

MALATESTIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIAL THEORY

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Even though he had never been or intended to be an academic, Errico Malatesta (1853-1932) had a rich and valuable intellectual output. It was a production that came to light in newspaper articles and small books and which, despite being marked by depth and innovation, remained simple, unstuffy, didactic and easy to understand. After all - as his biographers Max Nettlau and Luigi Fabbri¹ confirm - the Italian anarchist didn't intend to dialogue only with the intelligentsia of his time, but especially with the general public, with the oppressed classes in Italy and in the various other places where he lived.

*This paper aims to look at part of this intellectual production in order to recover and reconstruct some of Errico Malatesta's contributions to social theory.*² According to the distinction made by the author himself, this discussion focuses only on part of his political thought (or political theory), and even his frame of reference or method of analysis (realism). It goes less into reflections linked to the philosophical-epistemological and doctrinal-ideological fields, and concentrates on some of those related to the scientific field.³

Malatesta has made important contributions to social theory, and it is even possible to speak of a *Malatestian social theory*, which can be defined as *an analytical and interpretative tool with a certain level of generalisation and abstraction, built on a coherent articulation of concepts and based on social and historical facts. This theory is intended to provide scientific support for analyses*

¹ NETTLAU, Max. **Errico Malatesta**: the life of an anarchist. Rosario: Pensamiento y Voluntad, 2012; FABBRI, Luigi. **Life of Malatesta**. Libcom, 2010.

² It is important to emphasise that, over the course of the more than six decades that he defended anarchism, Malatesta modified part of his political thought. As such, the elements discussed in this text cannot and should not be understood as unitary in Malatesta's work. Nor should this text be read as the only interpretation of his theoretical contributions. Furthermore, I would like to point out that, although I have used a lot of Malatesta's writings in English and Portuguese, when faced with terminological issues, I have tried to prioritise the originals in Italian.

³ For such epistemological reflections, see: CORRÊA, Felipe. Epistemology, Method of Analysis and Social Theory in Malatesta. **Institute of Anarchist Theory and History**, 2014.

particular and concrete aspects of social reality, both in terms of history and conjuncture.

There are two main guiding categories in Malatestian social theory: *power play* and *power relations*. It is possible to say that they result from the articulation of five fundamental concepts in the work of the Italian anarchist: 1.) Social system; 2.) Inseparability of the three fields; 3.) Social force; 4.) Power; 5.) Domination. In the following, these categories and concepts will be (re)constructed and expounded, so that they can subsidise discussions Malatesta's work and, at the same time, explanations of capitalist and statist society.

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Errico Malatesta conceives of society as a "**social system**."⁴ It is a social order made up of related and inseparable parts or elements, which influence each other and make up a totality of macro and micro social aspects, concrete and abstract. These elements or parts are described by him as "*social relations*".⁵ These relations are vertical and horizontal, and are characterised by multi-causality.

In vertical terms (from micro to macro-social expressions), the interdependent relationships and mutual influence between the individual and society stand out: the "reciprocal action [...] between man and the social environment", in which, on the one hand, "society makes men as they are" and, on the other, "men make society as it is".⁶ Individuals, collectively articulated and through their social relations, produce "*social institutions*".⁷ These institutions can be more or less long-lasting and which, also in relation to each other, produce the social system, society itself.

⁴ MALATESTA, Errico. Qualche Considerazione sul Regime della Proprietà Dopo la Rivoluzione. In: **Il Buon Senso della Rivoluzione**. Milan: Eleuthera, 1999, p. 190, emphasis added.

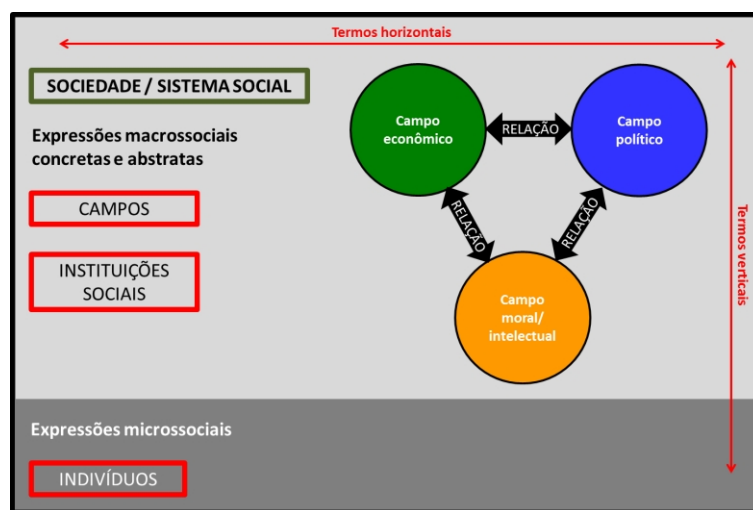
⁵ Id. Lo Sciopero Armato. In: "**Lo Sciopero Armato**": Il lungo esilio londinese (1900-1913). Milan: Zero in Condotta, 2015, p. 71, emphasis added.

