

# KROPOTKIN AND MALATESTA

## Russians, Italians and Japanese

### in the Revolutionary Movements in the World

Misato Toda

#### “Going to the People”

Among the Russians who were active in the Italian anarchist movement, Sergei Kravchinsky (Stepniak)(1851-95) occupies a unique position. When we follow the tracks of his international activities, we also meet those of Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) and Errico Malatesta (1853-1932). They belong to the generation that was under the strong influence of Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76), another great Russian revolutionary who realized that he was an anarchist during his stay in Napoli in 1865-67. The Neapolitan section of the International Workingmen's Association (First International) was founded in 1869 with his advice having influenced his Italian intellectual friends such as Giuseppe Fanelli, Saverio Friscia, Carlo Gambuzzi, Attanasio Dramis, Raffaele Mileti, Alberto Tucci, Pier Vincenzo De Luca and Carmelo Palladino, who formed a Bakunin group. In 1867 they organized an activist, socialist association “Libertà e Giustizia” (Liberty and Justice), cooperated with some master workers in Napoli, and published a newspaper bearing the same name. This was the first socialist newspaper in Italian history. There were about thirty members, among whom was Stefano Caporusso, the leader of a worker's union “Umanitaria” (Humanity). The association and its activities became a cornerstone of the Neapolitan International, the first Italian section of the International Workingmen's Association.

Greatly influenced by the Paris Commune of 1871, Malatesta in Italy and Kravshinsky and Kropotkin in Russia joined the anarchist movement, that is to say the broader movement of “going to the people”. It should be said that with the Paris Commune, the first social (if not “socialist”) revolution in Europe and the world, the age of great revolutionaries like Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72) and Bakunin came to an end. A new horizon suddenly appeared in the wake of the sharp division between the left and right wings of the European democratic movement. This division had already appeared in Paris during June 1848, when the French proletariat began to play a role in the revolutionary movement. The left, calling the right “bourgeois republicans”, declared that they were standing on the side of the people, of the proletariat, of the working men and women. Shortly after the failure of the Paris Commune, there appeared two antagonistic factions within

the left under the name of Karl Marx (1818-83) and Bakunin, the first advocating a proletarian dictatorship and the second a federalism based upon the free will of each individual and group. I would like to call the latter movement, which spread widely in Italy, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland and Russia in the 1870's, the broader movement of going to the people, as mentioned above.

### **Automy and Spontaneous Federation**

Under these circumstances, in August 1872, Italian Internationalists who gathered at the national conference in Rimini established the Italian Federation of the International Workingmen's Association as a nationwide federal organization of many varied regional sections. The conference declared that the Italian Federation would discontinue all relations with the "authoritarian communism" and the General Council in London. In September 1872, when the Italian delegation participated in the first congress of the Federalist International at St. Imier in the Jura in Switzerland, Malatesta represented the Neapolitan section; representing other sections were, for example, Carlo Cafiero (1846-92) and Andrea Costa (1851-1910). During this congress, which greatly stressed the principle of autonomy and spontaneous federation of all the workers in the world, were formulated for the first time in the history of socialism the anarchist principles inspired by Bakunin, who had befriended the eighteen-year-old Malatesta prior to the congress.

In the spring of the same year, Kropotkin made his first trip to Western Europe. In Neuchâtel he went to see the leader of the Jura Federation, James Guillaume (1844-1916). In Sonvilliers, Kropotkin met another leader of the Jura Federation, Adhémar Schwitzguébel, who introduced him to the watch-maker anarchists there. Deeply impressed with their anarchist ideas and organization, Kropotkin was an "anarchist" when he left the Jura mountains. He wished to remain in Switzerland to make propaganda as a permanent member of the Jura Federation, but following to Guillaume's advice he returned to Russia to dedicate himself to the same cause in his native land. Although he had been struck by how deeply Bakunin's influence was felt among the Jura people - "as the influence of a moral personality" - Kropotkin went back to Russia without meeting Bakunin. He was to regret it later because, when he returned to Switzerland in the beginning of December 1876, Bakunin had been dead for five months.

### **"Propaganda by Deed"**

On October 21 and 22, 1876, after the unsuccessful revolt in Bologna and Castel del Monte in 1874, in its third congress at Firenze-Tosi, the Italian Federation formulated two principles that were to be called "propaganda by deed" and "anarchist communism".

