

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



# The influence of Italian immigration on the Argentine anarchist movement

Oswaldo Bayer

Oswaldo Bayer  
The influence of Italian immigration on the Argentine  
anarchist movement  
January 24, 2010

Retrieved on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 from [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

January 24, 2010

repressive laws, or were murdered or suffered jail time for their ideas.<sup>22</sup>

It is commonplace for Argentine political demagogues to repeat every year on Immigrant's Day that they came to "build our homeland with a hammer and plow", but they always forget those that brought us their ideals of redemption and taught us to pronounce the word solidarity for the first time, which is just as valuable as the word freedom that our national anthem speaks of, and which in present-day Argentina is nothing more than painful irony.

---

<sup>22</sup> The example that they set with their humility and poverty will forever remain for future generations. To get a sense of this, it's sufficient to peruse the columns of the anarchist papers from that era and see obituaries of comrades killed in the middle of their youth, almost always by tuberculosis.

be maintained. It was the last written statement from Italian anarchists in Argentina.

The most consistent anarchists left in 1936 for the Spanish Civil War, among them Aldo Aguzzi, who in 1939, by way of Marseilles, was able to return to Argentina. There, in Buenos Aires, he committed suicide on May 31, 1939.

Aldo Aguzzi's suicide can be taken as a symbol of the definitive end of militant Italian anarchism in Argentina. In those days another wave of political emigration arrived in Buenos Aires: the Spaniards defeated by Francoist fascism.

We have looked at two key periods of Italian influence on Argentine anarchism. Obviously the Italians that struggled during the twenties and thirties were very different from those that helped to ideologically form our workers' movement. The antifascists arriving to Argentina expected to continue only that: the antifascist struggle. They didn't join, except sporadically, with the struggles of the Argentine working class. There was no Gori nor any Malatesta among them, no one to act as those two who had also arrived as exiles, but dedicated themselves to organize, teach and participate in local struggles. Gori and Malatesta encountered anarchism on the rise; the antifascists, an anarchism on the decline. The first facilitated its growth, the second aided in its decline.

Currently Argentine anarchism is a memory, a tradition, a historical position (perhaps the most pure in terms of struggles and sacrifice) of the working class movement. The workers' movement that that was born with it would later follow other paths.

This history is perhaps the primary merit of the Malatestas, the Goris, of the Italian and Spanish immigrants and those of other nationalities that arrived to Argentine soil and dedicated all of their spare time and even their entire lives to the politicization of the proletariat that was then nascent. The historical memory of them is a tribute to all those that were expelled by

## Contents

<b>Malatesta and Revolutionary Syndicalism . . .</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Pietro Gori's Journey . . . . .</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Fascism in Italy, Violence in Argentina . . . . .</b>	<b>22</b>

close relations with “L’Adunatta dei Refrattari” in New York, as well as with the groups following Luigi Damiani’s individualist position, to which Vanzetti belonged.

The series of violent actions in Buenos Aires and Rosario reached their highest point with a high-powered bomb explosion that destroyed the Italian General Consulate, killing nine and seriously injuring 34 more. This and other actions, such as various assaults on banks, resulted in the indiscriminate police repression of local and Italian anarchism. Because of this, *La Protesta*, the main Argentine anarchist paper, and the FOR A, the central labor union, openly attacked the group of individualist Italians undertaking such acts. This attack on the Italians reached such an extreme that someone from Severino Di Giovanni’s group killed the director of *La Protesta*, López Arango, with several gunshots because his paper had labeled Di Giovanni a “fascist agent.”

Di Giovanni was executed by Uriburu military dictatorship, a government that headed an anti-worker repression the likes of which had never been seen before on the Río de la Plata. They turned over to the majority of the anarchists of Italian origin to Mussolini’s Italy, expelled the Spaniards and sent the Argentines to the prison on Tierra del Fuego, Argentina’s Siberia. The anarchist organizations and publications became prohibited. Weakened by internal dissensions and sectarianism, Argentine anarchism began its decline.

