

Class, Race and Corporate Power

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Reflections on Class, Race and Power*

Article 11

2013

The Relevance of Marxist Academics

Raju Das
York University, rajudas@yorku.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/classracecorporatepower>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Das, Raju (2013) "The Relevance of Marxist Academics," *Class, Race and Corporate Power*. Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 11.

DOI: 10.25148/CRCP.1.1.16092150

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/classracecorporatepower/vol1/iss1/11>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts, Sciences & Education at FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Class, Race and Corporate Power* by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dcc@fiu.edu.

The Relevance of Marxist Academics

Abstract

This commentary examines the relationship between a Marxist scholar and the institutional and societal environment of the university. The focus is on how a Marxist academic navigates the social, economic and political aspects of the university while attempting to maintain a commitment to class analysis and Marxism as political practice.

Keywords

Marxism, academia, capitalism, class

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Marxist academics' anti-Marxist milieu

A Marxist is someone who is committed to dialectical and materialist analysis of society and nature with the purpose of contributing to the creation of a better world, a world which is ecologically sustainable and which is without class exploitation and social oppression. A Marxist will want to develop and defend Marxist ideas and practices, where possible. In doing so, she/he is caught between two questions, however, when she is placed inside academia. First, should Marxists simply accept the current level of class consciousness and adjust their views according to this? Second, should they educate people and help them lift their current level of consciousness upward?

For a start, a Marxist academic finds herself/himself in an intellectually hostile academic world, the university in a bourgeois society. It is increasingly the case that a Marxist academic meets with people who take a dominantly cultural-ist or discursive approach to nature and to all three major areas of society (culture, politics, economics). Everything is 'culturalized'. Everything is more or less a moment within the cultural or imaginative moment. All social relations are expressed in the form of the omnipresent and omnipotent individual or group identity (perception of who one is). Class is merely or more or less an identity. So is gender, race and caste. A Marxist academic may meet a few people (they are not too many, really) who may talk about the economic aspect of society, without understanding much about this. These people, generally, take a non-rigorous approach to the economic, which is defined as an arena of exchange processes, i.e. the processes of buying and selling (e.g. labour market; market for commodities). This shallow, partial and a-historical view of the economic may be combined with an equally shallow view of power (and culture). Not only are the constituents (the economic, power) superficially conceptualized, but also there is no adequate view of how to combine them. There is a lot more emphasis on how things (e.g. rivers or poverty, or women's lives) are seen and culturally experienced by people and less emphasis on what they actually *are* independently of how they are thought/written about, at a given point in time and over time.

If a document or a classification system says x is y, then x is y, even if x is not y, so there is little basis for saying x is not y. There is little basis for saying that something is real and that something isn't real. There is often little opportunity for presenting a Marxist view about a theme. Non-Marxist colleagues often say: 'that is just a Marxist view'. Just because something is from a Marxist view, it cannot be true or it cannot be taken seriously. In large parts of academia, a Marxist finds people who are very skeptical about the need for a scientific approach to the study of society and nature, i.e. the need for reasoned and coherent argument backed up by empirical evidence, which is not tampered with by the scientists or anyone else. In some corners of the academia, there may be some criticism of neoliberalism – which, like globalization, is supposed to explain all problems, but one finds little else in terms of criticisms of society's economic and social realities. That the capitalist world is imperialist and war-prone as it is driven by accumulation for its sake is often forgotten in much academic discussion (at least in the imperialist world). Even if one hears about inequality, the culprit is merely neoliberalism. And much of the inequality talk is about inequality between men and women or racial inequality (more or less, outside of the sphere of life of working class women and of working class ethnic minorities). If the world has problems, according to an average academic, these problems are such that they can be fixed by: individual agency, including a change in the way things are

spoken/written about, social economy or civil society, some form of government agency, and indeed some form of business philanthropy or some combination of two or more of these.

For an academic, society's problems are those that can be fixed in ways which do not necessarily demand/require transcending it. So identification/interpretation of society's problems happens from the standpoint of *stasis*, from the standpoint of not-transcending the current world. This is directly opposite to the Marxist view: a Marxist studies the world and seeks to radically change it. A Marxist studies the world from the standpoint of radically changing it, and seeks to radically change the world by using his/her tools of analysis of the root problems of society's problems. A Marxist is radical because she goes to the root of the matter, and the root is precisely this: class relations, bound up with a certain level of crisis-ridden development of productive forces. A Marxist often hears from non-Marxist colleagues that the Marxist views are political. This implies that Marxists are merely politicians of sorts, that their intellectual views are tools for promoting Marxist politics. But non-Marxists are not seen as such. They are normal intellectuals. Therefore, their views are more 'scientific' or are based on more authentic analyses, apparently not guided by political objectives. But then in what ways are the analysis of problems from the standpoint of their specific manner of resolution (via individual agency, union activity, government, business philanthropy, NGOs, self-help groups, etc.) less political?