⁶ Id. Anarchist Programme. In: **Revolutionary Writings**. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2000, p. 14.

⁷ MALATESTA, Errico. Syndicalism and Anarchism. In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., pp. 162-163, emphasis added.

In horizontal terms (concrete and abstract macro-social expressions), social relations in and between the economic, political and moral/intellectual "fields" of society stand out.⁸ The social system can be analysed on the basis of what happens in these three fields and the relations that exist between them. These fields are inseparable and form a totality in which the parts influence each other and can only be understood separately in analytical endeavours. It is in these fields and the relationships between them that social institutions and the society-system are produced.

As you can see from the graph below, this is the same social system that can be analysed in two different ways, vertically and horizontally.



(Corrêa, prepared for this work)

Historically speaking, the predominant social system in modern society is the "*capitalist and statist system*", i.e. the "*capitalist and statist order*".⁹ It can be analysed vertically, in the sense of the interdependent relationships between the individual and the state.

⁸ At another time I called "sphere" what I now refer to as "field". (CORRÊA, Felipe. Epistemologia... Op. Cit.) In Italian, Malatesta uses the term "terreno", which finds one of its possible translations in the Portuguese word "campo" (MALATESTA, Errico. L'Unità Sindacale. In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., pp. 177, 175) For mentions of these three fields, see: Id. Apropos of "Revisionism". In: TURCATO, Davide (org.) **The Method of Freedom: an Errico Malatesta Reader**. Oakland: AK Press, 2014, p. 528; Id. "Idealism" and "Materialism". In: **Anarchists, Socialists and Communists**. São Paulo: Cortez, 1989, p. 141; Id. Bourgeois Infiltrations in Anarchist Doctrine. In: **Anarchists, Socialists...** Op. Cit., p. 16.

⁹ Id. Anarchist Programme. Op. Cit., p. 21, emphasis added; Id. Anarchist's Line Within the Trade Union Movement. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op.Cit., p. 436, emphasis added.

society, something that explains why the subject produced in this system carries with it an important part of the influence of relations and institutions of capitalism and the state.¹⁰ And it can also be analysed horizontally, in the sense of the three fields and the relations between them, i.e. the capitalist economy, the modern state and its great institutions of communication and instruction.¹¹

Both vertically and horizontally, it is social relations that give shape to social institutions. Institutions are nothing more than relationships that have been established on a more permanent basis; common ways of thinking and acting that have consolidated and become structuring elements, organs or part of the social system for the fulfilment of certain socially established functions.¹² The more widespread in society, and the more permanent in time and space, the more a social institution is part of the structure of society, of the established social order. It is through the formation, dissemination and rooting of social institutions that a society creates its order, produces its structure.

There is no doubt that the structure of society, its most enduring institutions, explain a large part of what happens in a given social system.¹³ Even so, it is always important to bear in mind that "history is made by men".¹⁴ In other words, the will plays an important role in shaping social reality.¹⁵ Malatesta therefore reconciles social structure and human action, as well as the role each in structuring the social system.

For him, social conflict is an essential feature of this system which - both in terms of structure and human actions - is nothing more than the result of the **interplay of forces and power relations** that exist within it. In other words, the formation of society is explained by "the result of the centuries-long struggles that men have waged among themselves", by "the result of a thousand internecine struggles, a thousand natural and human factors."¹⁶

¹⁰ Id. **Anarchy**. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2001, p. 12.

¹¹ Id. **Anarchist Programme**. Op. Cit.

¹² Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 51.

¹³ Id. The Decline of the Revolutionary Spirit and the Need for Resistance. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op... Cit., p. 255; Id. Ideal and Reality. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.) **The Method...** Op... Cit., p. 449.

¹⁴ Id. A Little Theory. In: **Writings...** Op. Cit., p. 27.

¹⁵ Id. Liberty and Fatalism, Determinism and Will. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., pp. 363-364.

¹⁶ Id. **Anarchist Programme**. Op. Cit., pp. 8, 15.

