

# INDIA UNDER BRITISH RULE

By KARL MARX

*[The following two articles were contributed by Karl Marx to the New York Daily Tribune in 1853. They were recently re-discovered by Mr. Riasanov, the head of the Marx and Engels Institute in Moscow, and published in the journal, Under the Banner of Marxism. The present translation has been made from the German edition of this periodical (July, 1925), and cannot, therefore, claim to represent the exact wording of the original articles. Quotations also have been translated from the German. It is astonishing to notice how up-to-date Marx's analysis appears. His description of the revolutionary changes in the basis of the Indian social order brought about by the British conquest of India, and his forecast of the involuntary creation by British capitalism of the necessary political and economic conditions for Indian independence have been strikingly confirmed by events.]*

## I. BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

*New York Daily Tribune, June 25, 1853.*

**H**INDUSTAN is an Italy of Asiatic dimensions, with the Himalayas for the Alps, the plains of Bengal for Lombardy, the Deccan for the Apennines and the island of Ceylon for Sicily. Hence the similar great diversity in soil production and the analagous cleavages in political structure. Just as Italy from time to time has been split up by the sword of the conqueror into different national portions, so we see Hindustan, where not under the pressure of Mohammedans, Moguls or Britishers, broken up into as many independent and hostile States as it counts towns or even villages. Regarded from the social standpoint, however, Hindustan is not the Italy but the Ireland of the East. This peculiar combination of an Italy with an Ireland, of a world of voluptuousness with a world of suffering, reflects itself in the old traditions of the religion of Hindustan. This religion is at once a religion of sensual extravagance and of self-

mortifying asceticism, the religion of the Lingam and the Juggernaut, the religion of the monks and the dancing girls.

I do not share the opinion of those who believe in a golden age of Hindustan; without, however, like Sir Charles Wood, appealing to the authority of Kuli-Khan for the confirmation of my view. One has only to picture for oneself, for example, the times of the Aurangzebs, or the epochs when the Mogul appeared in the North and the Portuguese in the South, or the Mohammedan invasion and the Heptarchy in South India, or, if one wishes to go back still farther into antiquity, the mythological chronology of the Brahmins themselves, in order to date back the beginning of Indian misery to an epoch which reaches further back than the creation of the world according to the Christian reckoning.

There is no doubt, however, that the misery which the British have conjured up all over Hindustan is fundamentally different, and of an infinitely deeper consequence, than anything previously suffered by her. I am not referring here to the European despotism of the British East India Company grafted on to the old Asiatic despotism, a more horrible combination than any of the monstrous idols that frighten us in the temple of Salsette. That is no peculiarity of British colonial domination, but only an imitation of the Dutch, and, indeed, to such an extent is this the case, that it suffices for a complete description of the activity of the British East India Company to reproduce the exact words of Sir Stamford Raffles, the British Lieut.-Governor of Java, on the old Dutch East India Company. He said :—

The Dutch Company, governed entirely by the motive of profit, treated its subjects with less consideration or regard than earlier the West Indian plantation owners treated the slaves on their estates, for the latter had paid for the slaves in their possession, while the Dutch East India Company had not. It used the whole existing apparatus of despotism in order to wring out of the people the last penny in taxation, and the last ounce of labour power, and heightened still further the pressure of an arbitrary and semi-barbaric government by employing the latter with all the practical rapacity of a politician and all the finished egoism of a monopolist trader.

All the former civil wars, invasions, conquests and famines, however remarkably complicated, rapid and destructive their succession in India may appear, touched only the surface. England, on the other hand, has torn down the whole scaffolding of the

Indian social order, without so far any obvious signs of a rebirth being visible. This loss of an old world without any winning of a new one lends an especially tragic character to the present misery of the Indians, and distinguishes the present-day Hindustan as ruled by the British from all the ancient traditions and history of the entire past.

For unthinkable ages there have been in Asia only three departments of Government—that of finance or internal plunder, that of war or external plunder, and, finally, that of public works. Climate and soil conditions, especially the enormous stretches of desert reaching from the Sahara over Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary to the highest plateaux of Asia, make artificial irrigation by canals and waterworks the fundamental basis of oriental agriculture. In India, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia alike, river floods were utilised for fertilising the soil and increasing the water storage for feeding the irrigation canals. The absolute necessity of frugal economical use of water, which in the West, in Flanders and Italy, compelled the private owners to join in voluntary union, determined in the East, where the civilisation was too low and the area too great for it to bring about a voluntary union, the interference of the central governmental power. Thus arose an economic function of all Asiatic governments, *viz.*, the function of promoting public works. This artificial fertilising of the soil, which depends on the administration of the central government and immediately falls into decay with the neglect of irrigation and land drainage, is the explanation of the otherwise curious fact that at the present time whole regions are infertile deserts which were once under excellent cultivation, as, for instance, Palmyra, Petra, the ruins of Yemen and whole provinces in Egypt, Persia and India. It explains also the fact that the devastation of a single war could cause the depopulation of a country for centuries and rob it of its whole civilisation.