Why is the view that seeks to preserve the current society less political than the view that seeks to radically change it? Or, why is wanting to see small changes within the society not as political as wanting to see big changes? Why is it that being an ideological ally of capital, consciously or not, less political than being a conscious radical critic of it? If Marxist analysis is political, Marxists happily and publicly plead guilty. They *say* they are political (in the sense that they seek to see a new society without the rule of capital). Yet, they try to come up with an objective analysis of the current society as best as they can. If workers' real wage has increased in a place, Marxists will say that it has, and this is being objective. They will then explain why this has happened, and what are the limits to this, temporally (increase can only be short-term) and/or socially (only some groups may benefit) and/or spatially (workers in some areas only may benefit). The fact that Marxists are political will not prevent them from making this objective analysis. If being political is ultimately about class power, if being political is ultimately about the power of one class to preserve its control over another class, then Marxists and non-Marxists are *both* political. It is just that they are political from opposed sides of the divide. This is the case no matter how radical and progressive non-Marxists, including posts of various types (so-called post-Marxists being a part of the team) appear to be, both in language and in content. I invite the non-Marxist academics to prove that they are not political. I invite them to unambiguously and regularly announce, including before the students they claim to be teaching, where they stand on the most important question: the question of private property, and especially, the private property based on the employment of other people's labor (Marx, 1977). In particular, what is the role of capitalism in the creation of humanity's social, economic and ecological problems, and what must be done in their view about this? If they abstract from the role of capitalism, on what intellectual basis can they do so?

Why are non-Marxist ideas prevalent and how is Marxism marginalized in academia?

As a Marxist, I do think that both Marxists and non-Marxists are political. As a Marxist, I do think that both have the right to be political. Then the question is: between two equal rights, which right wins? In terms of intellectual interpretation of major world problems, the Marxist approach is generally miles ahead of any other competing approach on a topic concerning the capitalist world, the contemporary world in which we live and work. So from the standpoint of pure intellectual assessment, non-Marxist approaches are inferior, relative to Marxist approaches. Then the next question is: why are they in the market of ideas? Why do people believe in them? There are many reasons. One reason is the same as what non-Marxists try to preserve: the rule of capital, i.e. the material, political and discursive power of capital. Without the system-supporting effects of non-Marxist ideas, without these ideas being in sync with capital's and its state's economic, political and cultural interests, non-Marxist ideas will hardly have the kind of popularity and acceptance that they do. These ideas are accepted generally because they reflect and support the ideas of various fractions of the property-owning class or they are about facets of life which are less to do with the foundation of capitalism itself and are therefore non-threatening. If these ideas continue to be accepted, it has little to do with their inherent explanatory power but it has more to do with what they do for the rule of capital (including support from ideological state apparatuses as well as direct support from capital). (Note that I am not saying that ideas can be judged true or false *merely* on the basis of whether they support the interest of this group or that group in society; ideas can be independently verified in relation to objective conditions reflected in the form of empirical evidence. The idea that capitalism is incompatible with unfree labor can be shown to be inadequate, both on the basis of reasoned argument and on the basis of empirical evidence, as Tom Brass has shown. Yet, the idea such as this seems to have been written about and accepted by many at least partly because these ideas are in sync with the rule of capital).

I have found to my dismay that any consistent rigorous Marxist criticisms of, say, discourse-determinism (pomo-ism) or indeed explicitly pro-capitalist ideas are considered unacceptable. Some Marxist criticisms of people's previously-learned ideas are even considered injurious to their emotional welfare, in the same way that perhaps when encouraged by a therapist to be aware of our unconscious thought and difficult memories, people at times feel upset (the comparison may not be entirely adequate, I accept). Imagine also a religious fanatic saying that a criticism of religious fundamentalism is unacceptable. Marxists' criticisms, instead of being intellectually counter-argued, are used to launch criticisms-by-indirect means. A Marxist will not be told that one does not like the criticisms of postmodernism or bourgeois feminism because of this or that intellectual reason, but that the Marxists' pedagogical style or some such thing -- which is not intrinsically connected to the Marxist intellectual arguments as such -- is not good.