But the Italian anarchists in Argentina did not give up. In spite of all their setbacks, two years later in December of 1932, the paper *Sorgiamo! (Pubblicazione de critica e di propaganda defli anarchici italiani nell’Argentina)* began to appear. Aldo Aguzzi edited it; he had managed to reunite the remains of the three tendencies: that of “*Umanità Nova*”, which had inspired Fabbri and Treni, his own “*L’Avvenire*” and that of the individualists. The publication lasted for two years, until 1934. One year later, *La Fiamma* began to appear illegally, but it could barely

Already in December of that year, under his direction in Buenos Aires, *L'Avvenire, Pubblicazione anarchica di cultura e di lotta*, of the anarchist-communist tendency, began to appear. Camilo D'Aleffe, also from Voghera, was the paper's administrator. Aguzzi tried to bring together all of the Italian anarchist tendencies that came to the Río de la Plata region, trying to overcome any internal differences. He supported the idea of an antifascist campaign coming from all parties in order to achieve a united front with the other democratic Italian forces. Early on, he was successful in this. Proof is, for example, the action on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May of 1925.<sup>21</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> of June of that same year almost innocently marked the beginning of the dizzying cycle of violence to come. On that day the Italian fascist colony in Buenos Aires celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victor Manuel III's assumption of the throne. The massive party took place in the Teatro Colón; the president of Argentina, Marcelo T. de Alvear, and the Italian ambassador, Luigi Aldrovandi Marescotti (the count of Viano), were in attendance. When the orchestra began the Italian national anthem, a noisy incident took place: a group of anarchists, among them Severino Di Giovanni, interrupted the event by throwing flyers and shouting "Death to fascism!"

This was the starting point. All belonged to the "L'Avvenire" group, save for Di Giovanni who belonged to the "Renzo Novatore" circle and published the paper *Culmine*. Days later, because of the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign, the group around Di Giovanni began a bombing campaign against North American businesses as well as their consulate. Di Giovanni maintained

---

<sup>21</sup> Organized by the "Italian Antifascist Alliance for the Commemoration of May 1<sup>st</sup>". At 8:30 on this day in the xx Settembre Hall, Alsina 2832m Buenos Airesm. The following spoke at the event: Luigi Zanetti, Gruppo Comunista Italiano, Aldo Aguzzi, Gruppo Anarchico L'Avvenire, Severino Di Giovanni, Gruppo Anarchico Ind. "Renzo Novatore"; Giuseppe Pellegrini, Unione Proletariada Reduci di Guerra; Romeo Gentile; Lega Metallurgici; Clemente Daglia, Sindicato Edili Italiani.

Scholars of the Argentine working class movement have always been preoccupied by two main questions: why was anarchism so successful in Argentina and, by comparison, why did it decline after three decades, rapidly disappear after 1930 and get almost completely absorbed by peronism after 1943? In other words, how do we explain the change from a decentralized antiauthoritarian movement to a centralized authoritarian movement?

This isn't the place to debate these questions but I mention them because it was precisely the influence of Italian immigration in Argentina that played a direct role as much during the peak as in the decline of the working class anarchist movement in Argentina.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, two figures of Italian anarchism: Errico Malatesta and Pietro Gori, had a definitive influence in the formation and consolidation of organized Argentine anarchism. Without the long stays of Malatesta (1885–1889) and Pietro Gori (1898–1902) in Argentina it's quite possible that the movement would not have grown so quickly nor would it have coalesced as it did; instead, more likely it would have fallen into the divisive and destructive arguments typical of libertarian socialist movements worldwide.

With Malatesta's arrival, Argentina acquired a great propagandist and a talented organizer. His important work was marked by three essential characteristics: internationalism (for example, upon his arrival to Buenos Aires his contact with Spanish and Argentine anarchists was immediate); a predisposition to see in the workers and their organizations the best means for preaching his ideology, and his combative organiz-

---

<sup>1</sup> This essay was published for the first time in *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia*, Franco Angeli, 1983, Milan. I don't concern myself so much with statistics and interpretations of Italian immigration in Argentina because in said book there are already specific references to this topic. The same goes for the distribution and number of agricultural, artisanal and industrial workers. I will refer only to ideological matters, taking for granted the sociological premises.

ing capacity. These three characteristics in particular outlined the future course of Argentine anarchism, which would thus remain rooted in the working class movement.<sup>2</sup>

It is with good reason that Diego Abad de Santillán<sup>3</sup> says that Malatesta's arrival contributed greatly to the delayed formation and development of socialism in Argentina.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, the founding of the baker's union was fundamental. Malatesta, upon drawing up the charter for that organization, established the norm for all other aggressive working class organizations. Similarly, and as always in reference to the organized wing of the movement, the presence of the Italian lawyer Pietro Gori in Buenos Aires would also be fundamental in the founding of the Federación Obrera Argentina (FOA), the first national labor union, whose inaugural congress took place in Ligure Hall, 676 Suárez Street in the predominantly Genovese neighborhood of La Boca. Of the 47 delegates there, more than half (26) had Italian last names: Colombo, Magrassi, Ponti, Montale, Moglia, Larrossi, Cúneo, Garfagnini, Ferraroti, Cavallieri, Barsanti, Berri, Di Tulio, Rizzo, Negri, Oldani, Mosca, Bernasconi, Lozza, Barbarossa, Griviotti, Patroni, Basalo, Mattei, Bribbio and Pietro Gori.<sup>5</sup>

