

not matter for present purposes who burnt down the Dhokraha Cutcherry or whether it was accidental or the act was committed by *raiyats* deliberately or by Factory servants. That is a matter which the local authorities will deal with on receipt of the police enquiries, but the fact remains that there is a danger of such occurrences arising out of Mr. Gandhi's enquiries, as experience in similar cases and the past has shown, and that there is a general apprehension abroad of widespread movement to repudiate private contracts for carts, labour, etc., in North Bihar. That is a position which Government will not tolerate. We are well aware that there are many grievances to be remedied and we have taken and are taking steps to remedy them. Government are the best judges of how this should be done. We did not authorize and were sorry for the proceedings under section 144, Criminal Procedure Code, taken against Mr. Gandhi in the first instance and we have gone out of our way to interfere with him as little as possible since. But he is now going too far. We have decided that a Committee with all interests represented on it, is, in fairness to both sides, the best means of doing justice in this exceedingly difficult and complicated matter. Mr. Gandhi can help us by accepting the offer that he should sit on the Committee. But the present one-sided enquiry, which we believe is doing an enormous amount of harm and will only increase the difficulties of the Committee, has got to stop. Mr. Gandhi should be given clearly to understand that before he leaves Ranchi.

Some day Mr. Gandhi will see the report of Mr. Gourlay¹ an officer whose sympathy with the *raiyats* cannot be questioned. Mr. Gourlay made a long and careful enquiry in the villages of the Factories with which we are now concerned. Mr. Gandhi will find that there is nothing in Mr. Gourlay's report to justify the wholesale condemnation of the men and the system and that there is another side to the question.

E.V.L (EVINGE).

3-6-1917.

[No. 114.]

*Lieutenant-Governor Sir E.A. Gait's note of his interview with M. K. Gandhi on 4 June, 1917.*²

I had a long discussion with Mr. Gandhi this afternoon but learnt nothing new regarding the reasons for his settling on Champaran or the general course of his inquiries. I note briefly below some of the conclusions at which he says he has arrived.

¹. Vide Introduction, pp 16—18.

². Political (Special) Department file No. 1571 of 1917.

In the first place Mr. Gandhi contends that the *tinkathia* system has no legal foundation anywhere. He knows that the system was recognized by Government after the indigo disturbances of half a century ago, and that in 1877 the newly-formed Planters' Association made a rule that rents were not to be enhanced in holdings where three *kathas* in a *bigha* were assessed to indigo¹. He also admits that, so far as he knows, rents have never been enhanced since that date, and that as a rule they range from Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 per *bigha*. He holds, however, that in spite of that, the arrangement is an unfair one, and cannot possibly have become an incident of the tenancy. Mr. Gandhi holds also that all payments of *tawan* and all *sharabeshi* agreements are invalid. He says that it is proved that in some cases pressure was exercised to induce the tenants to execute these agreements; and he claims that it is a fair inference that pressure was exercised in all cases. He says that the *sharabeshi* agreements are immoral; and that, when indigo was no longer profitable, the planters ought to have asked the *raiyats* to release them from their *sattas* to grow indigo, instead of forcing the *raiyats* to execute *sharabeshi* agreements or exacting *tawan*. Mr. Gandhi explains the fact that the *raiyats* continued in some cases to grow indigo rather than pay higher rents, by saying that they anticipated some such agitation, as is now proceeding, which would relieve them once and for all from the necessity of growing indigo without any compensatory payment. In some cases Mr. Gandhi says that attempts have been made of late to enforce the cultivation of indigo by *raiyats* who have paid *tawan* or *sharabeshi* in order to escape from so doing. He also says that in some cases indigo is grown on homestead lands contrary to the agreements made by the Planters' Association after Mr. Gourlay's inquiry.

Mr. Gandhi says that he has satisfied himself that forced labour and impressment of carts is very common, and that planters usually pay their coolies only five to eight pice a day, against the normal Association rate of ten pice. He says the *raiyats* are absolutely cowed, and never dare to cross a planter. The people, according to him, are poor, abject and terror-stricken, and cannot defend themselves against the planters. Charges of assault are common, and he has recorded statements in two cases in which a planter himself (Mr. Irwin) is alleged to have been the assailant. Mr. Gandhi complained that Mr. Irwin left his letters inquiring into the matter unanswered.