The constitution of the system-society is therefore based on the result of this infinity of conflicts; of the *power relations* that have been established a result of the confrontation between the *forces at play*, in other words, of the countless social struggles and conflicts, which can be more or less violent. Struggles and conflicts that will never cease to exist, because they are essential features of society and factors that explain its very structure.¹⁷ They may be class-based, but they are not limited to them - they can involve different groups and even individuals. And they explain the development and transformation of society.¹⁸

In the case of the capitalist and statist system, it has a durable social structure and institutions which, although they don't fully explain how society works, have a considerable reproductive force, limiting human action in society.¹⁹

This social action, then, is neither the negation nor the complement of individual initiative, but the result of the initiatives, thoughts and actions of all the individuals who make up society; with the result that, all things being equal in principle, all *forces* compete towards the same goal, or *diverge* and *oppose* each other."⁽²⁰⁾

Initiatives, thoughts and actions that, as you can see, work within the logic of society's **power play**, associating, confronting each other and resulting in more or less lasting **power relations**. Social actions that take place in a structural scenario, itself forged from historical power plays that forged the long-lasting capitalist and statist social relations and institutions. They are in a position, especially with the "force that emerges from cooperation", with "organisation, which is life and force", to maximise their potential to influence reality.²¹ And in this way, contribute to social change.

Conflict is undoubtedly a central feature of the capitalist and statist order, and explains not only its origin, but also its day-to-day functioning. The different

¹⁷ Id. Individualism in Anarchism. **Last Barricade**, 2020.

¹⁸ Id. Ideal and Reality. Op. Cit., p. 450.

¹⁹ Id. Errors and Remedies. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 201; Id. The Decline of the Revolutionary Spirit... Op. Cit., pp. 255-256.

²⁰ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 56-57, emphasis added.

²¹ Id. Revolutionary Matters. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 103.

he forms of domination and exercise of authority that exist in such a society imply different types of violence. And it should not be forgotten that the institution of the state plays a central role in this regard, insofar as it guarantees, through threat and use of force, the institution of private property. In such a society, "men are oppressed in two ways: directly, by brutal force, by physical violence; or indirectly, by depriving them of their means of subsistence and thus reducing them to powerlessness."²² Furthermore, in this system, class struggle is a central feature, which stands out in the face of conflicts between nations, between men and women and between different races and peoples.²³

As pointed out, when analysing the social system from a horizontal perspective, Malatesta argues that it can be understood as a totality involving three major parts, three macro-fields: the *economic field*, the *political field* and the *moral/intellectual field*. *Field*, here, can be defined as a sphere or space dedicated to certain human activities, which is established on the basis of institutionalised social relations.

A social system brings together all the "means of life".²⁴ And each of the aforementioned macro-fields also brings together certain means. It is possible to say that the *means of life* are made up of all the *means of production and exchange* (*economic means*), the *means of government and repression* (*political means*) and the *means of communication and instruction* (*moral/intellectual or knowledge means*).²⁵

The *economic field* brings together all the *economic means*, i.e. the "means of production and exchange", as well as the relations of "production, consumption and exchange", which "encompass the whole of economic life".²⁶ The *political field* brings together all the *political means*, i.e. the "means of government", and therefore the "functions of government", and the "means of repression", which encompass political, legal and military life.²⁷ The *field*

²² Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 23; see also: pp. 22-26, 30-32.

²³ Id. Program and Organisation of the International Working Men's Association. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op. Cit., pp. 37-40, 44-49.

²⁴ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 22.

²⁵ Id. Il Nostro Programma. In: **L'Anarchia**. Liber Liber, 2012, p. 82; Id. Gradualism. **Pensiero e Volontà**, year 2, num. 12, October 1925, p. 266; Id. Regime di Dittatura "Proletaria". In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., p. 200; Id. Anarchy. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.) **The Method...** Op... Cit., p. 140.

²⁶ Id. Anarchist Programme. Op. Cit., p. 17; Id. Program and Organisation... Op. Cit., p. 49.

²⁷ Id. Gradualism. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 472; Id. Program and Organisation... Op. Cit., p. 43.

moral/intellectual brings together all the *moral/intellectual means*, which involve the "means of communication", the "means of instruction" and everything that could be called the means of "knowledge and understanding".²⁸

A central aspect of capitalist-statist society is the private ownership or monopoly of the means of life; something that implies hierarchy and imposition of the few over the many, as well as privileges for the few to the detriment of the latter. It should be noted that this is not just economic property, but *private property or monopoly of the means of production and exchange*, but also *the means of government and repression and the means of communication and instruction*.²⁹ These forms of property produce certain specific forms of domination and the exercise of authority in each of the three fields.

