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Enrico Malatesta
Signor Malatesta Explains
23 August 1899

The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader, edited by
Davide Turcato, translated by Paul Sharkey.
Translated from “Il signor Malatesta si spiega,” *Il Progresso
Italo-Americano* (New York) 20, n. 200 (23 August 1899).
Malatesta had arrived in America on 12 August and held his
first conference in Paterson, New Jersey, on 16 August. The
Progresso Italo-Americano, one of New York’s Italian
newspapers, had published a report of Malatesta’s speech in
its 20 August issue. The address provided by Malatesta is that
of Pedro Esteve and his wife Maria Roda, with whom he was
staying. Esteve was the Spanish anarchist with whom
Malatesta had toured Spain in 1891. Esteve had since
emigrated to America.

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Signor E. Malatesta wishes to amend certain views,
not reflective of his thinking, carried in the report
sent to us by third parties on the talk he gave on
the evening of the 16th inst., in Paterson, NJ.

To which end he has sent us this letter in which
he asks that we accommodate him, which we are
happy to do as follows.

750 Clay St., Paterson, 20.08.99

Dear Editor-in-chief,

I read in your edition of today’s date that I am supposed to
have stated in Paterson that “henceforth it is no longer a matter
of class struggle against the bourgeoisie as the older socialist
schools wished us to believe.”

Since this does not accurately reflect my thinking, allow me
to reiterate for your readers what I actually did say.

As I see it, it is not the case that the bourgeoisie forms a sin-
gle body in the struggle against the proletariat and that govern-
ment, army, bench, church, etc. have no reason to exist other

than the protection of bourgeois interests, just as the various schools of socialism believed once upon a time.

The current position in Europe is there as evidence, even for the most pig-headed, that the bourgeoisie is split into a number of factions competing among themselves, and that the various political, court, military, religious institutions, etc., not only champion the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, but indeed have interests of their own, which they protect even at the expense of placing bourgeois interests in jeopardy.

This situation represents a benefit and a danger as far as the laboring population is concerned; a benefit insofar as the enemy is divided; a danger in that it might lead the workers to forget that “all” bourgeois are its enemies.

So we anarchist socialists should cash in on the divisions within the enemy camp; and, if it can be done to some purpose, ally ourselves with this or that bourgeois faction in order to rid ourselves of the most immediate obstacles such as, in Italy, the monarchy; but we must always remain what we are, namely, implacable enemies of capitalism and authoritarianism, and, insofar as we have it in us so to do, prevent the workers from being used yet again as footstool for new rulers and new exploiters.

The point is not to give up on the class struggle but rather to prevent the workers from straying from the Polar Star of class struggle in the complex struggles at the present hour and in the near future.

The debate centers on a de facto matter, to wit, the influence, exclusive or otherwise, of the class struggle in a wide variety of historical events. But all socialists, of no matter what school of thought, are—or ought to be—in agreement on the necessity of the proletariat’s always being guided by the interests of the working class; given that, as far as socialists are concerned, there is no equitable solution to the social question other than the destruction of all parasitical classes through the eradication of

private ownership and the conversion of all able-bodied men into useful workers.

In the hope that you will be willing to publish these few lines for the sake of the truth, thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Enrico Malatesta