

THE
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WORKS
OF
MAHATMA
GANDHI

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COLLECTED
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OF
MAHATMA
GANDHI

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No more today.

Love

TYRANT

From the original: C.W. 3630. Courtesy: Amrit Kaur. Also G.N. 6439

183. *DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS*¹

[Before June 25, 1938]

Gandhiji explained to them how almost since the beginning of his public life in South Africa he had been closely associated with labour. When he settled down to practise at the bar in South Africa he decided to give the whole of his spare time to work for the Indian settlers there, and the first man who came to him for assistance was an indentured labourer. This case at once put him in touch with labour. The labourers brought to him their troubles with their employers and also their personal and domestic worries, and that gave him a glimpse into their lives as nothing else could have done. Non-violence was the first thing he placed before them, and non-violence was the only thing that they had been pledged to observe when, at a critical stage in the satyagraha campaign, nearly 60,000 labourers downed their tools and faced imprisonment. They went through untold hardships, suffering, starvation, and some even died, but they adhered to non-violence until the end. Their condition was particularly difficult and in a sense worse than the workers' here. They were not free, but indentured, and they had to fight not only for justice from their employers but for the abolition of the opprobrious £ 3 tax which threatened them with extinction. But non-violence helped them to pull through. His work in Champaran and Ahmedabad was recent history. Regarding Champaran he said that the condition of the peasants there was almost the same as the indentured labourers', and that they had failed in their agitation for nearly half a century for there was no cohesive power of non-violence to hold them together. There had been several riots and their condition had grown worse every year. But the first taste of non-violence breathed new life into them, and at the end of a remarkably brief struggle they were emancipated.

Without that necessary discipline in non-violence, they would have internecine strife and would never be ready to develop the strength that is needed to enable them to realize the power that they possess. Organization, technical skill and everything else would follow the acceptance of the fundamental principle of non-

¹ Extracted from Mahadev Desai's "Notes". A group of university graduates after undergoing training in the organization of labour had come to see Gandhiji.

violence. Class collaboration would also follow as a matter of course. They are strong in numbers and yet they feel so dependent, so very much at the mercy of their employers. That is because they do not know their own inherent strength. Otherwise what is there to prevent them from pooling their own resources and dictating terms as employers do now. The thing that they have to realize is that labour is as much capital as metal. That realization can come only through acceptance of non-violence.

But after that realization has come and they have come to their own, non-violence does not become superfluous. If they were to bid good-bye to it, they would be as bad as capitalists and turn exploiters themselves. The realization of their strength combined with adherence to non-violence would enable them to co-operate with capital and turn it to proper use. Then they will not regard it as a conflicting interest, they will not regard the mill and the machinery as belonging to the exploiting agents and grinding them down, but as their own instruments of production, and will therefore protect them as well as they would their own property. They will not steal time and turn out less work, but will put in the most they can. In fact, capital and labour will be mutual trustees and both will be trustees of consumers. The trusteeship theory is not unilateral and does not in the least imply superiority of the trustee. It is, as I have shown, a perfectly mutual affair, and each believes that his own interest is best safeguarded by safeguarding the interest of the other. 'May you propitiate the gods and may the gods propitiate you, and may you reach the highest good by this mutual propitiation,' says the *Bhagavad Gita*. There is no separate species called gods in the universe, but all who have the power of production and will work for the community using that power are gods—labourers no less than the capitalists.

Harijan, 25-6-1938

184. LETTER TO D. B. KALELKAR

[Before June 25, 1938]¹

CHI. KAKA,

I want that book about marriage rites. Send two or three copies. I hope to marry Vijaya to Manubhai shortly. Nanabhai will most probably attend and he himself will perform the rites.

¹ *Vide* "Letter to Mahadev Desai", p. 138.