In the economic field, *economic domination* or "*exploitation of labour*", a central characteristic of the capitalist economy.³⁰ Exploitation occurs because "the means of production are in the hands of a few individuals, and the masses, who have nothing but their labour power, must seek work with those who possess these means, and accept their conditions". Depending on the positions in the relationship and the economic conditions, the bosses impose themselves on the workers, paying them "wages that normally do not exceed what is strictly necessary for the most rudimentary and vegetative survival" and appropriating the majority of the fruits of their labour. This is why, in a capitalist and statist society, the bosses get rich and keep the workers in poverty.³¹

In the political field, two forms of *political domination* are promoted by the modern state. The first is the use of "brutal force", "physical violence", or simply *physical coercion*. The second, "the power to make *laws* to regulate the relationship of men to each other and to enforce these laws", or simply *political-bureaucratic domination*.³² This exercise of government takes place in the following way:

²⁸ Ibid., p. 51; Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 44, 72; Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 140.

²⁹ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 19-22.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 42, emphasis added.

³¹ Id. The Republic of the Boys and That of the Bearded Men. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 20.

³² Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 23, 18.

Political, legislative, judicial, military, financial, etc. institutions by which the management of their own affairs, the direction of their own behaviour, the care of their own security are taken away from the people in order to entrust them to a few individuals who, by usurpation or delegation, are invested with the right to make laws about everything and for everyone, to coerce the people conform to , using the force of all for this purpose.³³

In the moral/intellectual field, *moral/intellectual domination* or "*religious, university power*", which marks the private ownership of the means of knowledge in the capitalist and statist system.³⁴ Communication and instruction, "the blessings of science and civilisation, which the masses cannot appreciate because today they are monopolised by the bourgeoisie".³⁵ This monopoly produces a set of ideas that legitimises the social order in question, because it makes the majority of people believe that it is necessary (or even right) for society to function in this way.³⁶ This is the result, for example, of the "individualistic morality of the bourgeoisie, the morality of contention and competition".³⁷

The relational dynamic between the three aforementioned fields in a given system is explained by the "nature of the relationships" which involve a certain "derivation of powers" and which establish the role that each factor (field) has in shaping social reality (system).³⁸ Throughout his life, Malatesta changed his position on this issue. Between 1871 and 1889, he went from defending the preponderance of the economic field (a position he referred to as "materialist"), to, between 1924 and 1932, supporting an equivalence of the three fields, thus valuing the role of the political and moral/intellectual fields; in the latter case, he rejected materialism only insofar as it was equated with economic determinism.³⁹

But despite these changes, the Italian anarchist maintained throughout his life the use of the terms "material" and "ideal" to express the dichotomy between concrete and ideal.

³³ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 23, emphasis added.

³⁵ Id. Programme and Organisation... Op. Cit., p. 55.

³⁶ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 12-14.

³⁷ Id. Errors and Remedies. Op. Cit., p. 200.

³⁸ Id. The Republic of the Boys... Op. Cit., p. 19.

³⁹ See, for example: Id. The Economic Question. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.) **The Method...** Op. Cit; Id. "Idealism" and "Materialism". Op. Cit.

abstract, physical and spiritual, factual and ideal.⁴⁰ In other words, he always agreed that, in a social system, there are relationships and institutions that are more or less concrete (physical, factual, etc.) than others. And he usually linked, on the one hand, aspects related to the economic field (economic production, satisfaction of fundamental needs, the world of work, etc.) and the political field (state violence, war, conflicts, etc.) to concrete relations and institutions, and, on the other hand, aspects related to the moral/intellectual field (spiritual questions, values, ideas, etc.) to abstract relations and institutions.⁴¹

Throughout his life, Malatesta also retained the notion of the inseparability of **the three fields**, related to the concept of the social system and according to which, in a given system, the economic field, the political field and the moral/intellectual field are "inseparable"⁴², that is, inseparable, interdependent. It was in this sense that he emphasised "the inseparability of moral, political and economic emancipation", and referred to "a given economic, political and moral configuration".⁴³ Although it should be noted that, for him, each system, each society, has a certain configuration, a way of articulating these three fields.

The economic, political and moral/intellectual fields, together and related, constitute a systemic totality. Each of them has an influence on the others, so that social relations and institutions can hardly be restricted to monocausal explanations. It should be borne in mind, for example, that in order to be properly understood, the ideas or moral/intellectual issues of a society need to be related to economic and political facts.⁴⁴ And that, on the other hand, in order to

⁴⁰ See, for example: Id. Program and Organisation... Op. Cit., pp. 51, 54; Id. Anarchist Programme. Op. Cit., pp. 11, 13-14, 15, 17, 23-24.

