I have a fever (don’t be alarmed, I speak metaphorically) for the events of Spain. It appears to me that the situation presents great possibilities and I would like to go there. I am infuriated to be here, enchained.” How well it is understood! He always had the same hopes as Bakunin for a possible Spanish revolution. He had been there more than once through the first International; some of his closest friends were Spanish, the language was familiar to him; and if he had been able to go, he really would have been able to develop the most useful action. But it was already impossible! The police should have been able to divine his desire; and in Terracina they were made to understand it easily. Precisely in that summer of 1931 a project had been aired, not entirely fantastic, to organize his flight from Italy. But the eternal speakers and stupid publications in the papers made the smallest beginnings impossible to realize, and perhaps were the cause of a more rigorous vigilance over his surroundings.

But it shouldn’t be believed that the tormentuous and difficult position Malatesta was put in by the persecutions, disturbances and illnesses impeded him from continuing to live his intellectual and spiritual life, in harmony with his sentiments of free man, of a revolutionary and an anarchist. On the contrary. He didn’t renounce in any way, despite the silence to which he was constrained in Italy, to say his ideas, to stimulate action, to denounce the infamies of the oppressors, to cooperate in the incessant elaboration of libertarian ideas, to be interested in the international social and anarchists movement. There is no important question which, in these last years and until the eve of his death, has been debated in the anarchist camp, which he hasn’t spoken his opinion about. He wasn’t stingy with advice and exhortations, in particular if he heard the echo of certain antipathetic controversies among comrades, or if he believed to discover dangerous deviations in some theoretical or tactical attitudes. ? In addition to the articles for papers, he wrote to an infinity of comrades, he said all that he thought and knew without worrying about the censor, and directed words of affection, stimulus and hope to all, in which could always be seen the same strong human love and his unshakeable confidence in the future.

After 1926 until his end he continued his writing, always so lucid and original – at that point only published abroad – and contributing to the anarchist press. They would be too many to enumerate. The majority have appeared in *Il Risveglio Anarchico* of Geneva, and finally not a few in *L’Adunata dei Refrattari* of New York, where his last article has appeared in chronological order, about what is called “anarchist revisionism,” March 12, 1932. He has beneficially written other articles, moreover, for *La Lotta umana* and *Le Libertaire* of Paris, for *Studi Sociali* of Montevideo and *Probuzhdenie* (a Russian magazine) of Detroit, Michigan, and probably for other publications that I have ignored or forgotten.

Some of these writings, of notable breadth, have a special importance, as for example his critique of the “Anarchist platform” project of group of Russian comrades (1927), a study about the “regime of property after the revolution” (1929), another about the mission of “anarchists in the actual moment” (1930), one of memories and critiques of Peter Kropotkin (1931), and more. Most



important, especially from the historical point of view is a long preface to Max Nettlau's recent book, *Bakunin and the International in Italy* (*Bakunin e l'Internazionale in Italia*, Geneva, 1928), a type of retrospective description of revolutionary Italy around 1870. I have said (in another part of this work) his most recent intentions to prepare a type of theoretical and historical re-elaboration of his ideas in connection with the memories of his life. But I haven't known anything more of that. Most likely he lacked the time, and above all the tranquility, to do it.

Meanwhile the blows to his health became more frequent and menacing. After the serious sickness of yearly 1926, he had recovered enough, though continuing to pay tribute each winter to his old bronchial infection that had always tormented him since a boy. He had a most serious relapse in the spring of 1931, and he hadn't completely recuperated. The next summer, he who had never suffered from the heat, even enjoying it when others found it unbearable, for the first time felt himself exhausted by it. The sickness contributed to dishearten him that summer and in autumn (1931) on two occasions, and seriously, from his partner, having tried as hard as she could to help him day and night.

With winter he began to feel worse, between continuous highs and lows, though without overly serious relapses. The worst weakness persisted and grew, despite the resistance of his spirit. On the new year of 1932 he wrote me a brief postcard: "One freezes here, literally and figuratively; and I am frozen up outside and within." He anxiously awaited the spring sun, confident of a renovation of his forces. His heart resisted less and less. He had moments of suffocation, sometimes provoked by the smallest movement, and to alleviate it he resorted again to the oxygen respiration. His will fought energetically against the illness, and by March he began to feel better. His letters to friends became more frequent, longer, more calm; he wrote some articles again. But it was for a short time.

On March 26, 1932, a bronchiopulmonary attack, on top of his chronic bronchitis, locked him in bed. This time the illness was very grave. On April 9 he was at the point of death; the danger lasted several days, receding little by little. But the recovery was slow and uncertain. He managed to abandon the bed, to go from one room to the other, to sleep peacefully for several hours. The fatigue bothered him less and the need for artificial oxygen diminished. He began to write to friends again. But the recovery was interrupted a bit later by strong fevers, and the fatigue returned. This crisis appeared surmounted, so much so that on June 30 he wrote me a note with words of hope reborn.

