

# KARL MARX ADDRESSES M. K. GANDHI

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My dear Mr. Gandhi,

With considerable interest, I have watched your movement develop in India. After all, our movements to reform society have much in common. You speak to the common people, as do I. You include women in your movement, and return to them the respect that has been denied them thus far in this capitalist society (Gandhi 18), as do I. You envision a society in which everyone works and private property is abolished, as do I. I, too, believe that capitalism has failed in its attempts to bring happiness and comfort to people (Gandhi 18). Yet I regret to say that, much as I may support political action against British colonialism – by all means put power back in India’s hands! – your movement and the movement of the working class are not compatible. Nor is your philosophy of truth a sufficient foundation for any progressive social movement. Enough! I must now make clear to you the grounds of my unrest: you do not address the needs of contemporary life. You insist upon a return to old ways – to ancient class systems, self-sufficient labor, predominant religion. And *that*, I simply cannot accept. You cannot, nor should you, force Indian society to move backwards. What would it take to pull this reactionary veil from your eyes? Though there are surely many areas in which our opinions differ, I will expand upon only four: religion, division of classes in society, industrialization, and the nature of revolution.

The most pressing issue at stake here, Mr. Gandhi, is religion. Your political aspirations are tainted by religion. You believe that religion and morality should be inherent in India’s

political structure. Give me none of your “Truths.” I want none of your moral appeals. I have very little patience for your insistence that India’s government should find its roots in the ancient spiritual teachings of Hinduism. Religion is simply a part of man’s consciousness, and it changes as the ruling class changes. Working people practice religion because it offers them a happy alternative to their miserable lives in whatever alternate life follows. However, as I will explain to you in more detail shortly, when working people overthrow their bourgeois rulers, they will have no need for this religion that you hold so dear. They will have contentment on Earth, and religion will be rendered obsolete. While religion may find a place in the ideal society that you envision, it is absolutely irrelevant in the real society that I lay before you; a real society, developed not by religious philosophies but by the development of mankind’s labor (Marx 174)! Have I shocked you? It is not such a difficult concept to grasp.

Let us now examine your view of society’s structure. Society is no longer naturally composed of four classes, or “Varnas,” as you refer to them. Why on earth must you continue to starkly divide all of your people into four unnatural groups: What is the point of dividing Indian citizens into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishna, and Shudra classes? Into spiritual, protective, mercantile, and manual labor classes (Gandhi 217)? Have these classes always existed? Did two Brahmins, two Kshatriyas, two Vaishnas, and two Shudras simply appear upon the Earth and begin to repopulate? Certainly not. These classes, and the Hindu religion that they embody, emerged as a result of property relations during the development of Indian society. Though these divisions may have appeared naturally in India’s equivalent of a communal society, your people have become uncomfortable within these confines. As they naturally developed, so they will naturally dissolve. How is it that I know this? Why, it is a simple matter of tracing the division

of labor from its beginning. I discuss this at length in my work *The German Ideology*, so I will but outline the basic progression at the moment.

You can certainly see that man requires certain means of subsistence to survive, such as food, shelter, and clothing. In contrast to other animals, man can produce this means of subsistence himself. What individuals produce and how they produce it comprise their “mode of production” (Marx 107). Through their mode of production, individuals express themselves. Therefore, “the nature of individuals...depends on the material conditions which determine their production” (Marx 108). The development of a country, therefore, depends solely on the extent to which the division of labor within the country has been developed. I shall take you through these stages of development, starting at the first stage of ownership: the tribal stage (Marx 108).

At the tribal stage, labor is confined to the family and slaves. Yes, the slaves. Slaves have existed as the products of war bartering since the beginning of civilization. It is not an institutionalized slavery, but an informal, latent sort (Marx 109). At the next stage, which we refer to as the communal stage, the division of labor is developed further. While all work is still based upon communal association, private property begins to appear occasionally. It is at this stage of the division of labor that slavery becomes institutionalized, and the class distinction between citizens and slaves is realized (Marx 109). However, real opposition between a “working” and “ruling” class emerges in feudal society, the next stage of the division of labor. It is then that “nobles” begin to exert power over lower members of society, “serfs.” Opposition forms between country and town people. Craftsmen in towns form guilds so that they can protect their labor from the powerful nobles. These guilds are the kernels of the next, and Europe’s current, system of the division of labor: capitalism. Capitalism, the society in which the seemingly uncontested ruling class, the bourgeoisie, own the means of the production carried

out by working class, the proletarians. But is the bourgeoisie truly uncontested, as it believes? Indeed not. The proletarians have all the resources they need to overthrow this ruling class, and will do so when they realize that the economy is in their control!

