

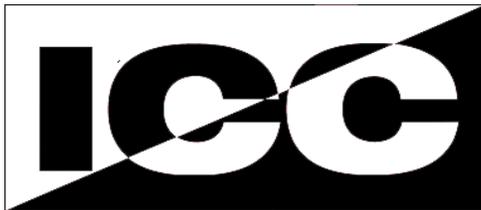


# ANARCHISM AND VIOLENCE

Selections From Anarchist Writings, 1896 - 1925



by Errico Malatesta



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## ANARCHISM AND VIOLENCE

struggle. Settling in Milan he accepted the editorship of the newly founded daily *Umanità Nova* which soon had a circulation of 50, 000. In July 1920 he participated in the second congress of the *Unione Anarchica Italiana* which enthusiastically adopted a program he had written for it. The following month he supported the factory occupations in Turin and Milan. At the end of the year he was arrested together with 80 other militant anarchists and held in prison for almost a year before being brought to trial and acquitted.

On his release he moved to Rome and continued to edit *Umanità Nova* until it was forced to close down after Mussolini's 'March' on Rome (during which a portrait of Malatesta was burnt by the Fascists in the Plaza Cavour).

With the closure of *Umanità Nova* Malatesta opened a small workshop undertaking mechanical repairs and electrical installations, but this was forced to close when the police started to molest his clients.

In 1924 he began to edit the bi-monthly review *Pensiero e Volontà* which contained some of his best writings until it was closed down in 1926 together with other anti-fascist publications.

At the end of 1926, after several months of police harassment, Malatesta was placed under house arrest. Virtually imprisoned in his flat he still managed to contribute articles to the anarchist press mainly *Le Reveil* of Geneva and *L'adunata Dei Refrattari* of New York. Early in 1932 he became ill with a respiratory complaint and died in July 1932 at the age of 79 years.

-David Poole

### Notes

1. *Umanità Nova*, August 25, 1921.
2. *Pensiero e Volontà*, September 1, 1924.
3. *Programma Anarchico*, Bologna, July 1920.
4. *Umanità Nova*, August 12, 1920.
5. *Umanità Nova*, September 9, 1921.
6. *Umanità Nova*, April 27, 1920.
7. *Umanità Nova*, May 9, 1920.
8. *Pensiero e Volontà*, April 16, 1925.
9. *Fede!*, October 28, 1923.
10. *Umanità Nova*, October 21, 1922.
11. *Il Risveglio*, December 20, 1922.
12. *Fede!*, November 25, 1923.
13. *Umanità Nova*, July 18, 1920.
14. *Anarchia (Numero Unico)*, August 1896.

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took the village of Letino without a struggle where they were greeted with great enthusiasm. Arms and expropriated goods were distributed amongst the people, tax money was returned and official documents destroyed. The following day the village of Gallo was taken in similar fashion. Unfortunately, as they were leaving Gallo the Internationalists were surprised and surrounded by government troops and all were arrested. Held in prison for over a year before being brought to trial all the accused were eventually acquitted.

After his acquittal Malatesta returned to Naples, but constant surveillance by the police forced him to leave Italy. From Naples he went to Egypt only to be expelled after a short time by the Italian Consul. Working his passage on a French ship he finally landed at Marseille after being systematically refused entry into Syria, Turkey and Italy. From Marseille he made his way to Geneva where he helped Kropotkin to produce *La Revolte*. Expelled from Switzerland Malatesta worked for a while in Romania before traveling to London, via France and Belgium, where he arrived towards the end of 1880. In London he worked as an ice cream seller and later as a mechanic, a trade he was to return to several times in later life. While in London he participated in the 1881 congress of the International which gave birth to the Anarchist International.

