

Anti-Militarism: Was It Properly Understood?

Errico Malatesta

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(To the editor of Freedom)

Dear Comrade — Allow me to say a few words on Kropotkin's article on anti-militarism published in your last issue. In my opinion, anti-militarism is the doctrine which affirms that military service is an abominable and murderous trade, and that a man ought never to consent to take up arms at the command of the masters, and never fight except for the Social Revolution.

Is this to misunderstand anti-militarism?

Kropotkin seems to have forgotten the antagonism of the classes, the necessity of economic emancipation, and all the Anarchist teachings; and says that an anti-militarist ought always to be ready, in case a war breaks out, to take arms in support of the "country that will be invaded"; which considering the impossibility, at least for the ordinary workman, of verifying in time who is the real aggressor, practically means that Kropotkin's "anti-militarist" ought always to obey the orders of his government. What remains after that of anti-militarism, and, indeed, of Anarchism too?

As a matter of fact, Kropotkin renounces anti-militarism because he thinks that the national questions must be solved before the social question. For us, national rivalries and hatreds are among the best means the masters have for perpetuating the slavery of the workers, and we must oppose them with all our strength. And so to the right of the small nationalities to preserve, if you like, their language and their customs, that is simply a question of liberty, and will have a real and final solution only when, the States being destroyed, every human group, nay, every individual, will have the right to associate with, and separate from, every other group.

It is very painful for me to oppose a beloved friend like Kropotkin, who has done so much for the cause of Anarchism. But for the very reason that Kropotkin is so much esteemed and loved by us all, it is necessary to make known that we do not follow him in his utterances on the war.

I know that this attitude of Kropotkin is not quite new, and that for more than ten years he has been preaching against the "German danger"; and I confess that we were in the wrong in not giving importance to his Franco-Russian patriotism, and in not foreseeing where his anti-German prejudices would land him. It was because we understood that he meant to invite the French workers to answer a possible German invasion by making a Social Revolution — that is, by taking possession of the French soil, and trying to induce the German workers to fraternise

with them in the struggle against French and German oppressors. Certainly we should never have dreamt that Kropotkin could invite the workers to make common cause with Governments and masters.

I hope he will see his error, and be again on the side of the workers against all the Governments and all the bourgeois: German, English, French, Russian, Belgian, etc.

Yours fraternally,
E. Malatesta

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