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Émile Henry
Comrades of l'En Dehors
1892

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I read in your last number an article from companion Malatesta, entitled "A Little Theory."

Please be so good as to insert these few lines of personal reflections on that subject.

Comp. Malatesta, after having elaborated upon the imminence and the necessity of a violent revolution, and considering the role of the anarchists to contribute to its imminent arrival, said that "any act of propaganda or achievement, by word or by deed, individual or collective, is good when it serves to *bring nearer and to facilitate* the Revolution… »

Then, speaking of acts of revolt inspired by hatred resulting from the long suffering of the proletariat, Malatesta says he understands and forgives those acts, but that: "It is one thing to understand and forgive, but another thing to claim. These are not acts that we can *accept*, encourage, or imitate. We should be resolute and energetic, but we should strive never to overstep *the limit marked by necessity*. We should do as the surgeon who cuts *when he must*, but avoid inflicting useless suffering… »

I would note to companion Malatesta that this part of his article is, at least, strange from the pen of an anarchist.

Indeed, what do the anarchists want? The autonomy of the individual, the development of his free initiative, which alone can assure him happiness; and if he becomes communist, it is through simple deduction, for he understands that it is only in the happiness of all, free and autonomous like him, that he will find his own.

And yet, what does Malatesta want?

To restrict that initiative, to undermine that autonomy, by declaring that the acts of a man — as sincere and convinced as he may be, — are not to be accepted, nor claimed, when they surpass *the limit marked by nécessity.*

But who can estimate when that limit has been passed? Who can certify that one act is useful to the Revolution, while some other is harmful?

Must the Ravachols of the future, before committing their lives in the struggle, submit their projects for the acceptance of the Malatestas raised up as a Grand Tribunal, who will judge the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the acts?

On the contrary, we say this:

When a man, in the present society, becomes a rebel conscious of his acts, — and Ravachol was such – it is because he has done in his head a work of deduction embracing his whole life, analyzing the causes of his sufferings, and he alone can judge whether he is right or wrong to hate, and be wild, "indeed even ferocious."

We reckon, ourselves, that the acts of brutal revolt like those that are products, and which are the origin of the polemic between "anarchists" and "terrorists" – in the style of Merlino –, we reckon that those acts strike the mark, for they awaken the masses, shake them with a violent whiplash, and show them the vulnerable side of the Bourgeoisie, all still trembling at the moment when the Rebel walked to the scaffold…

We understand perfectly that all the anarchists do not have the temperament of a Ravachol.

Each of us has a physiognomy and specific aptitudes which differentiate us from our companions in struggle.

Also, we are not astonished to see some revolutionaries focus all their efforts on a given point, for example, like the companions Merlino and Malatesto, on the grouping of the proletarians in well organized associations.

But we do not recognize their right to say:

"Our propaganda alone is good; apart from ours, there is no salvation." That is an old remnant of authoritarianism that we do not wish to bear, and we will be quick to separate our cause from that of the pontiffs or aspirants.

In addition, companion Malatesta tells us that hate does not engender love.

We reply to him that it is love which engenders hate:

The more we love liberty and equality, the more we should hate everything that is opposed to men being free and equal.

So, without losing our way in mysticism, we pose the problem on the terrain of reality, and we say:

It is true that men are only the products of institutions; but these institutions are abstract things which only exists as long as there are men of flesh and bone to represent them. There is thus only one means of getting at the institutions; it is to strike the men; and we happily greet all the energetic acts of revolt against bourgeois society, for we do not lose sight of the fact that the Revolution will only be the resultant force of all these individual Rebellions.

Comrades, the matter would involve lengthy arguments, but I hope that these few lines will suffice to make the companions think, who are capable of letting themselves be influenced by a name like that of Malatesta.

To you and to Anarchy!

Émile Henry