Leaving London in 1882 Malatesta went to Egypt where he fought with the Egyptians against British colonialists. The following year he returned clandestinely to Italy. Settling in Florence he founded the weekly *La Questione Sociale*, the first serious anarchist newspaper to be published in Italy. It was in *La Questione Sociale* that Malatesta's most popular and widely read pamphlet *Fra Contadini* appeared in 1884. That same year he was arrested and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment, and while waiting to serve his sentence he went to Naples and helped to nurse the victims of a cholera epidemic (as did many other Anarchists and Socialists).

Forced once again to flee Italy in order to avoid prison Malatesta went to South America. From 1885 to 1889 he lived in Buenos Aires (apart from several trips to Montevideo) where he resumed the publication of *La Questione Sociale* and was instrumental in founding the Bakers Union, the first militant workers' union in Argentina.

Returning to Europe in 1889 he stayed for a while in Nice where he published a new newspaper called *L'Associazione* before being forced to flee to London. For the next 8 years he made London his base, making frequent clandestine trips to France, Switzerland and Italy, and undertaking two lecture tours of Spain with Tarrida del

## Self - Defense

Anarchists are opposed to every kind of violence; everyone knows that. The main plank of Anarchism is the removal of violence from human relations. It is life based on the freedom of the individual, without the intervention of the *gendarme*. For this reason we are enemies of capitalism which depends on the protection of the *gendarme* to oblige workers to allow themselves to be exploited - or even to remain idle and go hungry when it is not in the interest of the bosses to exploit them. We are therefore enemies of the State which is the coercive, violent organization of society.

But if a man of honor declares that he believes it stupid and barbarous to argue with a stick on his hand that it is unjust and evil to oblige a person to obey the will of another at pistol point, is it, perhaps, reasonable to deduce that that gentleman intends to allow himself to be beaten up and be made to submit to the will of another without having recourse to more extreme means for his defense?

Violence is justifiable only when it is necessary to defend oneself and others from violence. It is where necessity ceases that crime begins ...

The slave is always in a state of legitimate defense and consequently, his violence against the boss, against the oppressor, is always morally justifiable, and must be controlled only by such considerations as that the best and most economical use is being made of human effort and human sufferings.[1]

There are certain other men, other parties and schools of thought which are sincerely motivated by the general good as are the best among us. But what distinguishes the Anarchists from all the others is in fact their horror of violence from human relations ... But why, then, it may be asked, have Anarchists in the present struggle [against Fascism] advocated and used violence when it is in contradiction with their declared ends? So much so that many critics, some in good faith, and all who are in bad faith, have come to believe that the distinguishing characteristic of Anarchism is, in fact, violence. The question may seem embarrassing, but it can be answered in a few words. For two people to live in peace they must both want peace; if one insists on using force to oblige the other to work for him and serve him, then the other, if he wishes to retain his dignity as a man and not be reduced to abject slavery, will be obliged in spite of his love of peace, to resist force with adequate means.[2]

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achievements if they are prepared to be used to impose a particular kind of social organization or the program of a particular party ... [12]

Revolution being, by the necessity of things, violent action, tends to develop, rather than remove, the spirit of violence. But the revolution as conceived by the Anarchists is the least violent of all and seeks to halt all violence as soon as the need to use force to oppose that of the government and the Bourgeoisie, ceases.

Anarchists recognize violence only as a means of legitimate defense; and if today they are in favor of violence it is because they maintain that slaves are always in a state of legitimate defense. But the Anarchist ideal is for a society in which the factor of violence has been eliminated, and their ideal serves to restrain, correct and destroy the spirit of revenge which revolution, as a physical act, would tend to develop.

In any case, the remedy would never be the organization and consolidation of violence in the hands of a government or dictatorship, which cannot be founded on anything but brute force and recognition for the authority of police - and military - forces.[13]

### Against "Passive Resistance"

... An error, the opposite of the one which the terrorists make, threatens the Anarchist Movement. Partly as a reaction to the abuse of violence during recent years, partly as a result of the survival of christian ideas, and above all, as a result of the mystical preachings of Tolstoy, which owe their popularity and prestige to the genius and high moral qualities of their author, Anarchists are beginning to pay serious attention to the party of passive resistance, whose basic principle is that the individual must allow himself and others to be persecuted and despised rather than harm the aggressor. It is what has been called "passive anarchy."