Apparently, a classroom in the graduate school is supposed to be a market place of ideas, where people can just make comments on the required academic readings as they wish, and the teacher is just supposed to listen (and probably 'guide' the discussion a little). After all, what right does the teacher have to teach? In fact, in an academic world where many people believe that all ideas are more or less of equal worth, my starting point in this article (the two questions mentioned above) may indeed be seen as pretentious. My humble reply is: if what they believe is true, why are some people students and why are some teachers? Is there such a thing called expert knowledge? One wonders where one goes when one has a heart attack: to a heart specialist or to someone who may have read some popular health books on heart?

What is to be done by Marxist academics?

These and various other types of intellectual views influence areas of work outside of intellectual production. These areas include: what kind of student or instructor to recruit, what kind of event to organize, and so on. In other words, Marxists in academia operate in a more or less hostile world. The degree of hostility may vary from one place to another. The question is, what does a Marxist do? And, additionally, what does a Marxist, who may happen to be in a decision-making position, do? I may suggest the following.

1. Whether in the classroom or in the administrative meetings, one may keep one's cards on the table, as far as possible. One must clearly tell people one's view about a topic. One must clearly say what one's view of what is to be done about an issue is. A Marxist's view in the everyday world is broadly colored by a Marxist's democratic view as well as her class perspective (the balance between the two views may vary from context to context). I strongly believe that Marxists are, and must be, consistently democratic, which reflects the fact that Marxists are fighting for a world in which the vast majority of society, the workers, exercise democratic control over society. The role of secrecy and 'indirect talk' (beating around the bush; fence sitting), should be minimized.

A Marxist must show in practice that she/he is democratic, must make sure, if in position of power, that different ideas, including those she/he may not endorse, get a chance to be discussed.

2. The extent to which one pushes for one's own view, especially with respect to departmental management issues (concerning course selection, etc.), is determined by the level of current support (among colleagues and students), i.e. by the current level of both democratic consciousness and class-related consciousness. One should, ordinarily, not push one's favourite agenda, informed by one's Marxist views on unwilling people.

3. When necessary, one should consider engaging in a Leninist retreat, quietly waiting for a more opportune moment for the acceptance of one's ideas. Lenin's theory of compromise ('On compromises') is useful here. What Lenin (1917) said to proletarians and proletarian leaders applies to Marxists who are involved in class struggle in the realm of ideas. 'compromises are often unavoidably forced upon [Marxists] ... by circumstances...The task of a truly [Marxist intellectual] is not to declare that it is impossible to renounce all compromises, but to be able, through all compromises, when they are unavoidable, to remain true to its [or his/her] principles, to its class, to its revolutionary purpose, to its task of paving the way for revolution and educating the mass of the people for victory in the revolution'.ⁱ

What happens in academia is not hugely going to determine what is happening in the realm of revolutionary struggles for socialism anyway. Nor is it the case that academia has a monopoly over the production of Marxist ideas; indeed, if anything, academia distorts and corrupts Marxism. One has to carefully weigh two things: how much worry one subjects oneself to within academia, trying to change it a bit, as opposed to how much time one can spend on non-academic projects aimed at workers' education and mobilization.

4. Capitalism is compatible with a certain level of democratic functioning, including of the university, which has been won by ordinary people through struggle. The size of the space of democracy will shrink and expand depending on: a. the level of threat to the capitalist system, including ideological threat from the university and similar areas, and b. on the level of popular struggle for democracy. Yet, where there is a democratic space, it should be made use of. And in the university, there *is* some democratic space. Some of this is protected by reasonably progressive non-Marxist academics who believe in academic freedom and who ally themselves, consciously or not, with the enlightened and progressive sections of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Similarly, there are scientists in the university, and as Lenin (1922) argued, Marxists should be friends with them and collaborate with them to promote scientific attitudes towards the study of society and nature. Marxists in humanities and social sciences and allied with scientists must fight against the spirit of modern obscurantism (=various forms of idealism/pomo-ism). There are indeed scientists such as Sokal and Dawkins who have fought against this tendency.

Where possible, Marxists, who tend to be generally research-active, and therefore receive some (however limited) admiration even from their critics for their theoretical and historical work, should strive for institutionalization of critical materialist thought, where possible, including creation of courses on, and holding academic events to promote, materialist-dialectical scientific thinking about society and nature; formally establishing diplomas, certificates and degrees in specific areas of this thought (e.g. political economy, Marxist-feminism, Marxist anti-racism, Marxist studies on indigenous peoples, radical social movements against capitalism and imperialism).