⁴¹ Id. A Revolt is no Revolution. **The Method...** Op. Cit., pp. 91-92; Id. "Idealism" and "Materialism". Op. Cit., pp. 139-141; Id. Ideal and Reality. Op. Cit., p. 452.

⁴² At another time, I called the "interdependence of the [three] spheres" what I now conceptualise as the "inseparability of the three fields". (CORRÊA, Felipe. Epistemologia... Op. Cit.) In Italian, Malatesta uses the term "indissolubilità", which finds one of its possible translations in the Portuguese word "indissociabilidade". Others would be indissolution, inseparability and indissociability. (MALATESTA, Errico. "Idealism" and "Materialism". In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., p. 58)

⁴³ Ibid., p. 58; Id. Apropos of "Revisionism". Op. Cit., p. 528.

⁴⁴ Id. Our Tactics. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op... Cit., p. 265; Id. A Revolt is no Revolution. Op. Cit., pp. 91-92.

To be properly understood, certain economic issues in a society need to be related to political or even moral/intellectual issues.⁴⁵

However, the fact that these three fields are inseparable does not mean that they have the same influence on shaping society. That's why Malatesta was able, throughout his career, to reconcile this inseparability of the three fields with what was explained earlier: the conception of the preponderance of the economic field in his youth, and the conception of a certain equivalence between the fields in his maturity. Furthermore, it seems necessary to state that it is undoubtedly possible to carry out less totalising analyses, which restrict themselves to two or even one field in question, or which focus on only part (greater or lesser) of a field. In any case, the important thing is not to lose sight of the fact that this separation between fields only exists in analytical terms, because in reality they function systemically.

This inseparable relationship between the fields is evident in the Italian anarchist's conception of *social classes*. For him, social classes are human groupings that result from the private ownership of the means of life (economic, political and moral/intellectual).⁴⁶ Classes that exist in all societies based on domination and privilege, placing antagonistic sectors on opposite sides:

In a society based on the antagonism of interests, in which one class retains all the social wealth and organises itself in political power to defend its own privileges, the poverty and subjection of the disinherited masses always tends to reach the maximum level compatible with the mere existence of man and the interests of the ruling class. And this tendency finds no obstacle except in the resistance of the oppressed. Oppression and exploitation never cease until the workers are determined not to tolerate it any longer.⁴⁷

Dominant and oppressed classes are in permanent conflict, *class struggle*. And the levels of domination and privileges in a society are the result of the play of forces that takes place in contexts that involve this dynamic: domination *versus* resistance, class oppression *versus* struggle and class consciousness.

⁴⁵ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 27; Id. Against the Monarchy. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 273.

⁴⁶ Id. Anarchist Programme. Op. Cit., pp. 8-9.

⁴⁷ Id. The First of May. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op. Cit., pp. 167-168.

In the capitalist and statist system, social classes are established on the basis of the inseparability of the three fields - and therefore of the four forms of domination that are produced in them (economic exploitation, physical coercion, political-bureaucratic domination and moral/intellectual domination), which in this system are also inseparable, interdependent.

In Europe at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, Malatesta identified a set of concrete social classes, which in a context of enormous conflicts and struggles. He identifies certain "dominant classes" or "privileged classes", which at the same time exploit, rule and deceive the working masses.⁴⁸ These include: the "bourgeoisie" (bourgeoisie), the former "landowners" (landowners), the "rulers" (sometimes called "bureaucracy" or "bureaucratic class") and the clergy (or "religious" authorities).⁴⁹ On the other hand, certain "oppressed" or "dominated" classes can be distinguished, made up of the "workers" in the broadest sense, who are at the same time exploited, governed and deceived. These include: the "proletariat" in the cities, those in the countryside, the "peasants" and the "poor" in general.⁵⁰

The "landlord class" (bourgeoisie and landowners) includes those who "hereditarily the land and all social wealth" and who own the economic means. The "special class" of rulers and bureaucrats includes those who have a monopoly on political means: "material means of repression" and government, which are used to maintain the privileges of the owners and also to "arrogate to themselves privileges". The "other special class", "the clergy", thanks to the

⁴⁸ In Italian, Malatesta often uses the terms "classi dominanti" [dominant classes] and "classi privilegiate" [privileged classes]. (See, for example: MALATESTA, Errico. *Le Due Vie: Riforme o Rivoluzione? Libertà o Dittatura?* In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., p. 88; Id. *Qualche Considerazione...* Op. Cit., p. 196; Id. *Riforme e Rivoluzione.* In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., p. 86; Id. *L'Unità Sindacale.* Op. Cit., p. 176)

