

FROM RESISTANCE

TO SOCIAL CHANGE



VOICES OF STRUGGLE

WORKERS RIGHTS



THIS IS THE FLOWER OF THE PARTISAN.
OH BELLA CIAO, BELLA CIAO, BELLA CIAO, CIAO, CIAO
THIS IS THE FLOWER OF THE PARTISAN
WHO DIED FOR FREEDOM



RISE & SING

Songs and chants have been a hallmark of protest movements across the world, serving to galvanise action, mobilise masses, and inspire change.

On International Workers' Day, we honor the voices of the struggles for workers' rights and social justice: their songs, creativity, and achievements.

We take inspiration from one of the most enduring protest anthems that has spanned several generations and is still sung to this day: 'Bella Ciao'.

Originating in Italy's Po Valley region at the end of the 19th century, it was sung by the women weeding the rice fields - *the mondine*.



LATE 19TH CENTURY

Mondine paddy field workers resist exploitation in Italy's Po valley. They sing Bella Ciao folk song 

1943

Italian partisans launch underground resistance against Nazi occupiers. Bella Ciao immortalised as anti-fascist anthem 



Their job was tiring and conditions were extremely tough with workers forced to toil knee-deep in malaria-prone flooded fields for hours under the beating sun, earning poor wages and having almost no rights.

To avoid punishments for talking during work hours, the mondine developed a repertoire of folk songs of which 'Bella Ciao' became the best known.

[Political activism thrived](#) in the rice fields. The rice weeders took leadership roles in progressive left-wing parties, associations and unions, among them the *Unione Donne Italiane* and working-class institutions such as the *Casa del Popolo* and cooperatives.

They rose, protested, and went on strike against the supervising padroni, demanding rights and achieving victories, living a life true to the songs they sang, until 'a day... when us all will work in freedom' (*ma verrà un giorno che tutte quante lavoreremo in libertà*).



1995

Brent spar occupations against fossil fuels gain international attention

1983

Nuclear disarmament movement steps up pressure in the West under shadow of Cold War tensions



1968

French students and workers rise against inequality and elites. Bella Ciao makes comeback as protest anthem 



RESISTING FASCISM

Decades later, between 1943 and 1945, Italian partisans rekindled the spirit of the mondine in their fight against the Nazi occupation of Italy.

They led the underground resistance in cities and the countryside, first against Mussolini's rule, and later when the Nazis invaded. They sabotaged communication lines, transportation centers, and supply lines. By 1944, the partisans immobilised eight of the 26 Nazi divisions in northern Italy.

Their struggle culminated with the liberation of Italy and the defeat of Nazism, cementing Bella Ciao as an international hymn against fascism, injustice, and repression, its lyrics a symbol of the sacrifices made for freedom.



2003

Massive protests across European capitals against Iraq war



2011

Anti-austerity protests sweep city squares. In Spain, Indignados movement is born

SOCIAL UPHEAVALS

The year 1968 saw mass uprisings across the world against military and bureaucratic elites and capitalist repression of working people. From the Black Panther Party in the US and resistance against the dictatorship in Brazil, to the rise of the anti-war movement and African independence struggles.

The environmental movement, which emerged out of the anti-nuclear proliferation movement, can trace its beginnings back to the protests of 1968. The '60s also saw the rise of a vocal feminist movement and LGBTQ liberation groups.

In May 1968, the French economy came to a halt and a revolution became imminent. All this was possible when students staged occupations to protest against the elite and their exploitation of the majority. Trade unionists leading the general strikes were brutally repressed by police, but the winds of change had only just started.

Bella Ciao became popularised in the 1960s, especially during the worker and student demonstrations of 1968.

The legacy of 1968 and the 60s as a whole [are still felt to this day](#), having earned us precious freedoms and rights.

2016

Polish women organise against attempts to criminalise abortion triggering wave of international women strikes



2018

Greta Thunberg starts protest to force action on climate emergency



THE STRUGGLES OF OUR TIME

Struggles for social and environmental justice, for workers' rights, feminism, equality, and peace have continued strong, creative, inspiring, determined, and full of life. Bella Ciao continues to be sung in squares around the world in many different languages.

In 2011, at the height of the economic crisis and crippling austerity policies, people from across Spain occupied squares imagining alternatives to an exploitative neoliberal economic system.

Polish women said enough is enough to patriarchy after the government threatened an absolute ban on abortion. Their stand reverberated across the world, giving rise in 2016 to the women's strike for equality.

In 2018, teenager Greta Thunberg began a one-person sit-in outside the Swedish parliament calling for decisive and radical action to tackle the climate emergency. Her stand inspired millions of young people from around the world, giving rise to the global Climate Strike.

Everywhere, gig economy and other workers are fighting back against the roll-back of hard-earned rights. People from all backgrounds show solidarity to refugees, resist attacks on public services, fight against the resurgent far-right and protest against militarisation and the war industry.

Today, we honour and celebrate these voices of struggle.

WATCH THE VIDEO



*Questo è il fiore del partigiano,
o bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao ciao ciao,
questo è il fiore del partigiano
morto per la libertà*



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