Since there are some, upset by my aversion to useless and harmful violence, who have been suggesting that I display Tolstoyism tendencies, I take the opportunity to declare that, in my opinion, this doctrine however sublimely altruistic it may appear to be, is, in fact the negation of instinct and social duties. A man may, if he is a vert good ... christian, suffer every kind of provocation without defending himself with every weapon at his disposal, and still remain a moral man. But would he not, in practice, even unconsciously, be a supreme egoist were he to allow others to be persecuted without making any effort to defend them? If, for

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the *coup de force*, to the violation of legal order by illegal means.[5]

We too are deeply unhappy at this need for violent struggle. We who preach love, and who struggle to achieve a state of society in which agreement and love are possible among men, suffer more than anybody by the necessity with which we are confronted of having to defend ourselves with violence against the violence of the ruling classes. However, to renounce a liberating violence. When it is the only way to end the daily sufferings and the savage carnage which afflict mankind, would be to connive at the class antagonisms we deplore and at the evils which arise from them.[6]

We neither impose anything by force nor do we wish to submit to a violent imposition.

We intend to use force against government, because it is by force that we are kept in subjugation by government.

We intend to expropriate the owners of property because it is by force that they withhold the raw materials and wealth, which is the fruit of human labor, and use it to oblige others to work in their interest.

We shall resist with force whoever would with by force, to retain or regain the means to impose his will and exploit the labor of others.

We would resist any force any 'dictatorship' or 'constituent' [Communist or Fascist] which attempted to impose itself on the masses in revolt. And we will fight the republic as we fight the monarchy, if by republic is meant government, however it may come to power, which makes laws and disposes of military and penal powers to oblige the people to obey.

With the exception of these cases, in which the use of force is justified as a defense against force, we are always against violence, and for self-determination.[7]

### The Social Revolution

I have repeated a thousand times that I believe that not to 'actively' resist evil, adequately and by every possible way is, in theory absurd, because it is in contradiction with the aim of avoiding and destroying evil, and in practice





## What We Believe

**We are Class War Anarchists. We believe that a conflict must go on between those who work for a living and our enemies who get rich off our labor but, do nothing until those who live off our labor are laid low and the society with power and privilege based on wealth and class is abolished in favor of a free society based on mutual aid, voluntary cooperation and personal freedom and responsibility. We advocate the methods of Revolutionary Syndicalism to win the class war against the corruption of the rich and powerful. We believe that all forms of non-capitalist non-exploitive non-authoritarian economic organization can co-exist in an Anarchist society in a Federation of free people, free communities and free workplaces. We believe that the first step towards the creation of a free society is for people to organize, educate themselves and assert their autonomy from the government, the capitalist and organized religion.**

ICC

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Marmol. While in London he wrote several important pamphlets including *In Tempo Di Elezione* and *L'Anarchia* (Anarchy).

In 1897, thanks to an amnesty given to him by the Italian government Malatesta was able to return openly to Italy. Settling in Ancona he began a new newspaper *L'Agitazione*. The following year however he was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment followed by 5 years banishment to a penal island. Taken first to the island of Ustica he was later transferred to Lampedusa from which he made a dramatic escape, returning to London via Malta in 1899. That same year he spent several months in the USA, resuming the publication of *La Questione Sociale* in Paterson New Jersey. Later, while addressing a meeting in West Hoboken he was shot in the leg by an individualist Anarchist who disagreed with him on his approach to organization. From the USA Malatesta returned to London by way of Cuba.

Once again in London he resumed his trade of mechanic, running a small workshop in Islington. Between 1900 and 1913 he founded several newspapers, always in Italian, the most important of which were *Cause Ed Effeti* (1900), *L'Internazionale* (1900) and *La Rivoluzione Sociale* (1902). In 1907 he participated in the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam where he vigorously opposed Monatte on the question of revolutionary syndicalism. In 1912 Malatesta was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment and recommended for deportation for criminal libel. Only a massive public outcry prevented the latter sentence from being carried out.