It should be emphasized that the importance of Malatesta and Gori lies specifically in the fact that they belonged to the organizationalist tendency of anarchism and not the individualist tendency.<sup>6</sup> If this last tendency had had the help of person-

---

<sup>2</sup> He also was important, although more ephemerally, in the realm of culture.

<sup>3</sup> Diego Abad de Santillán, *Movimiento anarquista*, ed., p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> This is what we call all of the writing normally labeled "authoritarian socialism", social democrat, marxist, parliamentary, etc.

<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, of the 27 organizations that gathered to celebrate the first May Day in 1890, the majority (17) were Italian, even though the initiative came from German immigrants

<sup>6</sup> In general, Argentine anarchism will exhibit three currents that characterized Italian anarchism: the "communist organizationalists", followers of Malatesta's theory; the communist antiorganizationalists that were de-

Here, while the Yiddish language groups progressively assumed a social democratic orientation, the Italian language groups continued defending an intransigent line, facing years of rigorous police persecution. The Sacco and Vanzetti case is the most well-known.

Another phenomena produced during this period was, according to Cerrito: "a reopening of the polemics about the organization question, which were took place in diverse attempts at federal associations with the purpose of building a common front, considered necessary in light of the increasing reaction."

This atmosphere came to Italian anarchists in Argentina, who were influenced principally by the exiles fleeing fascism that arrived in Buenos Aires after the Duce's seizure of power; thus, a profound crisis in anarchism was brought about in Argentina.

Among the Italian anarchists that came to Argentina were the organizationalists, such as Luigi Fabbri and Ugo Fedeli, who save for short periods settled in Montevideo, and the individualists. Among the latter came a group that very soon proved that when confronted with the radicalization of the political regime in their homeland, they were equally ready to radicalize their tactics. The most determined of the group, Severino Di Giovanni (born in Chieti in 1901), inaugurated a period of violence in Buenos Aires that could easily be considered the most direct antecedent to the urban guerrilla warfare that was repeated on a much larger scale and under another ideological banner in Argentina during the seventies.

Undoubtedly, the most outstanding leader of the Italian anarchist movement in Argentina during fascism was Aldo Aguzzi, born in 1902 in Voghera, Pavia, and who according to the local police "fled clandestinely" to Argentina<sup>20</sup> in 1923.

---

<sup>20</sup> Note 60 754 from 8-23/1933, Archive of the State, Rome.

## Fascism in Italy, Violence in Argentina

Although Italians were mostly responsible for the anarchistic features of the beginnings of the Argentine working class movement, they were equally responsible for this ideology's rapid decline in the region.

Argentina during the twenties became the refuge for Italian dissidents fleeing the rise of fascism in the peninsula.

What happened to anarchism in Italy? Gino Cerrito, in "Il disorientamento del ventennio"<sup>19</sup> points out:

The crisis of freedom characterizing the period between the two wars, the weakness shown by the anarchist movement when faced with the rise of fascist regimes, the widening of the class conflict and a superficial analysis of the Soviet Revolution and its effects upon the movement cause an extremely interesting phenomenon to arise: a peculiar but brief return to individualist and terrorist propaganda in Argentina and Italy, which is very different from what characterized the movement in Spain during the same period. Immediately after these events, which are generally characteristic of all periods of ideological deficiency, polemics began anew within the movement, which in general condemned terrorism. Obviously anarchist attitudes towards revolutionary violence in class struggles, which were particularly severe in Spain and Argentina, were different [...], in the face of actions against the dictators or leaders directly responsible for repression; or towards bloody propaganda by the deed, like those committed in the United States.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Geografia dell' Anarchismo*, Ed. RL, 1971

alities like that of these two travelers, it's possible that libertarian socialism would not have played such a role in the roots of the working class movement. However, it was not mere theory to which anarchism's success in Argentina was owed, but action: in fact the first event to catapult anarchist ideology to the fore of the workers' movement was the success of the first bakers' strike in January 1888. The founders of the bakers' union were Ettore Mattei and Francesco Momo<sup>7</sup>, two Italians from Livorno (Novara), and the man that drew up the charter and program for the organization was Errico Malatesta. His and Mattei's roles in the union were fundamental; they fought so that the union would be an authentic society of resistance, an organization that moreover could be labeled as "cosmopolitan", instead of yet another mere mutualist society

One year after its foundation this trade union held its first strike, which drew attention for its combativeness in spite of severe police repression. Its success would serve as an example for other movements of the same character, like that of the shoemakers, for example (also guided by Malatesta), and would continue defining the lines of conduct for all reliable anarchists in the orientation of the working class movement of that epoch.

