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Errico Malatesta

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The article was written on the eve of the London International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress of 1896, where a front of anti-parliamentary forces unsuccessfully opposed the resolution to exclude anarchists from the congresses of the Second International. Malatesta was among the most active anarchists in this battle.

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Why not? Perhaps because, as they have said, we are not Socialists. Well, if there are any persons who delight in calling themselves Anarchists, and who are not Socialists, certainly they have nothing to do with a Socialist Congress, and they ought to have no desire to take part in it. But we Anarchist-Communists or Collectivists desire the abolition of monopolies of all kinds; we demand the complete abolition of classes and all domination and exploitation of man by man; we wish that the land and all the instruments of production and distribution, as well as the wealth accumulated by the labour of past generations, should become by the expropriation of its present holders the common property of all mankind, so that all that work shall be able to enjoy the full produce of their work, either in full Communism or by each man receiving according to his efforts, according to the will and agreement of those interested. We wish to substitute for competition and war among men fraternity and solidarity in work for the good of all. And we

have spread this ideal, and have struggled and suffered for its realisation for long years, and in some countries—Italy and Spain—long before the birth of parliamentary Socialism. What honest and well-informed man will affirm that we are not Socialists?

Perhaps we are not Socialists because we wish the workers should conquer their rights by their organised efforts, and not to trust to the hope which we think vain and chimerical—that they will obtain them by concessions from any Government? Or because we believe that Parliament is not only a useless weapon for the workers, but that even without the resistance of the middle classes it will never, by the law of its nature, represent the interests and the will of all, and will always remain the instrument of the domination of a class or party? Or because we believe that the new society ought to be organised by the direct agreement of all concerned, from the circumference to the centre, freely, spontaneously, under the inspiration of the sentiment of solidarity and under the pressure of natural and social necessities, and because that if this organisation was made by means of decrees from a central body, either elected or a directorship, it will begin by being an artificial organisation, forcing and dissatisfying everybody, and it would end in the creation of a new class of professional politicians, who would seize for themselves all sorts of privileges and monopolies? It might easily be maintained with more justice that we are, if not the only Socialists, certainly the most thorough and logical, because we claim for every man, not only his entire portion of social wealth, but also his part in social power—that is to say, the real faculty of making his influence felt equally with that of others in the management of public affairs.

If we are Socialists then it is clear that a congress from which we are excluded cannot honestly call itself “The Socialist Workers’ Congress,” and that it ought to take the particular title of the party or parties admitted to its deliberations. For example, none of us would think of mixing with a congress which would be called a

“Social Democratic Congress” or a “Congress of Parliamentary Socialists.”

But let us leave alone this question of nomenclature, and neglect also the discussion of the question, if the London Committee has properly interpreted the resolutions of Zurich.¹ Let us go to the root of the matter. It is to the interest of all the enemies of our capitalist society that the workmen should be united and solid in the struggle against capitalism, and that they should be conscious that this struggle is of necessity of an economic character. It is not because we ignore the importance of political questions. We believe not only that government—the state—is an evil in itself, but that it is the armed defence of capitalism, and that the people cannot take possession of their own property without passing over the bodies of its armed police—really or figuratively, according to circumstances. Thus we ought necessarily to occupy ourselves in the political struggle against government. But it may be owing to the difference of conditions and of temperaments of the peoples of various countries, or the fact that the relations between the political constitution and the conditions of the masses are very complicated, hard to adapt and less capable of being treated in a way that seems good to everybody, that politics are in effect a great source of division, and the fact is that the conscious workers in the different countries whom it would be easy to solidly unite in the economic struggle, are by politics broken up into many fractions. Consequently an understanding between all the workers who fight for their emancipation is not possible, save on economic ground—and it is this that is of most consequence, because political action of the proletariat, parliamentary or revolutionary, is equally futile so long as it does not form a conscious organised economic force. Every attempt to enforce a single political opinion upon the labour

¹ The resolution against the anarchists had been taken at the Zurich congress of 1893, but had then been subjected to contrasting interpretations.

movement tends to its disintegration and stops the progress of its economic organisation.

The Social Democrats evidently desire to force upon the workers their special programme. It might almost be said that they want to prevent those who do not accept the decisions of their party from fighting for human emancipation! They have had in this direction more or less success—perhaps they will have more—but that can only take place at the expense of a general understanding among the workers, and certainly without desiring it, serving the interests of the middle classes. If Socialists would only remember the history of the old International, which certainly the old among them know better than it is generally related. There were plenty of insults between Marxists and Bakunists. The truth is that both sections wished to make its special programme triumphant in the International, and in the struggle between Centralism and Federalism, between Statism and Anarchism, we neglected the class struggle and economic solidarity, and the International perished through it. To-day the Anarchists, though we owe to them in many countries the first Socialist trade unions, by a series of circumstances and errors which there is no need at present to examine, have not much influence—save in Spain—in the Labour movement. But this will not last long, and the Social Democrats would do wrong to reckon upon it.

Certainly the Anarchists will soon be brought by the logic of their programme and by the necessities of the struggle to put their strength and their hope in the international organisation of the masses of the workers. Already eloquent signs of this can be seen. What will happen then? Will there be again *two* Internationals, wasting in internal quarrels the strength which ought to be employed against the capitalist middle classes, and will they again end in killing each other?

We have no intention of demanding—far from that—that the different parties and schools should renounce their programme and their tactics. We hold to our own ideas, and we understand that

the others will do the same. We only ask that division shall not be carried where it ought not to be; we demand the right for every worker to fight against capitalism hand in hand with his brothers, without distinction of political ideas; we ask that all shall fight as they think best, with those that believe as they believe, but that all shall be united in the economic struggle.

Then, if the Social Democrats persist in their attempt at military despotism, and thus sow dissension among the workers, may the latter be able to understand and bring to a glorious triumph the noble words of Marx: “Workers of the world, unite!”