The British in India have taken over from their predecessors the departments of finance and of war, but they have entirely neglected that of public works. Hence the decay of agriculture, which cannot be carried on in accordance with the English principle of free competition, of *laissez faire, laissez aller*. We are, however, quite accustomed to see in Asiatic empires the decay of agriculture

under one government and its restoration under another. The harvest here corresponds to the presence of a good or bad government, just as in Europe it reflects good or bad weather. The subordination and neglect of agriculture, however bad it might be, could not still be regarded as the ultimate ground of the collapse of the Indian social order brought about by the British invasion if it had not also been accompanied by circumstances of quite a different significance, by a new phenomenon in the annals of the history of the entire Asiatic world.

Whatever the numerous changes in the political picture of India's past, its social order remained unaltered from the oldest times up to the first decade of the nineteenth century. The hand loom and spinning wheel, which employed regularly their millions of spinners and weavers, formed the basis of the structure of this society. For ages past Europe has been in receipt of the wonderful products of the Indian textile craft, giving precious metals in exchange. Thus was provided the material for the work of Indian goldsmiths who formed an indispensable constituent of Indian society, where the love for ornaments is so great that even the almost naked Indians of the poorest sections of the population usually carry a pair of gold ear-rings or some gold ornament about the neck. Rings were also generally worn on fingers and feet. Women and children frequently carried massive bracelets of gold and silver, and in the dwellings one often saw gold and silver idols.

It was the British invasion that shattered the Indian hand loom and smashed the spinning wheel to pieces. England began by displacing Indian cotton goods from the European market. Then she brought cotton yarn to Hindustan, and finally flooded with cotton from abroad the real home of cotton itself. Between 1818 and 1837 the export of yarn from Great Britain to India rose in the proportion of 1 to 5,200. In 1824 the export of British cotton goods to India amounted to hardly a million yards; in 1847 it had already exceeded a figure of 64 million yards. At the same time the population of Dacca dwindled from 150,000 to 20,000. This shrinkage of Indian cities long renowned for their fabrics was by no means the worst consequence. British steam power and British science destroyed all over India the union of agriculture and hand manufacturing industry.

These two circumstances—on the one hand, the fact that the Hindus, like all oriental peoples, left it to the central government to look after large scale public works, the basis of agriculture and trade; and, on the other hand, the fact that this agriculture and this trade, spread over the whole country, was only knit together in small centres through the domestic union of agricultural and handicraft labour—these two circumstances had led to the creation from time immemorial of a specific social system, the so-called *village system*, which gave to each of these small centres its independent organisation and its own special life.<sup>1</sup>

These small, stereotyped forms of social organisation are for the most part in dissolution, and are on the point of vanishing, not so much owing to the brutal invasion of British tax-collectors and British soldiery, as rather to the influence of British steam engines and of British free trade. These family communities were based on home industry, with specific inclusion of hand-spinning, hand-weaving and hand-cultivated agriculture, thus making them self-supporting. The British invasion which transplanted the spinner to Lancashire and the weaver to Bengal, or swept away both the Hindu spinner and the Hindu weaver, dissolved this small half-barbarian, half-civilised community, inasmuch as it shattered its economic basis, and so carried through the greatest, and in truth the only, social revolution that Asia has ever experienced.

However heavily it may weigh on human sensibility to see how these innumerable, industrious, patriarchal and peaceful social communities have been disorganised, resolved into their constituent parts, thrown into an abyss of suffering and their separate members robbed at the same time of their ancient culture and of their inherited means of existence, it should nevertheless not be forgotten that these idyllic village communes, harmless as they may appear, have always been the firm basis of oriental despotism, have held the human mind prisoner within the narrowest horizon imaginable, have made it the pliant tool of superstition and the slave of traditional usage and have robbed it of every element of greatness and

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<sup>1</sup>Here follows in the article a description of the ancient self-contained Indian village communities with their rigid but simple division of labour, a description of which is omitted here, for it will be found reproduced in almost identical terms in Karl Marx *Capital*, Volume I. (English translation, G. H. Kerr & Co., 1918, pp. 392-394.)