Of course the pugnacious spirit of the strikes and the impact that the unions had were due to the social and economic circumstances of Argentina during a period of growth. If the worker in Argentina at the end of the century received a wage 32% lower than that of the American worker, 12% lower than that of the French worker, 9% than that of the English worker and 3% than that of the German worker, it was greater in every way than that of the worker in Spain or Italy. This fact, which

---

finied by the Kropotkinian formulation of anarchism and the Nietzschean-Stirnerist individualists. (See Gino Cerrito, *Dall' insurrezionalismo alla Settimana Rossa*, C.P. Editrice, Firenze, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Francesco Momo died in Barcelona in 1893 at 30 years of age due to the explosion of an Orsini bomb that he was making. (See *Lavoriamo*, 1-7-93, Buenos Aires).

in some ways might have satisfied the immigrants from these two countries, coexisted with other negative spiritual and social aspects of immigrant existence, such as the insecurity of a new country, the almost total lack of labor laws, the great economic crises in the short term and the disappointed hopes of the masses that had made the sacrifice of leaving their homes and families only to find their expectations largely unfulfilled.

In the period lasting from the final decade of the nineteenth century to the first few years of the twentieth, a period in which the organizational forms of the Argentine workers' movement were definitively accepted, the abovementioned emotional aspect of the working immigrant masses in a country that experienced a tremendously rapid transformation should be kept in mind. It is here that we will find the first answers to why anarchism's diffusion in Argentina was much greater than that of socialism.

Socialism proposed to the immigrant masses that they obtain their Argentine citizenship in order to be able to vote and elect their representatives; instead, anarchism preached direct action, the smashing of the State (a State reserved for elected officials, based on fraud and parochial dictators), and the defense of their interests in direct struggle with the boss armed with the three classic weapons of the working class: the strike, sabotage and the boycott. The Socialist Party offered the working class a scientific and deterministic interpretation of society; anarchism did not accept dialogue with the State but it did with the boss that exploited them. Because the State had not yet developed sufficiently to the point where it could take part in labor relations, the anarchist solution seemed like the ideal one for the uncertain masses hurrying to obtain the fruits of their labor. These workers without the ability to vote couldn't hope to achieve anything by the long road through the institutions and parliament (proposed by the socialists) in a country governed by the oligarchy. Even though the socialists in 1904 would obtain the first seat in Congress by a socialist in

part, because they did not possess his capacity to present ideas with friendliness and because they were afraid that their own partisans would be convinced by him.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps Gori's primary virtue for anarchism in Argentina was to facilitate the entrance of anarchist ideas into the mainstream of society. Public opinion could confirm that the anarchists were not merely bombthrowers and lumpenproletarians. Gori was able to act in the most distinguished settings. During the workers' congress that brought about the formation of the first workers' federation, in which Gori played a major role, he displayed great flexibility. For example, he pointed out that arbitration in a worker-employer conflict could be accepted as a tactic. He thus broke with an anarchist taboo and it was not easy to convince them otherwise; he showed how it was necessary to adapt to certain forms in order to create a common platform.<sup>18</sup>

In short, the visits of Malatesta and Gori served to decidedly strengthen the organizational current against the individualist within Argentine anarchism. That is to say, the movement took as its guidelines what libertarian socialism had defined in Italy under the name of socialist anarchism. In the anarchist congress in Capolago (Italy) in 1890, the Argentines were represented by a delegate. The organizational wing of anarchism was, in the end, the one that produced the most revolutionary tendency in the entire history of the Argentine working-class movement.

---

<sup>17</sup> The edition of *L'Avvenire* from 12-30-1900 says that bosses, when workers come asking for a job, will respond "Go ask Gori for one."

<sup>18</sup> Gori was supported, or at the very least was interpreted by *L'Avvenire*, while he was attacked by the individualist paper *La nueva Civiltá*.