⁴⁹ Id. *L'Anarchia.* In: **L'Anarchia.** Op. Cit., pp. 13, 20, 56; Id. *Il Rovescio della Medaglia: l'attendismo dei compagni spagnoli.* In: CERRITO, Gino (org.) **Rivoluzione e Lotta Quotidiana** (edizione elettronica). Milan: Antistato, 2012, p. 362; Id. *Gli Anarchici nel Movimento Operaio.* In: CERRITO, Gino (ed.) **Errico Malatesta...** Op. Cit., p. 186; Id. *A Proposito di Libertà.* In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., p. 44; Id. *Il Nostro Programma.* Op. Cit., p. 73.

⁵⁰ In Italian, even though Malatesta refers to "classi soggette" [subjected classes] and "gli oppressi" [the oppressed], he usually uses terms in the singular to refer to workers in a broader sense: "classe operaia" [working class], "classe di diseredati" [disinherited class], "classe spossessata" [dispossessed class]. For these terms, and those quoted in the last section, see: MALATESTA, Errico. *Le Due Vie...* Op. Cit., p. 88; Id. *L'Anarchia.* Op. Cit., pp. 12, 20, 34, 40, 50, 58; Id. *Qualche Considerazione...* Op. Cit., p. 190; Id. *Bolscevism and Anarchism.* In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., p. 206.

Its monopoly on moral/intellectual means or knowledge leads "the oppressed to docilely support the oppressor, the government, the interests of the owners and their own."⁵¹

Dominant classes and oppressed classes lead a "class struggle" - a central aspect of the capitalist and statist system, although other struggles and conflicts are also important. This struggle has particular expressions, when, for example, some workers find themselves in conflict with their boss, or when some peasants find themselves in conflict with the owner of their land. But the class struggle also has more general features when, in a given system, the different dominant classes are pitted against the different oppressed classes. In this case, it is a conflict that can bring about the "moral and material uplift" of the oppressed and also counter class domination in general, becoming the "main revolutionary force" of the oppressed masses.⁽⁵²⁾

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According to the above, Malatesta sees society as the result of the **play of forces** and **power relations**. These two broad categories explain the formation and dynamics of the social system, the three fields, institutions and social relations.

For him, every individual, group/collective or social class has a certain "capacity" for achievement, in other words, a certain possibility of producing a "force" or condition to achieve something, certain "latent forces" that can be mobilised.⁵³ When this potential (abstract) capacity or force is put into practice, it produces a **social force**, real (concrete) energy applied by subjects in certain conflicts to achieve certain objectives.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Id. Anarchist Programme. Op. Cit., pp. 8-9.

⁵² Id. Popolo e Proletariato. In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., p. 124.

⁵³ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 87, emphasis added; Id. The Anarchist Programme. Op. Cit., p. 25.

⁵⁴ However, it's important to note that when he talks about "social force" or "social forces", Malatesta usually refers to the "force of all", as in the Portuguese translation of *The Anarchy*, or to the "collective force of all in society", as in the English translation by Turcato. (MALATESTA, Errico. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 80; Id. Program and Organisation... Op. Cit., pp. 43, 47)

The recognition of this potential capacity/force and of the possibility or need for it to become what is here called a social force was identified by the Italian anarchist at different times. For example, when he argued that "the liveliest forces and the most real capacities" can have "influence on social life", and when he recognised that "individual [potential] forces" have "the possibility of complete development", especially when they associate "with each other for the greatest benefit of all".⁵⁵ Also when he argued that "propaganda and the idea are undoubtedly the powerful catalyst that will set the inert masses in motion [...], but this only appears among them and only affects them in the form of actions."⁵⁶ And when he recognised that "before one can do, one must have the strength to do," even if it "takes time to build that strength."⁵⁷

For Malatesta, if you don't transform capacity into social force, you remain impotent. As in the case of the anarchist emancipatory project, for which it is essential convert potential popular force (capacity) into real popular force (social force), enabling active intervention in social conflicts and the class struggle:

Unless we want to remain impotent dreamers, daydreaming about an ideal without taking care to promote the conditions that make its implementation feasible, we must actively and methodically strive to prepare, organise and inspire popular resistance in all aspects of life.⁵⁸

The different social forces can be described as *economic forces*, *political forces*, *moral/intellectual forces*⁵⁹; and/or as *class*, *group* or *individual forces*. These are forces that relate to their respective means (economic, political and moral/intellectual) and can therefore be more concrete or abstract: "*material forces*" or "*moral*"/*intellectual forces*.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 83, 57-58.

