

Errico Malatesta

Italian, Anarchist Intellectual, Anti-Capitalist, and Anti-Fascist

(1853 - 1932)

Description : There have almost certainly been better anarchist writers, more skilled anarchist organizers, anarchists who have sacrificed more for their beliefs. Perhaps though, Malatesta is celebrated because he combined all of these so well, exemplifying thought expressed in deed... (From : Cunningham Bio)

Tags : anarchist, writer, theorist, bakuninist, anti-capitalist, italian.

Quotes :

"Let there be as much class struggle as one wishes, if by class struggle one means the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters for the abolition of exploitation. That struggle is a way of moral and material elevation, and it is the main revolutionary force that can be relied on." (From : "About My Trial: Class Struggle or Class Hatred?," Errico Malatesta.)

"...the agelong oppression of the masses by a small privileged group has always been the result of the inability of the oppressed to agree among themselves to organize with others for production, for enjoyment and for the possible needs of defense against whoever might wish to exploit and oppress them. Anarchism exists to remedy this state of affairs..." (From : "Anarchism and Organization," Authored by Errico Malatesta, 1897.)

"Government is the consequence of the spirit of domination and violence with which some men have imposed themselves on other, and is at the same time the creature as well as the creator of privilege and its natural defender." (From : "Anarchist Propaganda," by Errico Malatesta.)

"Our task then is to make, and to help others make, the revolution by taking advantage of every opportunity and all

available forces: advancing the revolution as much as possible in its constructive as well as destructive role, and always remaining opposed to the formation of any government, either ignoring it or combating it to the limits of our capacities." (From : "The Anarchist Revolution," by Errico Malatesta.)

"And tomorrow, in the revolution, we must play an active part in the necessary physical struggle, seeking to make it as radical as possible, in order to destroy all the repressive forces of the government and to induce the people to take possession of the land, homes, transport, factories, mines, and of all existing goods, and organize themselves so that there is a just distribution immediately of food products." (From : "The Anarchist Revolution," by Errico Malatesta.)

"...the oppressed are always in a state of legitimate self-defense, and have always the right to attack the oppressors." (From : "Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles," by Errico Malatesta, from: Freedom, November 1914.)

"...all history shows that the law's only use is to defend, strengthen and perpetuate the interests and prejudices prevailing at the time the law is made, thus forcing mankind to move from revolution to revolution, from violence to violence." (From : "Further Thoughts on the Question of Crime," by Errico Malatesta, Umanità Nova, n. 134, September 16, 1921.)

"If it is true that the law of Nature is Harmony, I suggest one would be entitled to ask why Nature has waited for anarchists to be born, and goes on waiting for them to triumph, in order to destroy the terrible and destructive conflicts from which mankind has already suffered. Would one not be closer to the truth in saying that anarchy is the struggle, in human society, against the disharmonies of Nature?" (From : "Peter Kropotkin - Recollections and Criticisms of an Old Friend," by Errico Malatesta, from: Studi Sociali April 15, 1931.)

"...the State is incapable of good. In the field of international as

well as of individual relations it can only combat aggression by making itself the aggressor; it can only hinder crime by organizing and committing still greater crime." (From : "Pro-Government Anarchists," by Errico Malatesta, from: Freedom, April 1916.)

"We want to make the revolution as soon as possible, taking advantage of all the opportunities that may arise." (From : "Revolution in Practice," by Errico Malatesta, from Umanità Nova, n. 191, October 7, 1922, Section 2.)

Biography :

Though anarchism is based on the idea of individual freedom, the anarchist movement, unlike most other political movements, does not revolve around particular individuals. Our history cannot be reduced to the 'history of great men', rather it is the story of the development of a particular set of ideas, and the struggle to put those ideas into practice.

That said, there are famous anarchists. Some are known because their writings helped stimulate new thinking in the anarchist movement, or define a new current in anarchist thought. Others, like Errico Malatesta, are famous because their very lives epitomized the development of anarchist politics, and reflected the setbacks and advances of the movement.

Activist in exile

Born in 1853, into a growing mood of republicanism, Malatesta soon saw the need for a more profound change in society, and in 1871 joined the Italian section of the International. At the time, the main anarchist/socialist strategy was to start insurrections, driving government officials out of small towns and burning the tax ledgers and bank books in the hope of sparking more widespread rebellions, a tactic which Malatesta supported enthusiastically. He was forced to flee Italy in 1878 after the assassination of King Umberto, by a republican cook, led to a general crackdown on radicals.

Errico MalatestaHe returned to Italy after five years spent traveling around Europe, continually agitating for anarchism, but was arrested in 1884, and had to leave again, this time for Argentina, where he lived for twelve years and was very involved in the organization of the labor movement. He again returned to Italy,

where he became the editor of L'Agitazione. After only a year, however, he was arrested once more, but he managed to escape, and after a few years in America he traveled to London.