Buenos Aires, Santa Fe and Mendoza he was awaited by bands from the workers' and mutualist organizations at the train station and accompanied to his hotel.<sup>16</sup>

Max Nettlau writes that

Pietro Gori left Italy during or after the great riots of May 1898 that culminated in the Milan insurrection, whence they would have deported him anyhow. It was said that in Paris he wasn't allowed to speak in public and thus they advised him to travel to Buenos Aires via Barcelona. He already knew exile in London and the United States and because of this he must have rightfully considered Buenos Aires, because of the years of reaction in Italy, as the biggest city he could go to, where he could find the widest means and possibilities of life. He arrived at the end of June 1898 and left on the twelfth of January 1902 to return to Italy. Bresci's gunshot in the summer of 1900 created a new situation in Italy: since the last years of Crispi, the anarchists, republicans and some socialists had been brought closer together due to the persecutions that had befallen everyone. This coming-together was always platonic and Malatesta, in 1899, thought that it was never too late to join up together in order to combat the monarchy. Gori, who was not a man of action, was an enthusiast of those collective actions if everyone saw clearly the enormity which separated the differing political currents he encountered in Buenos Aires. Gori could do this because he always aimed to take advantage of every occasion to present libertarian ideas with kindness, instead of throwing these ideas in the enemy's face with contempt. In spite of this, many hated him, in

<sup>16</sup> From *L'Avvenire*, 17.XIII.1898, Gori in Chascomús: “

the Americas (who represented the abovementioned Genovese neighborhood of La Boca), the workers were quickly disappointed: what could this lone representative do against an entire apparatus that existed to serve the interests of the upper class?

Another aspect of Argentine anarchism during those years was its popular content: the proletariat (and of this, its lowest stratum) understood its direct language. Various socialist authors that lived during this era have detailed, almost with disgust, the appearance of the anarchist masses that attended the May Day demonstrations or labor assemblies. This phenomenon will be reproduced later with peronism: the socialists will again employ the same words of arrogant condemnation to judge the behavior of the new Argentine proletariat that arose in 1946.<sup>8</sup>

It is with good reason that the origin of socialism in Argentina is due mostly to the German Social Democrats exiled because of Bismarck's anti-socialist law. They were the first to teach Marxist theory, to organize on a local basis and to edit their own paper, *Vorwärts* (Forward!). In this respect there is a

<sup>8</sup> The Argentine socialist leader Jacinto Oddone, in his book *Gremialismo proletario argentina*, Libera, Buenos Aires, 1975, pgs. 66–7, describes with horror and sarcasm the anarchist unions at the end of the century:

*The anarchist organizations ignored discipline and order in every way. There were no leaders in such organizations, no directing committees. The anarchists didn't let anyone lead anyone or anything. There were no statutes; their wide conception of freedom didn't permit the least restriction in the exercise of individual rights. They didn't pay membership dues; well, actually they didn't let anyone fix a sum to be paid, preferring voluntary contributions, or nothing. There were no rules at meetings. Free initiative was the way of life. In the meetings, that no one was obliged to attend, everyone spoke when and how they saw fit, without the other attendees thinking they had the right to interrupt them, because this would have meant an inconceivable attack on freedom of speech [...] They left their meetings without voting on anything because of their completely infantile fear of the vote. When the socialists wanted to introduce order and method into this absurd and ridiculous environment they encountered, as one would imagine, serious resistance.*

notable difference between them and the anarchists: while the Italian anarchist newspapers<sup>9</sup>, even though there were few, already contained pages in Spanish, and for its part, *La Protesta Humana*, the organ of the local organizationalist anarchists, had a page in Italian, demonstrating clearly the spirit of integration and understanding between the different peoples of that Babel on the Río de la Plata that was then Buenos Aires; the German Social Democrats continued for many years to publish their paper exclusively in German. This isn't to say that the Germans didn't seek discussion and exchange of ideas; they did that very patiently, but they never stopped being more than academic conferences, a little bit too erudite for the working classes that were hectically pushing forward their demands in the here and now, for a more just world. (It is worth noting that one could read in *Vorwärts* repeated complaints about the lack of discipline of the "Romanic peoples," words that designated as a common denominator the Italians, Portuguese, and the Argentine descendents of southern Europeans.) They attributed to them a mentality incapable of understanding organized social change. The desperate German Social Democrats fell more than once into unintentional racism during repeated incidents with the Italian, Spanish, and Argentine anarchists. However, it wasn't just the German Social Democrats, but also the first Argentine socialists, like Juan B. Justo, who looked with nostalgia upon the development models of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, that had mostly Anglo-Saxon and not Romanic immigration.