of historical creative energy. Nor should there be forgotten the barbarian egoism of those who, clinging fast to a miserable scrap of soil, have looked on unmoved at the ruin of whole kingdoms, at the practice of unspeakable cruelties, at the massacre of the entire population of large cities, incapable of perceiving in all this anything beyond a simple phenomenon of Nature, and who have themselves been condemned to such impotence as to be devoured by every assailant who deigned to favour them with his attention. It should not be forgotten that this worthless, immobile, passive, vegetative existence evoked as its reaction on the other side wild aimless and unbounded powers of destruction, which in Hindustan made murder itself a religious observance. It should not be forgotten that these small communities were condemned to caste separation and to slavery, that they abased man to be the mere creature of external circumstances, instead of exalting him to be the ruler of external forces, that they transformed the social condition produced by their own special development into being considered an unalterable natural law, and thereby attained to that crude worship of nature, which in very fact revealed their own worthlessness, where man, the ruler of nature, reverently bowed the knee to Kanuman the ape and Saballa the cow.

It is true that England in setting into motion this social revolution in Hindustan was actuated solely by the lowest interests and proceeded stupidly in its endeavour to bring it about. But this is not the matter in issue. Rather the question is: can mankind fulfil its mission without a fundamental social revolution in Asia? If it cannot, then England, whatever the crimes she may have committed, has in the carrying through of this revolution acted only as the unconscious instrument of history.

## II. FUTURE EFFECTS OF BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

*New York Daily Tribune, August 8, 1853.*

How did it happen that British supremacy was established in India? The far-reaching power of the Great Mogul was broken by the Mogul's viceroys. The power of the viceroys was broken by the Mahrattas. The power of the Mahrattas was

broken by the Afghans. Then, while the fight of all against all was raging, the British burst in, and were able to subdue them all. A country in which not only Mohammedans fought against Hindus, but also race against race and caste against caste, with a society the coherence of which arose from a kind of equilibrium the result of a general mutual aversion and inborn segregation of all its members, was not such a land with such a society predestined to become the booty of conquerors? Even if we knew nothing about the history of Hindustan, would not the cardinal and indisputable fact be sufficient that up to this very moment India is held in subjection to Britain by an Indian army maintained at Indian expense? Hence India could not escape the fate of being conquered, and its whole history, so far as it is anything at all, is a history of the successive conquests of which it has been the object. Indian society in general has no history, at least no known history. What we call its history is solely the history of recurrent invaders, one giving place to the other, who founded their empires on the passive basis of this non-resistant and unchanging society. The question is not, therefore, whether the British had a right to conquer India, but whether we would have preferred to see an India conquered by the Turks, the Persians or the Russians rather than by the British.

England has a double mission to fulfil in India, a destructive and a creative; on the one hand the destruction of the old Asiatic social order, and, on the other hand, the creation of the material conditions for a western type of social order in India.

The Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls, by whom India was successively over-run, were quickly Indianised, since barbarian conquerors, in obedience to an eternal law of history, always succumb to the higher civilisation of their subjects. The British were the first who were superior to the Hindu civilisation, and therefore conquerors inaccessible to its influence. They destroyed it, in that they broke in pieces the Indian community, wiped out the native industries, and levelled to the ground all that was great and exalted in Indian society. The history of British rule in India gives information of little else except destruction. As yet the signs of a re-birth have hardly begun to appear among the ruins. But, still, it has begun.

The political unity of India, which is to-day more consolidated



and extensive than ever it was under the rule of the Great Mogul, forms the first of the conditions for India's re-birth. The unity forced on the country by the British sword will be heightened and furthered by the introduction of the electric telegraph. The native army, organised and drilled by British officers and sergeants, will be the *conditio sine qua non* of Indian self-emancipation, of an India which will have ceased to become the continual prey of every foreign invader. The free press, now penetrating into Asiatic society for the first time, represents a new and powerful lever in reconstruction. The zemindari and ryotwari systems, however abominable they may be in themselves, signify, however, two pronounced forms of private property in the soil, for which Asiatic society is so greatly thirsting. Among the Indians in Calcutta, so reluctantly and cautiously trained up under British supervision, a new class is springing up which exhibits the qualities necessary for governing and which is acquainted with European science. Steam-power has brought India into regular and speedy communication with Europe. It has linked India's chief harbours with those of all the south-eastern ocean, and snatched her out of the position of isolation which was the chief basis for her stagnation. The day is no longer far-distant when, by a combination of railway and steamship, the distance between England and India, measured in time, will be reduced to eight days, and thus the one-time land of fable will be actually annexed to the western world.