I asked Mr. Gandhi at this stage how he come to think he had a right to call the planters to account, and asked him if he would not feel annoyed with me if I were to intervene in a dispute

¹. See Introduction.

between him and his servant. He replied that he would certainly but that he regarded the planters as holding a public position and, therefore, as being bound to recognize the position of other public men.

I asked Mr. Gandhi for his version of the Dhokraha incident. He said that when the *raiyats* complained regarding the high rates paid for *zirat*, Mr. Holttum told him that he could make more out of the *zirat* if he kept it *khas*, and he would not mind the *raiyats* resigning. He added, however, that, in that case, they would again have to cultivate indigo. At the time only one man said he would give up his *zirat* but after Mr. Holttum had left Mr. Gandhi again explained matters to the *raiyats*, and told them that if they wished to give up their *zirat* holdings they were at liberty to do so. He mentioned that Mr. Holttum had said that in that case they would have to cultivate indigo again, but added that he, Mr. Gandhi, did not agree, and that there would be no such liability. Thereupon a large number of resignations of the *zirat* land were filed which Mr. Gandhi sent on to Mr. Holttum.

Mr. Gandhi denied that the two fires [which have taken place were in any way connected with his mission. One of them took place in a locality far from where he had been; the other occurred two days after he had left, and there is, he says, grave reason for suspicion against persons other than the *raiyats*. Mr. Gandhi admits that in the tract where he has been inquiring, the anti-planter spirit has grown in strength, in the sense that the *raiyats* feel their grievances more acutely and have a stronger desire to be released from them. Mr. Gandhi says that he endeavours to keep this spirit within limits. He has told the *raiyats* that they cannot expect to get rid of the planters, but only to escape from the compulsion which has been exercised in the past. He says that in some cases the *raiyats* wanted to uproot the indigo now growing, but he told them not to do so. He also said that certain *raiyats* in Singha Chapra (Kuria Factory) wanted to raise their charge from Rs. 16 to Rs. 60 per *bigha*. Mr. Gandhi told them not to do so but to keep to their contracts.

I asked Mr. Gandhi how he reconciled his statement that the *raiyats* were ready to uproot indigo with his statement that they were afraid of the planters. He said the reason was that at the present time they are in an exhilarated condition owing to his presence, and are willing to do things which they otherwise would not dare to do.

I asked Mr. Gandhi what he proposed to do now that he had such a mass of information on record. He replied that if he is left free, he contemplates recording statements as long as *raiyats* come in to make them. Then, if he can get the planters to

agree, he proposes to send volunteers to as many villages as possible to act as friends and protectors of the *raiya*s and to keep Mr. Gandhi informed of local conditions. He hopes that the presence of the volunteers will prevent the planters' *amla* from practising extortion and put heart into the *raiya*s, so that they will not feel bound to submit to the planters coercion. He does not wish to stop the *raiya*s from working for the planters, but only to protect them from being compelled to work at an inadequate wage. The volunteers will also educate the people and teach them sanitation which according to Mr. Gandhi, is more neglected in Champaran than in any place he has ever seen.

I asked him what were his views regarding Government action. He said, if he were asked to advise, he would suggest that letters be written to planters laying that Government intend to put a stop to all illegal actions, such as forced labour and payment of *abwab* of all kinds. He would say that the collection of *hunda* must cease at once, and that all *sharabeshi* agreements must be suspended pending inquiry.

E.A.G (AIT).
4-6-1917.

[No. 115.]

*Letter, dated Ranchi, 4 June, 1917, from M.K. Gandhi to Maharaja Bahadur Sir Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga, Member, Executive Council, Bihar and Orissa.*¹

DEAR MAHARAJA SAHEB BAHADUR,

In accordance with your suggestion, I reduce to writing my views about the proposed inquiry.

In my opinion simultaneously with the appointment of a Committee of enquiry (or arbitration, as suggested herein below), there should be declaration regarding the various points referred to in my letter to the Government dated the 13th May last.² *Tinkathia* in every shape and form, hand-notes being balances of *tawan* and *hundas* as in the *Dhokraha kothi*, should be declared as abolished or cancelled.

I have no desire, if I can help it, to lead evidence as to the coercive methods adopted by the planters to bend the *raiya*s to their will except in so far as it may be necessary regarding

¹. Political (Special) Department file No. 1571 of 1917.

². Vide No. 72 *ante*.