In contrast, anarchism seemed to be, for its spontaneity and negation of authority, more in line with the idiosyncrasies of the so-called "Romanic peoples". To these features, one must add that special missionary feeling that the anarchist movement partially held and its total contempt for holding public

---

<sup>9</sup> You can see a list of Italian anarchist papers in Argentina in Leonardo Bettini, *Bibliografía dell' Anarchismo*, Vols. 1, 2, C.P. Editrice, 1976.

## Pietro Gori's Journey

Pietro Gori came to Argentina in 1898. Buenos Aires, a Eurocentric city hungry to know of Europe and seem like Europe, was always predisposed to applaud politicians, lecturers, philosophers, princes, ex-presidents, charlatans, tenors, sopranos, directors of European orchestras, etc. Explainable, certainly, by the European origin of its inhabitants and by the orientation of its politicians and its society, which looked to England for its economics, France for its culture and to Prussia for its militarism. The Argentine bourgeoisie cheered and applauded for Vicente Blasco Ibañez, Georges Clemenceau, Enrico Ferri (1910), Alejandro Lerroux, Jean Jaurès, Anatole France and many others, some of whom came to explain theories that could cause a fuss, but none of whom became more than tickling stimulants; the important thing was that they came from Europe and were fashionable. The German historian Max Nettlau writes that "such visitors came to compliment the Argentine government and to admire the prosperity of its capitalism".<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, he says "Gori spoke in favor of the hated anarchists, in favor of the most poor of the immigrants, of organized workers dangerous to growing capitalism, and he knew how to succeed in his purpose."

In the history of visitors to Argentina, few have had the impact of Gori. The public: workers, men of letters, liberals, Mazzinists, Garibaldians, socialists of all tendencies, squeezed together in their halls to listen to him. He gave lectures that lasted more than three hours, captivating the audience to the extent that their silence was almost religious. The works of Gori became fashionable: his little theater piece (*First of May*) was performed hundreds of times during that era in the most remote regions of the country. On his tour through the provinces of

---

<sup>15</sup> Max Nettlau Archive, Amsterdam, Institute of Social History

have had to take on all the unions together and not exclusively the FORA. Because it was anarchist and of course the most combative of the unions, the initiator of all the great strikes over three decades, it was marked for repression. The picture was almost always the same: effective actions in pursuit of working class demands were initiated by the FORA and were later capitalized on by the socialists and syndicalists, who the government always called upon to reach an agreement.

We want to finalize this short analysis of Malatesta's thought about the workers' movement by transcribing words from the abovementioned 1907 polemic, that warned of a danger that would later be confirmed: he referred to the "plain and pure unions" and to their lack of ideologies.

Even when the union movement is adorned with an absolutely useless attribute: "revolutionary," it is and will continue being a legal and conservative movement without pursuing anything besides modifications of conditions on the job and it will barely be able to achieve these. The example of the large North American unions is alone sufficient to prove this point. When they were still weak they held a radical and revolutionary position, but when their power and wealth increased, they became conservative organizations that were only concerned with creating privileges for their membership [...]

He emphasized that because of this, the anarchists ought to enter the unions to fight against the privileges and corruption of their leaders. "The union leader", he maintained, "presents a similar danger to the workers' movement as the parliamentarian. Both lead to corruption." This was completely confirmed in Argentina, not just by peronist trade unionism after 1943 but already before this, in the diverse tendencies that arose during the Thirties.

offices and titles in contrast to the taste for hierarchy held by authoritarian socialism in its organizations. In the anarchist organizations (political as well as labor), there were no offices, nor profits nor honorary titles: they tried to create an environment of solidarity where everyone was considered equal, without any distinction due to levels of intelligence, eloquence, race or trade. It was enough for them to just have an acting secretary, clerk or a "responsible" as an official. Although bottom-up democracy had many advantages, the system began to weaken due to social complications: when state intervention and repression increased, rapid responses and not long debates were needed.