In 1913 Malatesta returned again to Italy where he published *Volontà* in Ancona until the outbreak of war in August 1914 forced him to return to London. While in Italy though he met the future Fascist dictator, Mussolini, then editor of the Socialist paper *Avanti*.

The war years brought much confusion to the Anarchist Movement with prominent figures, notably Kropotkin and Grave, openly supporting the allies. Malatesta, as always remaining loyal to his Anarchist ideals vigorously opposed the war and never ceased to denounce it. He was one of the signatories of the International Anarchist Manifesto against the war and responded to Kropotkin's position with such articles as "Pro-Government Anarchists" and "Have Anarchists Forgotten their Principles."

In 1919 Malatesta returned for the last time to Italy, landing at Genoa where his arrival was greeted with great enthusiasm. At once he threw himself into the

## The Political - Economic Revolution

The struggle against government is, in the last analysis, physical, material.

Governments make the law. They must therefore dispose of the material forces (police and army) to impose the law, for otherwise only those who wanted to would obey it, and it would no longer be the law, but a simple series of suggestions which all would be free to accept or reject. Governments have this power, however, and use it through the law, to strengthen their power, however, as well as to serve the interests of the ruling classes, by oppressing and exploiting the workers.

The only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it.

Conflict may be open or latent; but it always exists since the government does not pay attention to discontent and popular resistance except when it is faced with the danger of insurrection.

When the people meekly submit to the law, or their protests are feeble and confined to words, the government studies its own interests and ignores the needs of the people; when the protests are lively, insistent, threatening, the government, depending on whether it is more or less understanding, gives way or resorts to repression. But one always comes back to insurrection, for if the government does not give way, the people will end by rebelling; and if the government does give way, then the people gain confidence in themselves and make ever increasing demands, until such time as the incompatibility between freedom and authority becomes clear and the violent struggle is engaged.

It is therefore necessary to be prepared, morally and materially, so that when this does happen the people will emerge victorious.[3]

This revolution must of necessity be violent, even though violence is in itself an evil. It must be violent because a transitional, revolutionary, violence, is the only way to put and end to the far greater, and permanent, violence which keeps the majority of mankind in servitude.[4]

The Bourgeoisie [the Upper Middle Class - the capitalist class] will never allow itself to be expropriated without a struggle, and one will always have to resort to

instance, he were to prefer that a class should be reduced to abject misery, that a people should be downtrodden by an invader, that man's life or liberty should be abused, rather than bruise the flesh of the oppressor?

There can be cases where "passive resistance" an effective weapon, and it would then obviously be the best of weapons, since it would be the most economical in human suffering. But more often than not, to profess "passive resistance" only serves to reassure the oppressors against their fears of rebellion, and thus it betrays the cause of the oppressed.

It is interesting to observe how both the *terrorists* and the *Tolstoyans*, just because both are mystics, arrive at practical results which are more or less similar. The former would not hesitate to destroy half of mankind so long as the idea triumphed; the later would be prepared to let all mankind remain under the yoke of great suffering rather than violate a principle.

For myself, I would violate every principle in the world in order to save a man: which would in fact be a question of respecting principle, since, in my opinion, all moral and sociological principles are reduced to this one principle: the good of mankind, the good of all mankind.[14]

## Biography of Errico Malatesta (1853-1932)

Errico Malatesta was born in Capua near Naples in 1853. In his teens, while studying medicine at the university of Naples, he came under the influence of Mazzinian republicanism, and later, in 1871, partly through his enthusiasm for the Paris Commune and his friendship with Carmelo Palladino he joined the Naples section of the International Working Mens' Association. The following year he became acquainted with Bakunin and participated with him in the St Imer congress of the International.