5. A lot of research that happens in academia takes the form of R-M-R: more or less superficial **R**esearch-**M**oney from grant agencies-more of more or less superficial **R**esearch. Indeed, how much grant-money one has on the cv – and not one's power to critique, to theorize, to corroborate theory with evidence -- is a big indicator of one's intellectual power. Teachers are a role model here. Students do what their teachers preach and practice. Many times, one must get research money to be able to conduct research (e.g. to buy a piece of equipment; for international travel; for research assistance, etc.). But getting research money, instead of being a means, has often become an end in itself.

Marxist academics must resist this grant-money mania by showing in practice that without huge amounts of money one can produce useful knowledge, by arguing that getting money is not a necessary or sufficient indicator of the quality of intellectual work. In an alliance with non-Marxists natural and biological scientists, Marxist must make demands on the (university) system to provide resources for research at a *collective* level. Collective provision of research funds would negate the situation where researchers have to compete for research money or have to cut costs, foregoing opportunities for research. I constantly hear from my colleagues studying the environment that there is less and less money for science. But at the same time, Marxists must not be a barrier to people applying for grant money; they must show a democratic tolerance towards those who wish to obtain research monies. It is their academic freedom to do the kind of research that grant money-making allows and encourages. Besides, within limits, grant-research can allow one to do interesting work. A Marxist, if in a position of power, should encourage people to apply for grant money when the research project is *driven* by ideas and not merely by

the desire to get money. But then how does one know the difference? Sometimes one can and sometimes one cannot. With respect to one's students' work, a Marxist can discourage the development of grant-mania among her/his students. If grant money has to be applied for, one can make sure that the research proposal is driven by serious ideas, which have much explanatory power and potential political relevance. Marxist supervisors can promote graduate grant-research which is based on rigorous theory and which can potentially contribute to theory, within limits. Anyone who has applied for grants knows that system-threatening research is much less likely to be funded than research which is not so or less so, other things constant.

6. Given the way academia works and the wider society works, it is easy to be angry and disconnected/alienated. One may, however, consider the idea that if one is not a polite, civilized, collegial human being, who takes care not to harm anyone at a personal level, one perhaps cannot be a good Marxist either. In many ways, one is first a human being and then a critic of class-society (e.g. Marxist) or whatever. Research and teaching are social practices with ethical dimensions, and this Marxists cannot forget. One should try one's best not to hurt anyone at a personal level, even if one disagrees with the person. But here is the contradiction: This comes from my own belief that to be a Marxist is the highest form of being a human being (I know I will be accused of the highest form of reductionism here).

Being a Marxist means *developing* Marxism in theory and practice, winning newer audience for it, including among working class women, small-scale commodity-producing indigenous groups, low-paid working masses from the less developed, imperialized world, and so on. Here it is important to be compassionate, kind and persuasive. Being a Marxist also means *defending* Marxism. Sometimes in the process of doing so, strong words have to be uttered (without any desire to hurt anyone personally) against the people who hold ideas that directly or otherwise undermine Marxism. This might hurt people. In other words, being a Marxist may mean that one has to 'hurt' other human beings.

How can one be a Marxist and smile at a *human* being who is saying that capitalism is, more or less, a fine society (or who, for all practical purposes, just ignores the fact that we live in a capitalist society), in spite of endless sufferings that ordinary human beings are unnecessarily subjected to, and that all we need to do is to make small changes, with respect to gender here and race/caste there, and so on? It is this very idea -- that all is well and that all we can aspire to is perhaps a slightly modified system -- this old wine of liberalism that is served in the new bottle of critical thought of various colors and smells. These sort of ideas, which are widely accepted, are implemented in practice by the bearers of these ideas: in terms of what academic event is organized, what courses get taught, who gets appointed as a teacher, and indeed, whether Marxist courses are offered, what Marxist content means, and so on.

The problem is not just that these people are a barrier to the removal of the greatest obstacle to human happiness, which is the class system. The problem is also the fact that they will never achieve what they apparently want to achieve (in theory or practice): gender-equality, race-equality and significant, long-term concessions for the poor of the world. Why? Because it is capitalism which is the barrier to the achievement of gender and racial equality, and it is capitalism which has now become the barrier to poor people even getting *small* concessions.