Malatesta and Cafiero were chosen as representatives and delivered these principles to the general congress of the Federalist International held in Bern, Switzerland, on the 26th to the 30th of the same month. After the congress, probably in December, the two young revolutionaries were introduced by Guillaume to Kropotkin, who had just started his life as an émigré after having escaped from prison in Russia. From that time, as Kropotkin mentioned in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, he and Malatesta developed a strong friendship that lasted for almost forty years. At La Chaux-de-Fonds in January 1877, when he was about to devote his life to the Jura Federation, Kropotkin again met Kravchinsky, his closest friend from the Chaikovsky Circle in Russia.

In the meantime, based upon the idea of the “propaganda by deed”, the Italian Internationalists planned to organize a peasant revolt in Benevento of southern Italy. It was to provoke an echo of sympathy among oppressed, illiterate peasants as a tangible example of social justice and as an aspiration towards a better life of solidarity. Among the some fifty Italian anarchists who gathered from various districts was Kravchinsky. Not only was he a member of the group of the leaders along with Cafiero, Malatesta and Cesare Cecarelli, but he also would have played a very important role in guiding the partisan’s military if the insurrection would have succeeded. After having participated in the preliminaries, he was however arrested before the unsuccessful revolt known as “La Banda del Matese” (Band of Matese) began. After the band had declared “La Rivoluzione Sociale” (Social Revolution) with a red and black flag in Letino and Gallo, small villages in the zone, all the participants were arrested and imprisoned in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, the historical Capua where Malatesta was born.

During the sixteen months in prison with his Italian comrades, Kravchinsky mastered the Italian language, in which he was to write *La Russia Sotterranea* (Underground Russia), an excellent work which describes Russian revolutionaries in the “v narod” (to the people) movement and was published first in the Italian newspaper *Pungolo* (Spur) in 1881-82, and then appeared from Treves, the famous publisher in Firenze, as a book. The book, which was written during his second period as an émigré in Italy to obtain money for his daily life, was quickly translated into various languages and became one of the best sellers in Europe. The Russian edition appeared much later, in 1893, but the Japanese translation was published in 1884 to assist and to propagate for the “Jiyū Min-ken Undō” (People’s Charter Movement) during the first half of the Meiji Era (1868-1912). In 1970 a new edition was published in Japan; it was translated by Tsutomu Sano (who also translated the biography of Bakunin by N. M. Pirumova) from the selected writings of Kravchinsky in Russia that were published in St. Petersburg in 1907. The Japanese edition includes Kropotkin’s “My Friend - Sergei Kravchinsky” as the introduction to the book.

In December 1895, when Kravchinsky was very active, he suddenly died in a traffic accident in London and several hundred people attended his funeral. Kropotkin’s description of the scene included mention of socialists of every kind, English novelists,

artists and political activists following the coffin; another group of Russian, Italian, French and German proletarians with many red flags, being wet through and freezing; a group of old radicals and young socialists talking about Kravchinsky while in tears, William Morris (1834-96), Malatesta and of course Kropotkin. In those days Kropotkin once told Malatesta, as Malatesta remembered, "My dear Errico, I fear that we are alone, you and I, in believing a revolution to be near at hand." Because both of them were optimistic by temperament despite their difference in age (Kropotkin was nine years older than Malatesta), there was a quick resurgence of confidence. Although they did not share the same opinions on many fundamental questions, they loved each other "because", as Malatesta noted, "we were inspired by the same passion, by the same hopes ... and also by the same illusions." They collaborated for sentimental rather than intellectual reasons.

### Around the First World War

In 1914, however, they parted company because of their being on antagonistic sides in the anarchist movement. In 1931, one year before his death, Malatesta recollected:

And in fact there was never serious disagreement between us until that day in 1914 when we were faced with a question of practical conduct of capital importance to both of us: that of the attitude to be adopted by anarchists to the War. On that occasion Kropotkin's old preferences for all that which is Russian and French were reawakened and intensified in him, and he declared himself an enthusiastic supporter of *Entente*. He seemed to forget that he was an Internationalist, a socialist and an anarchist; he forgot what he himself had written only a short time before about the war that the Capitalists were preparing, and began expressing admiration for the worst Allied statesmen and Generals, and at the same time treated as cowards the anarchists, who refused to join the *Union Sacré*, regretting that his age and his health prevented him from taking up a rifle and marching against the Germans. It was impossible therefore to see eye to eye: for me he was a truly pathological case. All the same it was one of the saddest, most painful moments of my life (and, I dare to suggest, for him too) when, after a more than acrimonious discussion, we parted like adversaries, almost as enemies.

