

Perhaps it is but fair to the planters to say that Mr. Still<sup>1</sup> has of his own motion invited me to visit his *dehat* and remain there as long as I like and that Mr. Cox has written to me saying that he is arranging a meeting with some leading planters, and concludes "you may be sure that we wish to assist you in your enquiry". This perhaps is in conflict with your statement, "By the planters he (I) is regarded with great suspicion as their natural enemy."

I wish to serve my countrymen and the planters through the Government where their assistance is necessary.

Yours truly,  
M. K. GANDHI.

[No. 52.]

*Letter, dated Bettiah, 29 April, 1917, from W. H. Lewis, Subdivisional Officer, Bettiah, to W. B. Heycock, District Magistrate<sup>2</sup>.*

MY DEAR MR. HEYCOCK,

I wish to put down in writing some conclusions I have arrived at in connection with the mission of enquiry which Mr. Gandhi is at present conducting in this Subdivision.

2. Mr. Gandhi arrived last Sunday and called on me on the morning of Monday. He explained to me the object of his investigation which is to secure redress for certain definite wrongs to which he claims the *raiya*s are now subject. I gathered that he is already in possession of a large mass of information on local problems. Mr. Gandhi impressed on me that he wished his investigation to be impartial.

3. On Wednesday afternoon I rode out to Lankaria, one of the Byrea villages, where he was then collecting information. I sat with him for a time while his enquiries were being conducted. Each witness is subjected to a severe cross-questioning, as Mr. Gandhi is determined to get his facts on an incontrovertible basis. Mr. Gandhi is accompanied by Babu Braj Kishore who is working on similar lines. He also records deposition in writing. Every point raised is entered into with great detail. I have received your instructions that Mr. Gandhi is to receive every facility. Am I to understand that this instruction extends to Babu Braj Kishore? Babu Braj Kishore has not yet called to see me, nor has he asked me to grant him an interview. I met him for the first time in Lankaria.

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<sup>1</sup>. C. Still, Esq., C.I.E., of Sathi Concern.

<sup>2</sup>. Political (Special) Department File No. 1571 of 1917.

4. Mr. Gandhi had called on Mr. Gale at Byrea, and commented to me on what he called Mr. Gale's uncompromising attitude<sup>1</sup> though he was, of course, politely received: I think this could hardly be otherwise, as Mr. Gale or any other planter can ask by what authority Mr. Gandhi acts, and why they should be compelled to answer his questions, or render themselves liable to misconstruction by refusing to comply.

5. I have since questioned Mr. Gale on the points raised by Mr. Gandhi after his Lankaria enquiries. Mr. Gandhi claimed that *tawan* was still being taken, as when cash was not forthcoming the *raiyat* gave a hand-note, on which interest is charged. The money was then to be paid by instalments. Many of these hand-notes have not expired, and instalments *plus* interest are still being paid. Mr. Gale admits this, but states that if the payment were not made in full according to hand-note, then the *raiyat* should return his *satta*, and this he believes the *raiyat* would be unwilling to do. With regard to cart *sattas*, Mr. Gale admits that a number of his cart *sattas* rest on an uneconomic basis. Mr. Gandhi also referred to *kankut* of part of the *raiyat's* crop. He is referring, I think, to the oats *lagan* taken in this and some other factories. The oats are grown under *satta* conditions in the case of a few holdings. The oats are purchased by the factory at considerably lower than market rates. This appears to me a violation of the terms of the lease that only indigo should be grown on *satta* conditions, and seems to contravene the directions of Government issued after Mr. Gourlay's report. Mr. Gale can, however, perhaps explain the position more fully.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gandhi went very deeply into labour conditions and criticised the low rates paid by the factory, particularly to children, who, he says, are required to work at night during *mahai* under unhealthy conditions. He also enquired into the *tinkathia* system of indigo cultivation.

6. Since then Mr. Gandhi has visited Mr. Amman's *dehat* to investigate the question of *beshi salami*. He found the charge of Rs. 3 per bigha very frankly admitted by Mr. Amman, but says that this *salami* is further supplemented by other minor charges. In all cases, the *dasturi* taken by factory servants is engaging Mr. Gandhi's close attention. Mr. Gandhi returned this morning, and has spent several hours with me this afternoon.

7. I will now refer more generally to the position created by the presence of Mr. Gandhi and his large band of supporters. To

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<sup>1</sup>. The following extract from Mr. Gale's letter to Mr. Whitty, dated 26 April, 1917, is significant in this context:—

“..By the way Gandhi wrote last night to me to furnish him in Bettiah with a copy of my indigo and cane *sattas*: I do not propose doing anything of the kind.”

<sup>2</sup>. *Vide* Introduction.

the *raiyats* he has come as a redeemer, and he is already acclaimed as the liberator of Champaran. This has had a considerable effect on the three constituents of society, the *raiyats*, the planters, and the local administration.