Even with respect to people in academia who call themselves Marxists (with a certain degree of honesty), it is very clear that not everyone will share the idea about the primacy of class and of revolutionary socialism equally, the idea that defines what it is to be a Marxist. Within a circle, various points are located at varying distances from the single center. As an academic, one has to live with this fact in the interest of the center as well as the circle, in some sense. But it is not always easy, if one has intellectual and political integrity.

When the distance from the center increases beyond a point, a qualitative change happens: one is no longer a Marxist. Period. But many people believe they are Marxists. Others believe that these people are Marxists. So non-Marxists, or people who have relatively little to do with Marxism, become Marxists; they are transformed into Marxists. They are Marxists the same way as people who are bald have a few counts of hair. So, Marxists are produced discursively. Often people pretend to be a Marxist, using a word such as value or labor from Marxism, completely emptying it of its real original content, and they do this for the sake of career (publish in 'Marxist' journals) and for prestige (yes, Marxism is still associated with rigor and not just with humanness and a commitment to social justice). Often academics resort to bourgeois product differentiation to sell themselves as Marxists of sorts: these people call Marxists orthodox Marxists, meaning that they are also Marxists, but Marxists of other kind/s (including so-called post-Marxists). They practice Marxism which is innovative, which talks about things that are not talked about, they are less rigid and more flexible, and so on. They see art and pleasure in all forms of sufferings. They see resistance in every act of suffering and they see *that* as the way out of suffering.

To sell things one does many things including preparing glossy packages. We live in times of market dominance. These smart people fail to understand that using this or that term or even concept from Marxism or lifting this or that quote from Karl Marx or whoever or making this mild criticism of this or that aspect of society does not make one Marxist any more than a few counts of hair make a bald person hairy-headed. This story is also repeated in the world of publishing: some commercial publishers associate themselves with a Marxist journal if it is making some money or if it has the potential to do so in the future. It is the same publishers who would not tolerate the academic freedom of the editor of a Marxist journal.

A Marxist encounters dishonest colleagues and publishers all the time. And it is not always easy to talk sweet words. But one's goal should be to do precisely that: to remain civil. One is in academia, the battle field of ideas. Not the real battle field, and not in the political arena where different political movements are fighting for their views and practical proposals for change. The realm of ideas has some autonomy with respect to the latter.

7. Many people play cheap identity politics in academia and intellectual circles. A Marxist encounters them all the time.

A Marxist aims to live in a society which is free from both exploitation and social oppression based on gender, race and similar other relations. But this is not the same as playing identity politics. A Marxist should make clear that if two people are broadly equal in terms of being able to do a certain thing (e.g. teaching a course on political economy or poverty), one would have *no problem at all* suggesting that the candidate from traditionally under-represented group (e.g. a

woman, someone from an ethnic minority) may be recruited. A Marxist could perhaps even argue that as long as the intellectual quality of the person from the under-represented group is not 'significantly' less than that of another, the former may be recruited. Marxists are absolutely for the protection of interests of socially oppressed and under-represented groups; indeed, the protection of their rights is a part of the democratic agenda, and Marxists are consistently democratic. But they will not use the weapon of talk about gender, race and similar other relations to divert attention from the fundamental questions of property relations and the need to expropriate the expropriators through class-conscious disciplined political movements of workers and small-scale, self-employed commodity producers.

But the idea that we should look for a woman scholar or a racial minority scholar in the first place, that we should choose a candidate mainly on the basis of, for example, gender, and that the content of the persons' work is secondary, this idea is identity politics in academia. Between a pro-capitalist woman or a pro-capitalist scholar of an ethnic minority on the one hand and a theoretically rigorous anti-capitalist male scholar, and other things constant, a Marxist must choose the latter and make the appropriate arguments for such a view. It is important to note that often middle class academics belonging to a privileged ethnic group use, for example, gender to preserve its advantage. I do not see too many female academics from ethnic minority backgrounds. The talk about gender equality has done little and can do little to stop this from happening and neither can it do anything to encourage participation of academics and students from working class, lower-income backgrounds. Besides, the obsession with gender- and race-based inequality in academia hardly raises the issue of the other aspect of diversity: where are the people with views which are fearlessly and rigorously critical of capitalism? Why is it that in an entire university department, you will hardly find one, if at all, Marxist? Will being a Marxist ever give one an equity-seeking minority status? One wonders why not?

