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Errico Malatesta
Military Service
1902

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There is currently much discussion among French comrades about whether an anarchist should meet the draft obligation, evade the draft, or desert.

Some say that the anarchist, who naturally abhors militarism and continuously makes propaganda against it, must at any cost refuse to wear the abhorrent uniform and take up fratricidal arms, in homage to our principles and to set a good example.

Others say that refusing service forces one to go abroad, where, for economic reasons and because of differences in language and customs, he is incapable of making propaganda, whereas it is useful and necessary to bring the spirit of rebellion and the yeast of anarchist ideas within the very ranks of the army.

We believe that the matter does not have a single solution, applicable to all individuals, under all circumstances.

Aside from considerations of personal advantage, which we shall not get into, it is certain that, depending on each person’s particular talents and the dose and type of courage he possesses, some can be more useful by entering the army, making propaganda among soldiers and setting an example, when the case arises, of refusing obedience and open rebellion, while others

better succeed by deserting and facing the vagabond life of a man in an illegal position.

The essential thing is that, within or outside of the army, one always keeps aflame his hatred against the institution, always keeps alive the spirit of propaganda and sacrifice.