In November 1914, Malatesta wrote "Anarchist Have Forgotten Their Principles" in *Freedom*, responding to articles by Kropotkin, Jean Grave and others that had appeared in the same journal earlier in the same month, and asserted that "there are wars that are necessary" "and these are wars of liberation, such as are generally 'civil wars' - *i. e.*, revolutions"; "We have always preached that the workers of all countries are brothers, and that the enemy - the 'foreigner' - is the exploiter, whether born near us or in a far-off

country, whether speaking the same language or any other”; “We have always fought against patriotism, which is a survival of the past, and serves well the interests of the oppressors; and we were proud of being internationalists, not only in words, but by the deep feeling of our souls.” Then in December, when examining Kropotkin’s article on Anti-militarism published in the last issue of *Freedom*, Malatesta confessed in the same journal: “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 attitudes on the war.”

Malatesta’s recollections “Pietro Kropotkin - Ricordi e critiche di un vecchio amico” (Peter Kropotkin - Recollections and Criticism of an Old Friend) were first published in *Studi Sociali* (Social Studies) (published in Montevideo, Uruguay by Luigi Fabbri, Malatesta’s closest young friend who emigrated there after having escaped from Fascist persecution) on April 15, 1931 and then in *Le Libertaire* in France on April 24 of the same year. In his recollections Malatesta justly held in esteem Kropotkin’s sensibility:

It was for his love of justice, and as if by way of expiating the privileges that he had enjoyed, that he had given up his position, neglected the studies he so enjoyed, to devote himself to the education of the workers of St. Petersburg and the struggle against the despotism of the Tsars. Urged by these same feelings he had subsequently joined the International and accepted anarchist ideas. Finally, among the different interpretation of anarchism he chose and made his own the communist-anarchist programme which, being based on solidarity and on love, goes beyond justice itself.

Malatesta, however, also dared to point out Kropotkin’s two errors - his theory of scientific fatalism and his excessive optimism - because they were harmful to the anarchist movement, for which Malatesta felt that the human free will (*volontà*) was important. Here I would like to mention a subsequent event. Malatesta, in his letter of May 18, 1931 to Fabbri, answered Fabbri’s question about the statement “the communist-anarchist programme which, being based on solidarity and love, goes beyond justice itself” in the recollections by saying: “Strictly speaking, justice means to give everyone an equal portion, [ ... ] therefore it implies calculation.” “Instead - love means to give, as much as possible, all that one can wish, without calculation, without counting.” Malatesta then explained himself by noting: “The formula of giving to ‘everyone according to his work’ as a response to justice, while giving to ‘everyone according to his needs’ would be much better than justice.”

## Kropotkin and Malatesta in Japan

Malatesta's recollections drew great attention from Japanese anarchists who were confronting a possible war being prepared by the Japanese military in China. On July 10, 1931, two months before the outbreak of war in Manchuria, the monthly anarchist newspaper *Jiyû Rengô Shinbun* (Journal of the Free Federation) published the first half of the Japanese translation by Susumu Hasegawa, an anarchist intellectual, of Malatesta's critical recollections from the French anarchist paper; its second half was published on August 10. Sanshirô Ishikawa (1876-1956), a prominent Japanese anarchist and a friend of Elisée Ruclus (1830-1905), subsequently wrote an article for his monthly journal *La Dynamique* and published it on September 1, as "Errors in Kropotkin's Theory". Ishikawa, considering Malatesta's insight of and friendship with Kropotkin, agreed with Malatesta's idea that there was a contradiction in Kropotkin's anarchism, between his sensibility and his mechanical philosophy. On the other hand, he gave a supplementary explanation to Malatesta's views:

At bottom Kropotkin conceived nature as a kind of Providence, thanks to which there had to be harmony in all things, including human societies. [ ... ]

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 always suffered.

Would one not be closer to the truth in saying that anarchy is the struggle, in human society, against the disharmonies of Nature?

Ishikawa explained that man is in harmony or disharmony according to his criteria, but nature itself has an existence beyond human psychology; one could say that nature contains everything in existence, including beings, and realizes for itself eternal harmony through time and space. Therefore, he continued, if Kropotkin's optimism might be based on such an insight into nature, it could be praised; but one should not, however, believe so greatly in Kropotkin's optimism as to neglect revolutionary activities. He concluded by saying: "The eternal harmony of great nature will be realized only through human struggle for love and justice." It is interesting to note that ideas nature and harmony differ among the various anarchists - Russian, Italian and Japanese - according to their different cultural backgrounds.