Identity politics in academia is based on the idea that it is legitimate to discuss women and similar issues outside of -- and in abstraction from -- the framework that assigns primacy to class and exploitation of labor. Recently, I asked colleagues, sympathetic to Marxism, to consider this simple fact at a meeting: what happened to race when black policemen killed black striking workers in South Africa? People kept quiet. Understandably. The ubiquitous, petty- or left-bourgeois, academic obsession with race and gender of non-working class people and with 'distrust of meta narratives' type meta-narrative -- including these ideas that are dressed up in, or painted with, the language of Marxism -- are a huge obstacle to Marxist theory and practice. A large number of people in academia who call themselves Marxists merely wear a veneer of Marxism; their Marxism is no more than skin deep or a 'word deep'. They cannot be allies of Marxists at all, in theory or practice. Where possible, Marxists must oppose all this, including through their involvement in campus- and off-campus, political activities and direct educative interventions with students outside of the formal classroom context. Marxists are a different kind of teacher. They must absolutely and genuinely be friends of their students, being open to their criticisms. Their students must be an inalienable part of their lives, socially and intellectually. They must be their students' worst critics and strongest admirers, and must be able to make self-sacrifices in terms of time and energy.

Conclusion

Universities must serve the ruling classes. They always have. Universities are also contested terrains. This is especially so during moments of crisis (Targ, 2009), which peels off several layers of the structure, making it possible for millions of ordinary people to better see the workings of capitalism and their effects on daily lives. During moments of crisis, the system is challenged more than usual. Universities are a part of the system. They experience the crisis of the overall system. The university becomes a battle ground of ideas which contradict each other. Ideas which directly represent ruling class interests, ideas which seek to reproduce the system in slightly modified manner, and the ideas that seek to overthrow the system are part of overlapping discussions. Such discussions will be allowed as long as the threat to the university's primary function is not compromised. At some point in time, and in various ways, radical ideas will be excluded. The threat comes from those who directly and publicly represent business and state interests. Often, the threat also comes from those who appear to be critical of the system but who are effectively cushions for, and supporters of, the system: modern day liberals dressed up in the language of critical thought that is apparently for equality based on gender, race and similar other relations. They are ideologues of left factions of the bourgeoisie and of the 'upper middle class'. Much of their thinking also happens to be anti-scientific as well. The attitude of modern day liberals supports the fact that there is a connection between materialist-scientific approach and socialist thinking, i.e. the latter requires the former, and that if one is not scientific, one will not be socialistic. Much of this trend is blindly insensitive to the workings of capitalism. What do Marxist academics do then?

Marxists must uphold principles of democracy and collegiality. They must maintain a consistently critical attitude to 'identity thinking and politics', one that is based on social oppression in abstraction from class issues and that divides the working class and preserves capitalism. With their students, Marxist teachers must demand an education system which promotes the spirit of scientific understanding of nature and society and respects academic freedom. They must demand an education system which freely trains artists, poets and writers, many of whom will correctly and fearlessly register the sufferings, dreams, desires and struggles of the ordinary working men, women and children, and the classes and groups which hold them in chains. They must demand an education system that is driven by a curiosity to know why things happen, so we can know what might happen, under certain plausible conditions, so we can take action now to ensure things happen to serve our material, political and cultural interests. They must make a demand on society to provide high quality education for free. The demand must be for a system which is without the control of big business, which freely appropriates the fruits of research conducted in the academic labs and which benefits from students who are being trained to work in factories and offices for a meager wage without most of them questioning either what they are doing at work or the nature of society itself they are living in.

Marxist teachers and their students must connect to working masses outside of academia to make these and other similar demands, including demands for decent school education without which university education will suffer. They must make demands for secure, well-paid and enjoyable employment for school teachers, health-care workers (e.g. nurses and doctors), transportation workers and community library workers without whom schools and universities cannot function properly, and so on. Demands on the system must be made which grow out of actual human needs. Demands are not based on the perception of what the system says it can deliver. Any

social system which fails to satisfy the needs of the vast majority, when all the resources necessary are available, must not be allowed to succeed in continuing to exist.

Raju J Das teaches at York University, Toronto.

(<http://people.laps.yorku.ca/people.nsf/researcherprofile?readform&shortname=rajudas>)

Email: rajudas@yorku.ca

References

Marx, K. 1977. *Capital volume 1*, Vintage, New York.

Lenin, V 1922. 'On the Significance of Militant Materialism',
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/mar/12.htm>

Lenin, V. 1917. 'On compromises',
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/03.htm>

Tag, H. 2009. 'Higher Education Today: Theory and Practice',
<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/targ100809.html>

¹See also: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch08.htm>