The ruling classes in Great Britain have so far been interested in the progress of India only exceptionally, in passing, and from case to case. The aristocracy wanted to conquer her, the plutocracy to plunder her, and the big capitalists to exploit her. Now, however, the page has been turned. The big capitalists have discovered that the conversion of India into a producing country has acquired vital importance for them, and consequently that it is above all necessary to provide India with means for artificial irrigation and for the expansion of internal trade. They intend now to cover the whole of India with a network of railways—and they will do it. The consequences will be immeasurable.

It is a notorious fact that the productive forces of India have been paralysed by the complete lack of means for despatch and exchange of its manifold products. Nowhere more glaringly than



in India is there shown, as the result of lack of means of exchange, manifest social misery in the midst of natural superfluity. It was proved by a committee of the House of Commons in 1848 that, while grain was being sold in Kandesh for six to eight shillings a quarter, in Poona, where the people were dying of hunger in the streets, the cost of grain was 64 to 70 shillings, without it being possible for stocks to be obtained from Kandesh since the clay roads were impassable.

The introduction of railways can easily be made to serve agricultural needs, for in places where earth excavations are necessary for the building of railway embankments, water reservoirs will be made and the water distributed along the various lines. Thereby irrigation, the *conditio sine qua non* of agriculture in the East, will experience a far-going extension, and the recurrent local famines which result from lack of water will be avoided. The general significance of a railway system applied from this point of view becomes obvious as soon as we remember that an irrigated soil, even in districts in the neighbourhood of the Ghats, pays three times as much in taxes, employs ten or twelve times as many men and yields twelve to fifteen times as much profit as the same area without irrigation.

The railways will also bring about a reduction of the strength of the army and of expenses for military purposes. Captain Warren, Commander of Fort St. William, declared before a Select Committee of the House of Commons :—

The possibility of obtaining information from distant parts of the country in as many hours as at present days and even weeks are required, and of despatching instructions together with troops or stores in the quickest possible way, is a factor the importance of which can hardly be over-estimated. The troops could be stationed in more remote and healthier localities than heretofore, whereby considerable loss of human life through sickness could be saved. The amount of stores required in the various depots would be less than before, whereby damage through destructive climatic influences would be avoided. The strength of the army could be decreased to an extent immediately corresponding to its power of execution.

We know that the communal administration and the economic basis of the village communities have been destroyed. Their most evil character, however, *viz.*, the dissolution of society into rigid and separate atoms, has been retained. The isolation of the

villages determined the absence of roads in India, the absence of roads in its turn perpetuated the isolation of the villages. Thus arose communities with a permanently depressed level of living conditions, persisting in a condition of almost complete lack of connections with one another, and devoid of those needs and activities from which alone social progress can spring. Now that the British have broken this inertia and self-limitation of the villages, the railways will evoke an increased need for trade and communications.

I know that the English big capitalists wish to endow India with railways solely in order to obtain cotton and other raw material for their factories at a low price. If, however, machines are once introduced into a country which possesses coal and iron, then it is impossible to prevent such a country from producing them for itself. It is impossible to maintain a railway system in a country of such huge dimensions as India without at the same time developing all those industries which are needed to fill the immediate current requirements of such a railway system. This must draw after it an application of machinery in those branches of industry which are not immediately connected with the railways. Thus the railway system in India will become in fact a forerunner of modern industry. That will be so much more the case since the British authorities themselves credit the Hindus with a special facility in adapting themselves to the requirements of completely new methods of labour, and in acquiring the necessary technical knowledge. A striking proof of this is furnished by the capacity and skill of the native engineers of the Calcutta mint, which has for years made use of steam machinery. The same is true of the Indians working the steam machinery of the coal district of Hurdwar, and in other cases. Even Mr. Campbell, however much he may be under the influences of the prejudices of the East India Company, has to allow that—

the vast mass of the Indian people possess a great industrial capacity, are well suited for the accumulation of capital, and are endowed with notable mathematical powers, capacity for reflection and talent for exact sciences.

“Their intelligence,” he says, “is remarkable.” Modern industry, developing on the basis of the railways, will do away with

the out-lived division of labour on which the caste system rests, and the chief obstacles to Indian progress and Indian power.

All that, however, which the British bourgeoisie will be compelled to bring about will neither free the mass of the people nor essentially improve its social position, which depends not only on the development of productive forces, but also on their appropriation by the people. What the bourgeoisie will do is to create the material pre-conditions for both. But has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever brought about any progress without dragging individuals and whole peoples through blood and dirt, misery and degradation?