Since the time when theories of Western socialism had been introduced in Japan - mainly through the *Heimin Shinbun* (Journal of Common People) which during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) propagated "Against war! Against capitalism!" - the name of Kropotkin was very familiar among Japanese intellectuals and workers. Shûsui Kôtoku translated Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* as early as 1908. Sakae Ôsugi's transla-

tion of his *Appeal to the Young* sold well in Japan for many years and contributed to Kropotkin's popularity. In many anarchist journals were expressions such as "Kropotkin is the brains of anarchism while Malatesta is the arms." When the translation of Malatesta's article appeared, the repercussion was therefore great. Two old anarchists, Kanzaemon Onaya (who has since passed away) and Seiichi Miura, once told me about how shocked they were with Malatesta's article and how they learned about the attitude of anarchists toward the war from Malatesta.

The image of Kropotkin, which was built by his teachings before the First World War, has not however been damaged among the Japanese people. When visiting the studies of old professors, it is possible to find the complete works of Kropotkin in translation. Yuri-ko Mochizuki and Tokio Furukawa, an old anarchist couple and collaborators for Ishikawa's *La Dynamique*, recently told me that the writings of Kropotkin had quietly permeated the young generation who at the time were seeking their own path, and they had felt his soul in their heart.

\* \* \*

I should like to finish my paper with some personal recollections: I had an old anarchist friend named Shin Furukawa, who had participated in the anarchist labour movement from 1919 until his death in 1988, and who had also taught me many things along with his wife, Tetsu Furukawa, who has also since passed away. Among the materials that he left I found two old notebooks that were written by several different hands. Both of them were copies of Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread*. Obviously, after anarchist publications were prohibited, works by Kropotkin were copied by workers themselves and circulated underground. When consulting these notebooks, I could also feel the spirit of the workers who were inspired by Kropotkin. This was a very moving experience.

#### Selected Bibliography:

Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Boston & New York, 1899.

Errico Malatesta, *Scritti scelti*, con prefazione di Luigi Fabbri, 3 voll., Ginevra 1934-36 (reprint, Carrara 1975).

———, "Ricordi e critiche di un vecchio compagno", now in Errico Malatesta, *Scritti scelti*, vol. III, Ginevre 1936 (reprint, Carrara 1975); also in Vernon Richards, *Malatesta. vita e idee*, Catania 1968; English translation, "Recollections and Criticism of an Old Friend", in Vernon Richards, *Malatesta. Life & Ideas*, London 1965.

———, *Epistolario 1873-1932*, a cura di Rosaria Bertolucci, Avenza 1984.

\*

James Guillaume, *L'Internationale. Documents et souvenirs (1864-73)*, 2 vols., Paris 1905 (reprint, New York 1969).

Jacques Freymond, *La Première Internationale. Recuell de documents*, tome IV, Geneve 1971.

\*

N.M.Pirumova, *Pyotr Alekseevish Kropotkin*, Moscow 1972, Japanese translation by Tsuyosi Sakon, Tokyo 1994.

Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin*, Chicago & London, 1976.

Simon R. Potter, "Geography and Its Influence on Peter Kropotkin's Politics: the Importance of the Years 1862-74", in *Bulletin of cultural and Natural Sciences in Osaka Gakuin University* 16 (December 1987).

———, "Review of, with Thoughts Provoked by, V.A.Markin's Biography of Peter Kropotkin", in *Saitama Daigaku Kiyô* 30 (1994, Kÿoyô Gakubu).

Max Nettlau, *Errico Malatesta. Das Leben eines Anarchisten*, Berlin 1922; Italian translation, *Errico Malatesta. Vita e pensieri*, New York 1922; Spanish translation, *Errico Malatrsta. La vida de un anarquista*, Buenos Aires 1923.

Vernon Richards, *Malatesta. Life & Ideas*, London 1965; *Malatesta. vita e idee*, Catania 1968.

Misato Toda, *Errico Malatrsta. Da Mazzini a Bakunin. La sua formazione giovanile nell'ambiente napoletano (1868-1873)*, con prefazione di Alfonso Scirocco, Napoli 1988.

\*

Max Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale in Italia dal 1864 al 1872*, con prefazione di Errico Malatesta, Ginevra 1928 (reprint, Roma 1970).

Pier Carlo Masini, *Gli Internazionalisti. La Banda del Matese 1876-78*, Milano e Roma, 1958.

———, *Storia degli anarchici italiani da Bakunin a Malatesta (1862-1892)*, Milano 1969.

———, *Cafiero*, Milano 1974.

Marianne Enckell, *La Fédération jurassienne*, Losanna 1971; Italian translation, *La Federazione del Giura*, con introduzione di Pier Carlo Masini, Lugano 1981.

Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

[This article is based on my report to a session of the International Scientific Conference

Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Pyotr Alekseevich Kropotkin's Birth (Moscow, Dmitrov and St.Petersburg, December 9-12, 1992).]