There he lived and worked for the next thirteen years, with a mass campaign stopping him from being deported in 1909. In 1913 he went back to Italy of his own volition. Following the collapse of the general strike of 1914, Malatesta, now in his sixties, had to leave for London once more. He spent the war years there, writing and speaking often on the need for anarchists not to choose sides between two capitalist, imperialist powers. Finally, in 1919, he was able to return to Italy, this time for good.

Although he had spent barely half his life in his native country, his experience and dedication had won him much respect in anarchist circles there. At the time, the anarchist movement in Italy was strong, the popularity reflected in the fact that Umanità Nova, the daily anarchist paper which Malatesta founded, had, at its peak, a circulation of over 50,000. Unfortunately, this golden period was to be short-lived. When Mussolini came to power the left-wing papers were closed down, the anarchist movement decimated and driven underground, and Malatesta himself spent the last five years of his life under house arrest. Ideas and Actions

Malatesta was, above all, an activist. While he wrote many articles and pamphlets he was no academic, he was a working electrician who wrote when there was something to be said, not for the sake of writing. He described an anarchist society simply, as a "society organized without authority, meaning by authority the power to impose one's own will", "a society which reconciles the liberty of everyone with co-operation and liberty among men". What more needs to be said?

We also see in Malatesta's writings the changes that were taking place in the general anarchist movement. Though he always reserved the right to use arms in the defense of social gains, maintaining that "if you want the corn, you need the cannon", over the years the tactics he emphasized changed, from the insurrectionism of his youth to the syndicalism of his older years. He had always said that the anarchist movement needed to be as visible as possible, and this change reflects his coming to believe, as did the wider anarchist movement, that this is incompatible with the strategy of 'propaganda by the deed'.

There is no one action, no single pamphlet or article for which Malatesta is famous.

There have almost certainly been better anarchist writers, more skilled anarchist organizers, anarchists who have sacrificed more for their beliefs. Perhaps though, Malatesta is celebrated because he combined all of these so well, exemplifying thought expressed in deed, ideas backed up by action, and all driven by a fierce commitment to freedom.

Ray Cunningham

From : "Errico Malatesta," by Ray Cunningham, published by the Struggle Site, <https://flag.blackened.net/revolt/>.

Works :

Author of About My Trial: Class Struggle or Class Hatred? (September 20, 1921)

Author of Against The Constituent Assembly As Against The Dictatorship (September 04, 1930)

Author of Against Monarchy (November 30, 1898)

Author of Anarchism and Organization (November 30, 1896)

Author of Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles (December 31, 1969)

Author of Pro-Government Anarchists (April 01, 1916)

Author of The Idea of Good Government (November 30, 1919)

Author of Towards Anarchism (December 31, 1969)

Author of Anarchy (December 31, 1969)

Author of Anarchist Propaganda (December 31, 1969)

Author of What is to be Done? (August 26, 1922)

Author of The Anarchist Revolution (December 31, 1969)

Author of Anarchists in the Present Time (December 31, 1969)

Author of Syndicalism and Anarchism (November 30, 1925)

Author of A Project of Anarchist Organization (September 30, 1927)

Author of A Talk About Anarchist Communism Between Two Workers (December 31, 1969)

Author of Medicine... And Anarchism (May 10, 1924)

Author of Further Thoughts on the Question of Crime (September 08, 1921)

Author of Further Thoughts on Revolution in Practice (October 14, 1922)

Author of Exchange Between Malatesta and Makhno on the Platform (November 30, 1929)

Author of Majorities and Minorities (December 31, 1969)

Author of Reformism (December 31, 1969)

Author of Mutual Aid (November 30, 1908)

Author of Note To The Article "Individualism And Anarchism" By Adamas (August 15, 1924)

Author of The Revolutionary "Haste" (September 06, 1921)

Author of Peter Kropotkin: Recollections and Criticisms of an Old Friend (April 15, 1931)

Chronology :

December 14, 1853 : Errico Malatesta's Birth Day.

July 22, 1932 : Errico Malatesta's Death Day.

November 15, 2016 : Errico Malatesta's Added to
<http://www.RevoltLib.com>.

March 13, 2018 : Errico Malatesta's Last Updated on
<http://www.RevoltLib.com>.

Links :

- **Anarchy Archives: Errico Malatesta Archive**

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/malatesta/Malatestaarhive.html

- **Anarchist Library: Errico Malatesta**

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/errico-malatesta>

- **Wikipedia: Errico Malatesta**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Errico_Malatesta

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