Between 1872 and 1876, working closely with Bakunin, Cafiero and Costa, Malatesta helped spread Internationalist propaganda throughout Italy. For this he was imprisoned for 6 months in 1873 and again for a year between 1874 and 1875.

In April 1877 Malatesta, Cafiero, the Russian Stepniak and 30 other comrades began an insurrection in the province of Benevento. The armed group, with a large red and black flag at their head marched into the Matisse mountains and soon

immoral because it is a denial of human solidarity and the duty that stems from it to defend the weak and the oppressed. I think that a regime which is born of violence and which continues to exist by violence cannot be overthrown except by a corresponding and proportionate violence, and that one is therefore either stupid or deceived in relying on legality where the oppressors can change the law to suit their own ends. But I believe that violence is, for us who aim at peace among men, and justice and freedom for all, an unpleasant necessity, which must cease the moment liberation is achieved - that is, at the point where defense and security are no longer threatened - or become a crime against humanity, and the harbinger of new oppression and injustice.[8]

We are on principle opposed to violence and for this reason wish that the social struggle should be conducted as humanely as possible. But this does not mean that we would wish it to be less determined, less thoroughgoing; indeed we are of the opinion that in the long run half measures only indefinitely prolong the struggle, neutralizing it as well as encouraging more of the kind of violence which one wishes to avoid. Neither does it mean that we limit the right of self-defense to resistance against actual or imminent attack. For us the oppressed are always in a state of legitimate defense and are fully justified in rising without waiting to be actually fired on; and we are fully aware of the fact that attack is often the best means of defense ...

Revenge, persistent hatred, cruelty to the vanquished when they have been overcome, are understandable reactions and can even be forgiven, in the heat of the struggle, in those whose dignity has been cruelly offended, and whose most intimate feelings have been outraged. But to condone ferocious anti-human feelings and raise them to the level of a principle, advocating them as a tactic for a movement [as the Fascists do], is both evil and counter-revolutionary.

For us revolution must not mean the substitution of one oppressor for another, of our domination for that of others. We want the material and spiritual elevation of man; the disappearance of every distinction between vanquished and conquerors; sincere brotherhood among all mankind - without which history would continue, as in the past, to be an alternation between oppression and rebellion, at the expense of real progress, and in the long term to the disadvantage of everybody, the conquerors no less than the vanquished.[9]

It is abundantly clear that violence is needed to resist the violence of the adversary, and we must advocate and prepare it, if we do not wish the present situation of slavery in disguise, in which most humanity finds itself, to continue

and worsen. But violence contains within itself the danger of transforming the revolution into a brutal struggle without the light of an ideal and without possibilities of a beneficial outcome; and for this reason one must stress the moral aims of the movement, and the need, and the duty, to contain violence within the limits of strict necessity.

We do not say that violence is good when we use it and harmful when others use it against us. We say that violence is justifiable, good and 'moral' as well as a duty when it is used in one's own defense and that of others, against the demands of those who believe in violence; it is an evil and 'immoral' if it serves to violate the freedom of others ...

We are not 'pacifists' because peace is not possible unless it is desired by both sides.

We consider violence a necessity and a duty for defense, but only for defense. And we mean not only for defense against direct, sudden, physical attack, but against all those institutions which use force to keep people in a state of servitude.

We are against Fascism and we would wish that it were weakened by opposing to its violence a greater violence. And we are, above all, against government, which is permanent violence.[10]

To my mind violence is justifiable even beyond the needs of self-defense, then it is justified when it is used against us, and we would have no grounds for protest.[11]

## After the Revolution

To the alleged incapacity of the people we do not offer a solution by putting ourselves in the place of our former oppressors [like the Communists and Socialists]. Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom.

But, you say, to start a revolution and bring it to its conclusion one needs a force which is also armed. And who denies this? But the armed force, or rather the numerous armed revolutionary groups, will be performing a revolutionary task if they serve to free the people and prevent the re-emergence of an authoritarian government. But they will be tools of reaction and destroy their own