But in what followed not many illusions were made. As I later understood, he wrote slightly more refreshing letters to me, because he knew that I was sick as well, and didn't want to afflict me. But to another good friend of his, Luigi Bertoni of Geneva, he opened his spirit more. His last letters were another reflection of his soul, so full of a will to live, full of love of the idea, of tenderness for all the comrades in faith.

"I spend," he wrote to Bertoni, "part of the day half-sleeping, as a fool (I generally can't sleep at night), and by the other half I live the intimate tragedy of my spirit, that is to say, I am shaken by the great affection that comrades feel for me and at the same time my torment by the feeling of having merited it so little and, what is much worse, by the growing awareness of already not being able to do anything in the future. Frankly, when one has dreamt and waited so, it is sad to die in the conditions in which maybe I will die, perhaps on the eve of the awaited events. But what do you want! Maybe there is no more remedy than to wait for the end holding before my mind's eyes the image of that which I have so desired and who I have so loved." And in another letter to the same person, on June 30, "... In relation to my health, here they would make me

believe that I am better, and I do not too afflict you to feign to believe it. But I know that it isn't true. It is true, however, that the good time and heat, in which I so trust, still haven't begun: there is, therefore, place to hope..."<sup>67</sup>

Someone near to him wrote me after his death: "He didn't want to leave his desk: night and day he was there in that chair, at his table, and he wouldn't be seen to abandon that place at any price. He only left for a moment to lie in bed or sit in an armchair. When he was in agony and already couldn't move, a small movement he would make with his feet: the act of getting out of bed to go to the table. Because the table represented life for him, where he was busy with his dear ideas, where he related with distant comrades, reading and rereading his letters and writing them... He always thought of his comrades, and the great pain he was going to cause them. He was moved almost to tears when his thought went to his most loved friends and he saw them receive the news of his death..."

On July 11 he tried to write me for the last time. But that day he couldn't finish the letter and send it. I had it later, written laboriously and so almost interminably. On the 18<sup>th</sup> he got worse.

However, he wasn't resigned to defeat. He couldn't be in bed, save some moments; and he stayed at the table or reposed in an armchair. He didn't lose spirit; his memory was always accurate and sure, his intelligence didn't suffer any alteration, although he slowly lost his physical powers. On the morning of July 21, the eve of his death, he sat to eat with his family, read the paper as was his custom and when the mail arrived, his letters were read by Elena. He spoke of politics a bit with the doctor who came to visit him. He found a way ? to write to his niece Tristán in Egypt and to a comrade in Paris, and noted in the paper some brief thought about society and the individual, which showed him to be in his usual lucidity of intelligence.<sup>68</sup>

At midday he sat at the table, as always, and made himself eat a little. He split the rest of the day between the desk and armchair until 9 at night. Then he laid down, to not get up again. At night he deteriorated enough, and at about 3 in the morning he went in to agony. However, he preserved consciousness even then, responding to those speaking with signs with his head. His heart gradually resisted less, and twenty minutes after noon, July 22, 1932, ceased beating.

Errico Malatesta had died! Our loved comrade, the friend, the brother, the father of so many of us, the faithful defender of the proletariat, the apostle of revolution and anarchy, had ended his long, laborious and heroic journey. Now he belongs to History.

# Appendix A: biographical notes

## The Funerals

I think it would be good to add here the news received from Rome about Malatesta's funerals:

"As soon as the Roman police knowing that Malatesta had died, they took all measures to prevent comrades from going to see him and to avoid a possible agreement between them for the funerals. Ten police and a commissioner, beyond those already in regular service there, were spread out on the stairs of the building where Malatesta lived. They took the personal data of all those who approached the dead man's door.

"Other police on bicycles circled about the houses in a generous radius, to dissolve the groups which formed, to stop comrades from heading to the house, and to avoid all type of news of his death from spreading. With all this, fifteen comrades, men and women, could meet.

"The funerals were marked for Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> at 3 in the afternoon. The itinerary was set by the police themselves. The press maintained absolute silence: not a single line! The obituary notices sent by relatives as paid notes weren't published. For the news to be known on the outside, the foreign papers telegraphed the Press Association of Rome to get confirmation.

They responded affirmatively; but in Italy nothing was made known.

"Three cars of family and friends followed the hearse?. Then came the police automobile, which was consecrated to observation of Malatesta, full of police; other police functionaries followed in a wagon?, others still on bicycle.

"The only flowers permitted were a wreath from the family and relatives. Only consented-upon writing: 'To Errico Malatesta, Eduardo and Tristán, Elena and Gemma.' (Eduardo and Tristán were two of his nephews.) The flowers from children in the vicinity would be left in the empty apartment. The red carnations from comrades were only allowed in the coffin. Poor Gemma wanted to follow her father with a bouquet of red flowers, to deposit them later in his coffin. The police said that they wouldn't permit her the ostentation of throwing the, Gemma, hopeless and pained, hurled the flowers she had in her arms out the window. So their departure was permitted.