⁵⁶ Id. A Revolt is no Revolution. Op. Cit., p. 91.

⁵⁷ Id. Our Tactics. Op. Cit., p. 265.

⁵⁸ Id. The Duty of Resistance. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op... Cit., p. 230.

⁵⁹ Id. In Relation to Strikes. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., pp. 319-320.

⁶⁰ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 57, 80, 87, 55, emphasis added.

There are countless resources for a class, a group or even an individual to constitute a social force and, above all, to be able to increase it. These resources include: physical strength and the development of techniques for using violence; access to money, property, natural resources, positions of command and decision; the ability to influence and persuade people; access to weapons, war technology, information, knowledge, etc. Malatesta dedicated himself to reflecting, in particular, on the resource of organisation, which he defined as "association with a determined objective and with the means necessary to achieve this objective".⁶¹ He stressed the need to organise an "anarchist party" in order to increase the social strength of anarchists in reality, and, at the same time, the need to "organise the working masses" in order to strengthen the revolutionary project of the oppressed classes.⁶²

Another relevant factor is that the dispute between social forces always takes place in a given system (field or institution). And, according to what has been discussed, the systemic structuring of society occurs with the rooting of certain historical relations of force, which are more permanent and long-lasting. So systems (fields or institutions) themselves have a certain social force aimed at social reproduction, which acts as a kind of inertia and explains why the forces of change tend to face greater resistance than the forces of order, even though both have a similar quantum.⁶³

Emphasising that it is the dispute between social forces that establishes power relations requires us to understand how Malatesta uses the term "**power**" [*potere*, in the Italian originals], because this is done in different ways. In the first way, power is presented as the notion of a *capacity for realisation* defined above, a *capacity to do or achieve something*; a *possibility*, of *something that may (or may not) materialise*. In this way, Malatesta emphasises: "The freedom we want is not the abstract right to do one's own will, but to *be able to do it*"; "The reformists [...] delude themselves that they *can*, little by little, by means of small reforms, [...] undermine the bourgeois state and prepare the way for socialism"; "A class, powerful in wealth and science, interested in

⁶¹ Id. Organisation. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 235.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 236-245.

⁶³ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., pp. 12-13.

to keep the masses in intellectual slavery in order to *better dominate them*."⁶⁴ In this way, the Italian anarchist has a neutral perspective, in that you can do or achieve something that is (more or less) favourable or even contrary to the anarchist project. It is in this sense that he recognises the need for an "effective power of all workers aimed at overthrowing capitalist society".⁶⁵

In a second way, power is conceived as *the result of the play of forces, the conflict between social forces, when one overrides the other(s); a relationship of imposition, oppression or domination between classes, or even between groups or individuals*. Such a relationship always involves two or more parties and takes place over a certain period of time and in a certain space; it is something relational and historical that actually happens. With this usage, Malatesta argues that the state implies both "the brutal, violent, arbitrary domination of a few over the masses" and "an instrument organised to ensure the domination and privilege of those who [...] have seized all the means of life, above all land, and use them to maintain themselves.

the people into servitude and make them work for them". Something that concomitantly involves

"power, i.e. political privilege" and "ownership [of the means of production and exchange], i.e. economic privilege".⁶⁶ In the capitalist and statist system, the state is the instrument that guarantees the "power of the bourgeoisie" and of "a class of bureaucrats" who want to "consolidate power in their hands".⁶⁷ In this case, some classes impose themselves on others, oppress or dominate others, have power over others. In relation to this, Italian anarchists generally take a very critical stance, insofar as the anarchist project is opposed to domination and oppression.

In a third way, which is actually the one most used by Malatesta, power is presented as an *instrument of management, an institution or position of authority, the exercise power, domination and oppression*. Here, it is the *result of power relations, the power games of society*, which forge the basis of *regulations, controls, norms*, and which, for the Italian anarchist, in most cases takes on the meaning of *political power or the state*. As he puts it: "By *state* we also mean the

⁶⁴ Id. A Proposito di Libertà. Op. Cit., p. 43; Id. Le Due Vie... Op. Cit., p. 145; Id. La "Fretta" Rivoluzionaria. In: **Anarchismo e Insurrezione**. Edizioni Anarchismo, 2013, emphasis added.

⁶⁵ Id. Letter to Luigi Fabbri on the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat". In: **Il Buon Senso...** Op. Cit., pp. 198-199.

