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The Italian federal delegates to the Berne Congress

Letter to *The Bulletin De La Fédération Jurassienne*

1876

*The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*

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## Letter to *The Bulletin De La Fédération Jurassienne*

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Congress

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Comrades,

In light of a number of inaccuracies and omissions in the official minutes of the Berne Congress, certain newspapers have drawn from the report presented by us on the situation and principles of the International in Italy some conclusions that do not quite match with the facts.<sup>1</sup> We therefore ask you to carry the following statement in your newspaper:

1. We never said anything that might lead one to suppose that in Italy the International was split into two branches subscribing to two different schools of thought. The vast majority of Italian socialists have rallied around the Italian Federation's anarchist, collectivist, revolutionary program, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Malatesta and Cafiero, co-authors of this letter, had been among the delegates of the Italian Federation to the congress of the federalist branch of the International held in Berne at the end of October 1876. The letter summarizes some of the key views held by the Italian Federation at the time.

few who have, thus far, as a consequence of intrigues and lies, remained outside, are now all beginning to enter our organization. We are not referring here to a tiny group that, being prompted by personal views and reactionary purposes, is out to conduct what it terms “gradual and peaceful” propaganda: these people have already been judged by the Italian socialists and represent no one but themselves.

2. The Italian Federation holds that the *act of insurrection*, designed to assert socialist principles through deeds, is the most effective method of propaganda and the only one that, without deceiving and corrupting the masses, can delve into the deepest strata of society and draw the cream of humanity into the struggle, backed by the International.<sup>2</sup>
3. The Italian Federation looks upon collective ownership of the products of labor as the necessary complement to the collectivist program, *the contribution by all towards the meeting of each and everyone’s needs* being the only rule of production and consumption compatible with the principle of solidarity.<sup>3</sup> The federal congress in Florence has eloquently expressed the Italian International’s view on this issue, as well as on the preceding one.

Greetings and solidarity.

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<sup>2</sup> Malatesta and Cafiero are expressing here the tactics that would later come to be known as “propaganda by the deed,” of which the Benevento uprising of the next year would be a notable example.

<sup>3</sup> This is one of the earliest statements in which the replacement of collectivism with communism—“the collective ownership of the products of labor”—is advocated. In the months preceding the Berne congress the issue had been discussed by Malatesta, Cafiero, and others during conversations in Naples. They had come to the conclusion that the traditional bakuninist formula of collectivism had to be abandoned in favor of communism. This change of perspective had been approved by the congress of the Italian Federation, held near Florence a few days before the Berne congress, and then expressed at Berne by Malatesta and Cafiero.