

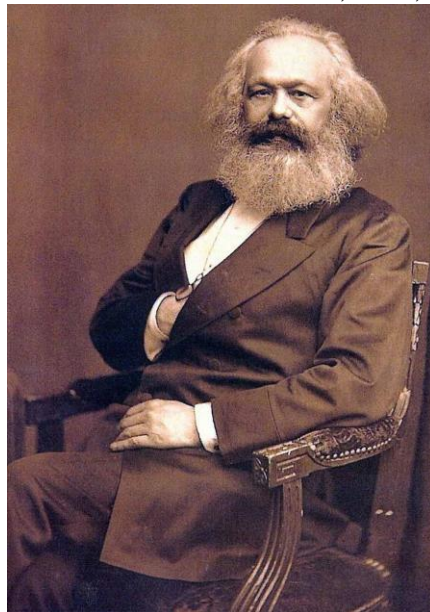
Can We Create a Classless Society? Should We?

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There's class warfare, all right. But it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning. – Warren Buffet, New York Times Magazine, November 2006.

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth. – the Preamble to the Constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World union, June, 1905.



Karl Marx

Many social experiments have tried to construct classless societies. Marxists and anarchists of all stripes; revolutionaries from just about everywhere; religious groups; various Utopian communities, communes and cooperatives; unions and worker's movements; even the socialist/Jewish kibbutzim in Israel have attempted to construct societies that abolish class structures, make everyone equal, and do away with poverty in the name of social justice. Most of those experiments have failed.

Despite humanity's repeated efforts to create classless societies, even when revolutions overturn and embroil entire nations to accomplish that elusive goal, ultimately the gradual re-emergence of the wealthy classes and the poor classes usually occurs. Historically, this has happened so many times that it has become a familiar pattern, a consistent and reliable development in most every culture. A large number of historians and sociologists believe that human beings will always form a natural hierarchy in any social structure they inhabit.

From a Baha'i perspective, social class of some type will continue to exist in a future state of human society—but we will build and maintain that society on the basis of moderation, justice and an equitable way of providing the necessities of life to everyone, no matter what their class:

Baha'u'llah's solution of the social question provides for new laws, but the different social classes are preserved. An artisan remains an artisan; a merchant, a merchant; a banker, a banker; a ruler, a ruler; the different degrees must persist, so that each can render service to the community. Nevertheless, every one has the right to a happy, comfortable life. Work is to be provided for all and there will be no needy ones to be seen in the streets. The vocational labor adjustment provided by Baha'u'llah precludes there being people too poor to have the necessities of life on the one hand, nor the idle rich on the other. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 83.

The Baha'i teachings emphasize that regardless of their economic or social class, every able person must work; and conversely, every wealthy person has a spiritual duty to help the poor:

They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor, for great is the honor destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience. By My life! There is no honor, except what God may please to bestow, that can compare to this honor. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves.

Please God, the poor may exert themselves and strive to earn the means of livelihood. This is a duty which, in this most great Revelation, hath been prescribed unto every one, and is accounted in the sight of God as a goodly deed. Whoso observeth this duty, the help of the invisible One shall most certainly aid him. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 202-203.

You could probably summarize the Baha'i spiritual solution to the economic problems of the world in a few words: no idle wealth, no abject poverty. We must find equitable ways to moderate the extreme riches and terrible, grinding poverty that now exist in the world. To do

that, the Baha'i teachings highly recommend organizing together and working towards that ideal, and even say that "No deed is greater before God than helping the poor."

What could be better before God than thinking of the poor? For the poor are beloved by our heavenly Father. When His Holiness Christ came upon the earth those who believed in him and followed him were the poor and lowly, showing the poor were near to God. When a rich man believes and follows the Manifestation of God it is a proof that his wealth is not an obstacle and does not prevent him from attaining the pathway of salvation. After he has been tested and tried it will be seen whether his possessions are a hindrance in his religious life. But the poor are especially beloved of God. Their lives are full of difficulties, their trials continual, their hopes are in God alone. Therefore you must assist the poor as much as possible, even by sacrifice of yourself. No deed of man is greater before God than helping the poor. Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of them. When physically destitute, spiritual thoughts are more likely. Poverty is stimulus toward God. Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty.

The greatest means for prevention is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. One of Baha'u'llah's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer merchant and laborer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent; each in his function according to ability; but justness of opportunity for all.
– Abdu'l-Baha, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 35.