"The law allowed funeral processions to travel half a kilometer of street by foot; but this time even a single step was prohibited. The relatives and friends had to get in their cars as soon as they left the doorway and follow at great speed. On the length of the street, in all the intersections? the hearse passed, 'by accident' there were riflemen and police to stop the comrades from crossing or going down the same street as the rapid and short procession. It was like that everywhere up until the cemetery.

In the cemetery many other police and characters from Central Interrogation waited. Police guards were left before the coffin all night. Sunday at 6 in the morning the coffin was lowered into the grave, in the common area of the poor people, amidst the dead of the people, that people for whom Malatesta had fought his whole life.

"Since then two police take turns in the cemetery to take the affiliation of those who dare to approach the grave. A comrade who knew nothing of this went and was detained a moment

before it. The police took his affiliation and accompanied him to Interrogation; there he was interned in a cell, where he was left for fourteen hours.

“Malatesta, having died as he lived, outside all religion, had been taken to the cemetery without a cross; and his relatives had given dispositions in order that crosses not be placed on his tomb. But orders from the government of Rome were exact and unbendable: a cross was placed even above the grave of the atheist anarchist. The next morning, when his comrade Elena Melli went to the cemetery, she saw the cross, went to take it immediately; but had to go to declare that she had removed it as his wife. Later, Elena was called to the police for this, though they didn’t bother to offend her pain with useless reproaches.”

(From Rome, July 30, 1932.)

## **Fascist Lies**

The announcement of Malatesta’s death deeply moved the world of revolutionary workers and filled the anarchists of all countries with sorrow. Even his adversaries were inclined to respect before the noble figure of the great Italian revolutionary who had ceased to live.

Only fascism wanted to distinguish itself, beyond its borders, intending to throw a pile of mud on his tomb when it had barely closed. A fascist daily from Buenos Aires, official organ of the party that dominates Italy and spawned XXX by the Italian Embassy, published on July 25, 1932 a blurb in which, after making ironies about the unanimous condolences of the leftist press of the Argentine Republic, about the abundant columns dedicated to the memory of the extinguished, fantasized about the pretended moral and material help given to Malatesta by Mussolini in the last moments of his life: morally, speaking to him several times, providing him with books; materially, finding him lodging and co-operating in his sustenance.

It is useless to say that it deals with the most ridiculous lies; Mussolini and Malatesta were for a brief time friends — of a superficial enough friendship, anyway — in 1913–14; but all relations between them ceased after the last polemic letter from Malatesta to Mussolini (see the biography), from London, in December of 1914, regarding the war. They didn’t see each other, nor spoke, nor wrote. As to Malatesta’s sustenance, after he was put by fascism in an absolute impossibility of earning his bread in any way, he was always provided for, until the final instant, modestly, but sufficiently, by his comrades. Far from procuring him books, Mussolini’s police seized those that arrived by mail. The lodging that Malatesta rented from the Institute of People’s Houses of the Commune of Rome since before the “March on Rome,” he had always paid for from his wallet.

When I read such piggishness in the paper alluded to, against that which other papers (including a fascist one) protested, I believed it a stupid invention, in the place, of whatever editor. But when I knew that similar voices had circulated in some dailies of North America, I had thought that the breeze of slander had been breathed from Rome, without worrying about it much, it is understood, there where the truth was too well-known and where it was preferred to hush up the news of the man’s death, whose name alone caused the tyrants such panic. A paper of New York also spoke of the living space put at Malatesta’s disposition by the government; and another of Chicago even spoke of a chalet in the vicinity of Rome. The sincerity of journalism is remarkable!

## Malatesta's Tomb

Elena Melli, the comrade of ideas who in the last twelve or thirteen years had also been Errico Malatesta's life companion and had tended to him so lovingly, creating the warmth of domestic housekeeping in his surroundings and permitting him to enjoy, at least in the intimacy of the house and the family, what bit of tranquility that was still possible in the tempestuous Italian life and under the inquisitorial persecutions of the fascist regime, he had pursued with his tenacious will that the remains of our loved friend would have a dignified and long-lasting grave.

Recourse has been had, for the not insignificant expenses, to the aid of comrades and friends scattered throughout the world, and it has been had immediately and sufficiently. And therefore in little more than a year his pious wish and that of those who loved Malatesta has been satisfied.

Malatesta's tomb is found in Campo Varano, the monumental Roman cemetery, in division 30, third file, number 20, to the left of the broken column, beyond the ossuary. It is very simple: a rectangular stone lightly inclined, with his first and last name in letters 11 centimeters high, date of birth and death in 4 centimeter letters, and a flowerpot with a smelted photograph, encased. Name and date are in zinc letters.

\* "forced domicile," a system of house arrest instituted by X in Y because

\* Italian *fare*, roughly meaning to do, make, create, or build, in contrast to the phrase often used at the time, XXX

\* See the "Declaration of Principles" in this volume.

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