This sense of solidarity, almost an evangelical concept, was truly notable in the organizations of agricultural workers in the province of Buenos Aires. The anarchist "societies of resistance" grew like mushrooms in the small towns of the vast Pampa. They were exemplary organizations that, beyond the activities of the union, had a wide cultural and educational life, with theater groups, night courses for learning how to read and write, and classes to understand basic science. The migratory worker of those fields was Italian for the most part. They'd come for the harvest, return to Italy and come back the next year. This worker sold his labor power to the highest bidder and had to deal with problems that were difficult to solve by himself due to the attitudes of employers. This explains why he would then turn to whoever could give good advice, even if this adviser was known as an anarchist agitator. In the Argentine Pampa there arose a certain kind of person: the so-called "*linyera*" (hobo), and there is a good reason why this word is of Italian origin. According to some authors, it comes from *linghera*, the knapsack where those political vagrants carried all of their belongings, mostly flyers and anarchist periodicals. They were

Tolstoyan figures that travelled on freight trains, worked in the fields and taught their ideologies of social rebellion.<sup>10</sup>

Malatesta arrived to La Plata with his background of revolutionary action in Benevento in 1874, and was well-known for his position, together with Cafiero, at the Rimini Congress, during which the Italian Federation of the First International split and joined with the Bakuninists. One year before Malatesta's arrival, 17 Italian workers, among them the baker Marino Garbaccio, the cabinetmaker Michele Fazzi and the engraver Marzoratti, established the Anarchist-Communist Circle, representative of the International Workingmen's Association. They received and distributed *La Questione Sociale*, which Malatesta published in Firenze; *Il Paria*, from Ancona, and *La Révolte*, from Paris.

Ettore Mattei wrote the following about the arrival of Malatesta to the Río de la Plata:

Propaganda for communism and anarchy grew in intensity when two or three months after comrade Malatesta's arrival to Buenos Aires (in February 1885) they enthusiastically established a Circle of Social Studies at 1375 Bartolomé Mitre Street, in which he and other comrades gave the first public anarchist-communist meetings, and published *La Questione Sociale* in Italian.

This formed the principal nucleus of Malatesta's political activities. Fundamental for him is that he carried out what he had earlier proposed in Firenze: the foundation of affinity groups for ideological and propagandistic activities; with publications, conferences, and polemics with representatives of other ideologies. To be specific, we offer Gonzalo Zaragoza Ruvira's paragraph, where he points out:

---

<sup>10</sup> In *Mundo Nuevo*, No. 4, Paris, there is a study on the linyeras by Alicia Maguid.

This is proudly demonstrated by the two most well-known representatives of Argentine anarchism during the Twenties: López Arango and Diego Abad de Santillán, both of them Spaniards. In their book *El anarquismo en el movimiento obrero*, they stressed the need to maintain an exclusively anarchist workers' federation, independent of other working-class tendencies:

What we have accomplished is just as good if not better than what others could have done, because the movement that exists is an offspring of our ideas, a product of our tireless efforts over a long period of development. Should our position in the workers' movement and our revolutionary activities in relation with the actions of the proletariat be the same as the methods described by the classics of European anarchism? Is our conception of syndicalism the same as that of the comrades in Italy, France and Portugal? So what if it is or isn't, this is nothing but a confirmation of our own success within the movement. Our position is as logical as any other, but it's a position that has more than a third of a century of real existence and is neither the work of one man nor the result of the actions of a fleeting traveler within the movement.

We see here language that is a little haughty and arrogant, very distinct from that of Malatesta. Their pride for the Argentine model is such that these two Spaniards in Argentina suggest that their model will have to be adopted by Europeans: "European anarchism, we think, will end up accepting this orientation because similar circumstances will force our comrades to define their position in relation to the tendencies that distort the union activities of the workers."

If the anarchist Argentine workers' movement had followed the line set by Malatesta, the State's repression would

want to call them and in this way the working class would be more divided than ever. I don't want red unions because I don't want yellow unions. Much better would be organizations that are open to all workers, without any qualms due to political differences. This is to say, unions that are totally neutral. [...] Above all I represent the interests of our propaganda in claiming that in this way [through the unions] we could greatly expand our field of action. Participation [in the unions] doesn't mean in any way the renunciation of our beloved ideals. In the unions we should remain anarchists in every sense of the word. The workers' movement to me is only a means, but it is the best of the means available to us.

As we already said, Malatesta's writings continued exercising a decisive influence on anarchism in the Río de la Plata region: time and again many sought to form a central union together with socialists and syndicalists.<sup>14</sup> They were never able to achieve this unity, except for short periods, and this was not just the fault of the socialists and syndicalists, but also that of the libertarians, who, considering themselves the majority, kept insisting that the FORA have in its statutes anarchist communism as an ideological base.

This abandonment of Malatestian thought, and a certain convergence with the Spanish model, caused the Argentine anarchist movement to lose the mass character of its beginnings, thereby forcing itself onto the exit-less road of sectarianism.

---

<sup>14</sup> Just as those antiauthoritarians and anti-militarists that influenced the Argentine workers' movement were Italian, it was a son of Italians, General Ricchieri, military attaché to Berlin, who inspired the law of compulsory military service that marked the beginning of Argentine militarism in a country that due to its geographic position should have been a model of pacifism.