The Indians, however, will not reap the fruits of the elements of the new society scattered amongst them by the British bourgeoisie as long as in Great Britain itself the present ruling classes are not displaced by the industrial proletariat, or the Indians themselves become sufficiently strong to shake off the British yoke once for all. In any case, in the more or less near future is to be expected with certainty a re-birth of this great and interesting country, of this noble branch of the human race, which, to use an expression of Prince Saltykov, is even in the lowest classes "*plus fin et plus adroit que les Italiens*," which even in subjection is characterised by a certain calm distinction of bearing, which in spite of its natural forbearance is able to astound the British officers by its courage, whose country was the birthplace of our languages and religions, embodying the type of the ancient Germans in the Jat, and of the ancient Greeks in the Brahmins.

I cannot leave the Indian question without saying a few words in conclusion.

The deep hypocrisy and innate barbarity of bourgeois culture is revealed before our eyes as soon as we turn from our home, where it assumes respectable manners, to the colonies, where it appears in all its nakedness. The bourgeoisie is the protector of property. But where has a revolutionary party ever carried through such an agrarian revolution as in Bengal, Madras and Bombay? Has not the bourgeoisie in India, to employ the phrase of that great robber Lord Clive himself, taken refuge in cruel extortion when simple corruption could no longer keep pace with its rapacity? Has it not, while in Europe it chattered of the inviolable sanctity of the

national debt, in India confiscated the dividends of the Rajahs who had invested their private savings in the securities of the East India Company ? Has it not, while it fought the French revolution under the pretext of the defence of " our holy religion," at the same time forbidden the propaganda of Christianity in India ? Has it not, in order to extract money from the pilgrims streaming to the temples of Orissa and Bengal, made a trade for itself out of the murder and prostitution of the temple of Juggernaut ? This is how appear the men of " property, order, the family and religion " !

The destructive effects of British industry on India, a country as large as Europe and covering 150 million acres, are obvious and terrible. But we should not forget that they represent solely the organic result of the whole system of production, in the form which it has taken at the present time. This production has as its basis the unrestricted rule of capital. The concentration of capital is of essential significance for the existence of capital as an independent power. The destructive effects exerted by this concentration of capital on the markets of the world only discloses in gigantic dimensions the imminent laws of political economy which to-day are in operation in every city in the civilised world. The bourgeois period of history has to create the material basis for a new world : on the one hand, world trade and the means for this trade based on the dependence of nations on one another; on the other hand, the development of human productive forces and the transformation of material production into scientific mastery of natural forces.

Bourgeois industry and bourgeois trade fashion these material pre-conditions for a new world in the same way that geological revolutions fashion the face of the earth. Only when a great social revolution has mastered the work of the bourgeois epoch, the world market and the modern means of production, only then for the first time will human progress cease to resemble that loathsome heathen deity which would only drink nectar from the skulls of its slaughtered victims.

# LOCARNO AND AIX-LA-CHAPELLE

By W. N. EWER

**T**O see a painting clearly one must stand well back from it. Proverbially at close hand one cannot see the wood for the trees. And so it is in politics. The near view of events is often, even generally, singularly incorrect. One is a little bewildered by the detail, a little bemused by the chatter of the moment.

And so this business of the Locarno Treaties will, I think, become a little more understandable if one moves a little away from it—say a hundred leagues and a hundred years in space and time. Forward we cannot go, except in imagination ; so let us try backwards. I think we may find Charlemagne's old capital of Aachen in the autumn of 1818 a curiously useful spot and time for our purpose. For at that time and in that place there was also a Conference of the Powers in being : the Conference of Aix-la-Chapelle, as English history books, preferring the French name for a German town, usually call it. A pleasant Conference—"I have never seen a prettier " wrote one of the protagonists to his wife.

The first point we shall note is how curiously like is the Conference of Aix-la-Chapelle, seen at close hand, to the Conference of Locarno.

A great war had been finished a few years before. A great Imperial power had been beaten by a Grand Alliance. She had been condemned to pay to the victors reparations beyond her capacity. Armies of Occupation were in her Rhine territories. She was still, though she had changed her form of government, a half-pariah state, suspected of hankering after the fallen régime, of harbouring projects of revenge.

How to obtain reparations, how to withdraw the armies of occupation, how to assure permanence for the treaty settlement which had ended the war, how to bring the outcast nation back into the European comity, how above all to obtain " the best