⁶⁶ Id. L'Anarchia. Op. Cit., pp. 16-17.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 20; Id. Riforme e Rivoluzione. Op. Cit., p. 87.

the supreme administration of a country, the central *power*, distinct from provincial or municipal power"; "the right to vote [... gives] the most energetic part of the proletariat the illusory hope of *coming to power*"; "rulers, accustomed to command, [... seek] to *keep power in their hands*"; "politicians [... are] useless parasites, all concerned with imposing their whims and keeping themselves in power."⁶⁸ In this way, Malatesta also always adopts a critical stance, emphasising that anarchists are opposed to power (the state, the positions of rulers, bosses, etc.). And based on this, he emphasises: "we don't want to get into power" and the mission of anarchists is "to demolish or contribute to the demolition of all political power".⁶⁹

For the purposes of conceptual standardisation, it is proposed here: to call the first way the *capacity for achievement* (the ability to do or achieve something; the possibility of something that may or may not materialise; potential strength); to refer to the second effectively as *power or power relations* (resulting from the play of forces, the conflict between real social forces, when one force overrides another/s); to call the third a *management instrument* (institution or position of authority, the exercise of power; the basis of regulations, controls, norms). In this sense, and based on the terms used by Malatesta himself, it is possible to talk about "*economic power*", "*political power*" and *moral/intellectual power*⁷⁰; and/or *class power, group power or even power of individuals*.⁷¹ And, by extension, *economic, political, moral/intellectual, class, group, etc. management instruments*.

In general, in historical societies, power relations have taken the form of "**domination**", "oppression"; they have been based on the "principle of authority".⁷² This has been the case with the government or the state:

Throughout history, as well as today, government is either the brutal, violent, arbitrary *domination of a few over the masses*, or an instrument ordained to ensure *domination and privilege* for those who, force, cunning or heredity, have it,

⁶⁸ Id. L'Anarchia. Op. Cit., pp. 11, 20, 41, 66 emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Id. Revolution in Practice. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 421.

⁷⁰ Id. Le Due Vie... Op. Cit., p. 90, emphasis added.

⁷¹ Id. The First of May. Op. Cit.; Id. A Bit of Theory. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op... Cit., p. 155; Id. The Anarchists in the Present Time. In: TURCATO, Davide (org.). **The Method...** Op... Cit., pp. 504-505.

⁷² Id. L'Anarchia. Op. Cit., pp. 16, 51, emphasis added; Id. The Monza Tragedy. In: TURCATO, Davide (ed.) **The Method...** Op. Cit., p. 311.

They have seized all the means of life, especially the land, and use them to keep the people in servitude and make them work for them."⁽⁷³⁾

For Malatesta, domination and oppression are synonymous. They can be defined as power relations that are based on the principle of authority and that establish lasting social hierarchies; in these relations, a few (dominators) impose themselves on many (oppressed), decide on what concerns them all and enjoy certain privileges; such relations often involve control of the social strength of the dominated, appropriation of the fruits of their labour, relations of command and obedience between dominators and dominated, as well as violence, repression and deception by the former over the latter.⁷⁴

In short, for Malatesta, capitalist-statism is characterised by its relations of domination. In terms of class domination, it can be said that it is a system in which certain dominant classes have mobilised greater social force in conflicts and have managed to impose themselves. The ability of these classes to achieve has been transformed into social force and, by intervening in the play of forces in society, they have managed to overpower each other and forge lasting power relations.

The bourgeoisie, landowners, rulers and religious authorities therefore have power in this society. And they have been creating or reinforcing management instruments that ensure the maintenance of this authoritarian power and its agents. Due to the private ownership or monopoly of the means of life that prevails in this society, these dominant classes enjoy different privileges, thanks to economic exploitation, physical coercion, political-bureaucratic domination and moral/intellectual domination. On the other hand, because of their position in the power play of this society, the oppressed classes have victims of the domination caused by capitalist and statist power relations. Proletarians in the cities and countryside, peasants and the poor in general, the vast majority in this society, have forced to occupy the lowest positions in the social hierarchy. They are the source of the dominators' privileges, which are only possible because of their labour, their dependence, their repression, their obedience and their alienation. The class struggle explains not only the greater or lesser level of domination that exists in society (since resistance and conquests can

⁷³ Id. **Anarchy**. Op. Cit., p. 22, emphasis added.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 22, 29; Id. **Anarchist Programme**. Op. Cit., p. 22; Id. **Organisation**. Op. Cit., 236.

diminish its effects), but it can also point to revolutionary and completely transformative perspectives.

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*** Text produced for the III International Congress of Research on Anarchism, held in São Paulo between 8 and 11 November 2022.**