The Italian (Malatesta) insisted on two essential points: unity of the anarchist family and rapprochement with the socialist wing, and promotion of strike movements. He said that in Argentina, due to the scarce number of workers, strikes could end victoriously; from there the anarchists could push forward and the working class, through experience, would continue forming a revolutionary consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

Both Malatesta and later Gori always advocated the idea of unity, humility in discussion with other ideologies and the rejection of sectarianism. Malatesta's visit is also important for this: even after he left Argentina his human personality remained a constant presence through the stories of those who knew him during this space of a few years, and that is why for the rest of his life, the Argentine anarchist press would publish nearly everything Malatesta ever wrote. His constant emphasis was on moderation and there is nothing that better reflects the spirit of this than these words written forty years later in *Pensiero e Volontá* on the first of April, 1926:

Among anarchists there are those revolutionaries that believe it necessary to destroy by force the power that maintains the prevailing order, to create an environment in which the free evolution of individuals and communities is possible, and there are teachers that think you can only achieve social transformation by changing individuals first by means of education and propaganda. There are partisans of nonviolence or passive resistance, that avoid violence even for self-defense, and there are those who at the same time, in respect to

---

<sup>11</sup> "Errico Malatesta y el anarquismo proletario," Gonzalo Zaragoza Ruvira, *Historia y Bigliografía Americanistas*, Vol. XVI, No. 3, Sevilla, 1972.

its nature, measure the extent and limits to which violence is permissible. Moreover, there is disagreement concerning the attitude of anarchists towards the union movement, about the organization or non-organization of anarchists themselves, permanent or occasional differences about the relations between anarchists and other subversive parties. We rightfully try to understand these and other similar questions; or if our understanding shows it not to be possible, we have to learn to tolerate each other, working together when it is possible and when it is not, letting each person do what they see fit without getting in each others' way. Because in reality, if every factor is taken into account, no one is always right.

Beyond organization, two other questions were confronted by the propaganda of the Italian anarchist papers in Buenos Aires, Rosario and Bahía Blanca<sup>12</sup>: the emancipation of women and antimilitarism. With regards to the first topic, they insisted on female self-organization in pursuit of their demands, a campaign initiated principally by *La Questione Sociale*.<sup>13</sup>

## Malatesta and Revolutionary Syndicalism

The first historic period of the Argentine workers' movement, from its origins in the late nineteenth century until the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, was characterized by two

---

<sup>12</sup> The most important centers of Italian anarchism in Argentina were Buenos Aires, Rosario and Bahía Blanca whose groups maintained close contact with other important centers of Italian anarchism: San Pablo (Brazil), London, Patterson (New Jersey) and West Hoboken (New Jersey).

<sup>13</sup> See "Alle Donne", *La Questione Sociale*, Buenos Aires, No. 6, 12-15-1894. During that era *La voz de la mujer* began to appear, an anarchist-communist paper in Spanish and Italian.

ideological movements: one, the majority, anarchist, and the other socialist. Besides these, however, one must also add "revolutionary syndicalism" or "pure syndicalism", inspired by the theories of the Frenchman Georges Sorel and the Italian Arturo Labriola. "Pure syndicalism" in Argentina, which curiously arose from the ranks of the socialists, had such an influence that it hindered the advance of the anarchist-communist movement as much as the socialist movement. From a minority it would become little by little the majority. The anarchists always resisted accepting labor unity with them, even though they shared much in common. The anarchist union, the FOR A of the Fifth Congress, pursued, according to its preamble, the achievement of anarchist communism; at this point we have to return to Malatestian thought. In his celebrated polemic with Pierre Monatte at the Amsterdam Congress in 1907, Malatesta rejected syndicalist theory on the grounds that it thought the unions by themselves were sufficient to make the revolution. Malatesta begins by clearly saying that "The working class movement is a reality that no one can ignore" while "revolutionary syndicalism is a theory and a system with which we have to be careful not to confuse one thing with another".

The workers' movement has always had in me a decided defender, but in no way a blind one. I saw in action that it was an especially appropriate venue for our revolutionary propaganda and at the same time a point of contact between the masses and us. I desire today as much as yesterday that anarchists participate in the workers' movement. I will continue being a syndicalist in the sense that I am a partisan of the unions. I don't demand explicitly anarchist unions because they would legitimate the social democratic unions, the republican unions, the realist unions, or whatever you