

11. *Assistants in Champaran.*—Rajindro [Prasad<sup>1</sup>, M.A., M.L., a Chapra man, practising in High Court has come to Champaran, for six months to assist in enquiry; most able young pleader in Bihar; two junior High Court Vakils, Sarbo Saran (Chapra)<sup>2</sup> and Ramanugrah Narain, M.A. B.L.<sup>3</sup>, taken there with Rajindro Prashad. Brajkishore Prashad came also with a lieutenant of his from Darbhanga, called Dharani Dhar. Ramanavami Pershad also from Muzaffarpur, and others joining them. Mr. Andrews, of Fiji fame, came and gone.

12. Complaints being recorded in detail, and certificates noted at first that they were recorded in presence of Criminal Investigation Department Officers. So Criminal Investigation Officers left. Gandhi proposes to stay for three months at any rate himself: the enquiry to go on for six months; to be carried on later in Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Saran. Gandhi will collect materials, appeal to Government and public, and formulate documents. *Raiyats* of other districts also flocking to him.

13. Meeting was to be held on evening of 28th April at Bankipore to help patriots assembled at Motihari. Telegrams appearing regularly in press of other provinces. Question now being made an All-India question. Polak has informed Dwarka Nath that condition in South Africa not so bad as in Champaran.

[No. 50.]

*Letter, dated Padamkair, 28 April, 1917, from Herbert Cox, Hony. Secretary, Bihar Planters' Association (Champaran), to L.F. Morshead, Commissioner, Tirhut Division<sup>4</sup>.*

DEAR SIR,

I have been directed by the members of the Bihar Planters' Association, resident in Champaran, to protest most strongly against Mr. Gandhi being allowed to tour the district at the present time with the ostensible object of making enquiries into the relation existing between landlords and tenants.

2. In his communications to the Press, Mr. Gandhi has stated that he has come to the district in response to pressing invitation to help the *raiya*s who urge that they are being unfairly treated

<sup>1</sup>. Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

<sup>2</sup>. Mistake for late B. Sambhu Saran, husband of Smt. Sundari Devi.

<sup>3</sup>. Mistake for Babu Anugrah Narayan Sinha, later, Finance Minister of Bihar (1937—39 & 1946—1957).

<sup>4</sup>. Political (Special) Department file No. 1571 of 1917.

by indigo planters, and with the object of rendering national and humanitarian service, also, that he has been promised the assistance of officials, and intends to place his final conclusions before the Government and the country.

3. If these statements are correct we very much regret that as the persons most concerned, we received no communication from the Government of the province on the subject and we would welcome a clear statement as to their attitude in the matter as we find it difficult to believe that they would authorise a private person, whose published statements show a strong bias to one side of the question, to institute an enquiry into matters that have been engaging the attention of the Settlement officials for the last three years, and which are actually awaiting final decision in the Appellate, Settlement and Civil Courts.

4. Although ostensibly an enquiry, this mission of Mr. Gandhi is developing into an agitation to stir up the *raiyats* and agricultural labourers against planters and landlords...

Whatever Mr. Gandhi's real aims may be, there is unfortunately no question as to the objects of the band of disloyal and seditious agitators who are in his train. The wildest rumours are being industriously disseminated throughout the district. That Mr. Gandhi has been specially appointed by the Viceroy, in supersession of the local officials to redress all grievances which *raiyats* are suffering at the hands of planters, that the British are handing over the ruling of the country to Indians of whom Mr. Gandhi is the representative, that none need work for a planter any more. The result of this agitation is already only too apparent in the spirit of unrest which has begun to manifest itself in those parts of the district visited by Mr. Gandhi and his satellites. This is only the beginning, but is a beginning on precisely the same lines as the Bettiah disturbances of a few years ago<sup>1</sup>, with the additional weight of Mr. Gandhi's personality and successful defiance of local authority in support of it...

5. It has been generally agreed, in all parts of the Empire, to avoid, as far as possible, the raising of contentious issues during the present war. This policy has been followed by Indians generally except those actively disloyal in all parts of the world even in the South African Colonies, the scene of Mr. Gandhi's chief activities.

It was presumably the anticipation that Mr. Gandhi's presence might be antagonistic to it that led the Government of British East Africa to refuse him permission to land there shortly after the

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<sup>1</sup>. of 1909.

beginning of the war, and the same gentleman's public utterances and his action in this district tend to show that this policy does not command his support. The unrest which has already begun to show itself of the agitation following in his train, cannot fail to be rendered the more serious in view of the present critical stage of the war.

Apart from any general considerations, it would appear advisable on these grounds alone that his activities should be put a stop to.

6. In strongly urging these objections to Mr. Gandhi's presence at this time, we have no desire to impugn the honesty of that gentleman's own motives, though we cannot say the same with regard to his followers. But we would like to point out that his career up-to-date shows him as an able agitator and organizer of his countrymen in defence of what he believes to be their rights, rather than as a disinterested seeker after the truth, as which he now apparently wishes to pose. Also, that he can hardly be expected to possess the impartial point of view necessary to any genuine enquiry into a very complicated subject, and one which has already given rise to such strong feeling.

7. We wish to make it perfectly clear that we have no objection whatever to any impartial enquiry into the relations between ourselves and our tenants....

The question of the most urgent importance at the present moment is, however, the danger of serious trouble owing to the activities of Mr. Gandhi and his satellites, and, should it be the opinion of the Government that the most politic method of avoiding any further agitation in this direction is to arrange to hold an impartial enquiry into these questions, before which Mr. Gandhi could bring forward any points which he might wish to raise, this course would be welcomed by our community as the only available means of bringing the present intolerable and dangerous situation to an end.

8. Mr. Jameson and I have been deputed to ask His Honour the Lieutenant Governor to give us an opportunity to put the facts of the case before him, and it is our intention to go to Ranchi with that object on Friday next, May 4th.

We should be very grateful if you could ask His Honour to grant us an interview on that evening or on Saturday, the 5th. We would also like to suggest that Mr. Gandhi might be asked to meet us in Ranchi, in conjunction with some representative of that Government.

Yours faithfully,  
HERBERT COX.