Would it not, you ask, be better to preserve these distinctions? No. These are meaningless divisions! Your people have been frozen in time, stuck somewhere in between the communal and feudal stages of the division of labor. You would do much better to view the people in your country as if they were gradually dividing into two classes: the bourgeois and proletariat. These, you see, are the groups into which the Western world has divided itself. The bourgeoisie is the ruling class. The proletarians are the workers. India, as it is a communal society that has only recently been introduced to capitalism, does not yet clearly exhibit all the characteristics of capitalist society. It must first experience a feudal period. But only watch the development from feudalism to capitalism, and see how I am right! The British capitalism has seized hold of your country. Once your country has progressed to the capitalist stage of development, your British-inspired proletarians can take control from the bourgeoisie of Indian society in the same manner that you will soon witness in Europe!

And now we may address your misperception of society's future. Industrialization has happened – do not live in the past, sir! You wish for society to return to how it was before British rule infected it with the disease of modern capitalism. You have made it clear that you care not for humankind's technological advances – criticizing the railroads, lamenting the division of labor (Gandhi 23). We both share the common vision of all people laboring, but this labor does not have to occur in lieu of production capabilities. In the society you envision, people would not employ the strategic division of labor, essentially imprisoning them in the

communal society. Communism need not come at the expense of progress! Do not deprive your people of the ability to produce goods at an efficient rate.

When the proletarian class of the capitalist society overthrows the ruling class, they, the producers, will have access to the means of production. Private property will be done away with, and the bourgeoisie will assimilate into the proletarian ranks. Capitalism, the vile beast that both you and I so detest, will undo itself in due time. The communal society that will be created by the rise of the proletarians to power is not so different from the united India that you envision. It is, indeed, better – it no longer demands the presence of religion that wearies me so! It will allow India to share the interest of the working class, for the first time ever a universal interest among the capitalist nations of the world.

I have not yet addressed the form that this revolution should assume. Mr. Gandhi, at the very center of your teachings, of your idyllic political goals, is the belief that radical change may come about peacefully. Peaceful protest may well be the “morally superior” form of protest, but what good is morally superior protest if it does not work? I should phrase my case more clearly. Whether or not one can successfully cause an entire nation’s division of labor to regress using peaceful protest matters little to me. I do not wish for society to regress. Rather, I apply the notion of peaceful protest to the transition of the currently capitalist society to a proletarian-ruled communist society. The idea that this transition will come about peacefully is laughable. The bourgeoisie will not peacefully relinquish their grip on the proletarians. However, the possibility that it will come about quickly, successfully, and manifestly is very real! Little has this to do with religious appeals and moral education. This violence will not lead to more violence (Gandhi 48). The proletarians, large in number, have only to forcibly seize the brittle shell of

power of the tiny bourgeoisie. They will face no opposition that their sheer numbers cannot put down in a moment!

The defeat of capitalism is our common goal. We both envision a society in which gross surplus in the hands of a few no longer exists. But see the flaws in your vision of India's future. You would do yourself good to forgo religious ties and ancient beliefs. Your people do not need moral education. Rather, they need political education. A strong band of politically educated citizens would be your best weapon against the British rule that has infiltrated your beloved India (Marx 186)! The progression of British capitalist society in India has begun a gradual decomposition of your country's ancient class systems. Let the demise of these arbitrary divisions continue! The progress of mankind is not to be feared, but welcomed. If you only let capitalism follow its natural course, a better society will emerge. Can you now see that attempts to move India back in time are not only futile, but also undesirable? "Working men of all countries unite" (Marx 186)! All countries – India, too! Mr. Gandhi, you cannot recreate your dear India of the past, but you would do well to help it embrace a communist future!

Karl Marx

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