8. In a sense he has superseded the local authority. Mr. Gandhi claims that local administration has been very largely dominated by planter influence. To make this point, he is reviewing the treatment of local problems by the administration, and by enquiring publicly into the manner in which the Courts and the local administration, have conducted themselves, he is regarded as something higher than the local authority. To quote an instance. At my first interview with Mr. Gandhi he called my attention to an enquiry that was being conducted into the possession of guns by four Sheikhs of Tappa Deoraj on the basis of a letter from a factory manager. It would be easy in this instance to reply to Mr. Gandhi's criticism. There is no need for me to do so now, and the enquiry is under your instructions. It is to the sequel that I wish to draw attention to. The Sheikhs know that Mr. Gandhi had mentioned this subject to me. The next thing I heard from an entirely different source as a rumour current in a *bazar* eleven miles from Bettiah was that Mr. Gandhi had seen me on the subject of the guns, and had taken steps to have them returned. I asked Mr. Gandhi this afternoon what he had actually done. He admitted meeting the Sheikhs after seeing me, and admitted telling them that I was enquiring, and they would probably get their guns back. This was improper interference by Mr. Gandhi in administrative matters : even if he chose to question an enquiry based on a letter of the type described, the return of the guns does not concern him, and after the statements which he admits making, he has only himself to blame, if a rumour spreads that he has directed me to return the guns. I quote this as a small instance to illustrate a feeling which undoubtedly exists.

9. By the planters Mr. Gandhi is very naturally regarded as their natural enemy. The affairs of the great majority of factories, even those which we consider well-managed, will not under present circumstances stand the severe critical analysis on all points of economic detail to which they are now being subjected, and Mr. Gandhi will have in his hands material based on indisputable facts to form the basis of a very formidable indictment, though I was this afternoon rather less impressed by the present amount of Mr. Gandhi's real knowledge of local problems, than I had previously been. Further, the planters feel that what is practically a public enquiry is being conducted without the safeguards that usually attend such an enquiry. Whenever a state of affairs requires investigation by a public commission, it is usual to select a number of members representing different views to sit together, with the intention that all shades of opinion may be represented. In this

instance a peripatetic enquiry on the lines of a public commission, with a full record of evidence is being held under the guidance of Mr. Gandhi. He is an ardent social reformer, and, as such, his views tend in a single predetermined direction. Moreover, he is acting without official authority. I was present last evening at a meeting held by the planters of the district, and I understood from them that they were prepared for the appointment of public commission. This is a matter, however, on which they are themselves addressing Government.

10. It is with the effect of Mr. Gandhi's presence on the *raiyats* that I wish specially to deal, and it is this aspect of the situation that I have very fully discussed this afternoon with Mr. Gandhi. We may look on Mr. Gandhi as an idealist, a fanatic or a revolutionary according to our particular opinions. But to the *raiyats* he is their liberator, and they credit him with extraordinary powers. He moves about in the villages, asking them to lay their grievances before him, and he is daily transfiguring the imagination of masses of ignorant men with visions of an early millenium. I put the danger of this before Mr. Gandhi, and he assured me that his utterances are so carefully guarded, that they could not be construed as an incitement to revolt. I am willing to believe Mr. Gandhi, whose sincerity is, I think, above suspicion; but he cannot control the tongues of all his followers, many of whom he would disclaim; nor can he prevent many statements being attributed to him by mischievous inventors. Wild rumours are already afloat, and are believed. It is, for instance, said that Mr. Gandhi has undertaken to break every factory before the middle of May.

11. I impressed on Mr. Gandhi that, whatever his own motives, he will not be able to prevent this becoming an anti-European movement, and it will certainly be given this complexion by the many biased politicians who have given Mr. Gandhi monetary and other assistance for the conduct of his campaign. The Europeans, whose system is being called in question, live isolated lives in lonely bungalows. Some of them are far from help. Further, to impress on Mr. Gandhi the seriousness of the situation he was creating, and the inflammable nature of material he was dealing with, I briefly sketched for his information the rapid spread of disturbances during the Bettiah troubles of 1909 and the anti-European character it was at once given by the *raiyats* who took vows at the village *asthan* never to obey the word of a European. I further quoted the example of Mr. Bloomfield's murder,<sup>1</sup> as showing the length to which *raiyats* will go, once excitement and passion take possession of them; though murder may not have been their original intention, Mr. Bloomfield was beaten down, and every bone in his body

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<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Introduction.

broken. I further quoted the recent case in which Mr. Kemp was attacked and assaulted, and expressed the opinion, that had not Mr. Kemp retained his seat in the saddle, he would have lost his life. To bring in an instance in which a planter was not concerned, I quoted a recent instance from the Bettiah thana, in which two parties quarrelled over the possession of a small piece of land as a result of which one party attacked an individual on the other side, and beat him to death, though these men were neighbours who had lived peacefully together all their lives. I further quoted fully to Mr. Gandhi the methods of intimidation used by the *raiya*s during January, February and March of this year, when numerous petitions against *salami* in the Ramnager Estate were being put in.

12. In view then of past experience of the rapidity with which a dangerous situation develops, I informed Mr. Gandhi that, if rumours continued to spread as fast as they are now doing, I would be forced to report that I was unable to take responsibility for the maintenance of order or the safeguarding of lives in the subdivision. I then asked Mr. Gandhi if he would accept responsibility should outbreaks occur. He said he could not, but that he did not think that any such outbreaks were to be expected. In this point I differ with him, as the extension of Mr. Gandhi's tours will so unsettle local conditions, that I am sure a very anxious situation would have to be faced.

13. Mr. Gandhi has always met me with much frankness, and he asks for the co-operation of Government. Both he and Government are committed to lines of reform. The question is one of degree and he may want to push for reform further than Government is prepared to go. I do not know Government's attitude towards Mr. Gandhi, beyond the instructions I have received to give him every facility. The actual situation created is, however, so serious that I think the facts should immediately be presented to Government by an officer with local knowledge. I asked Mr. Gandhi if he would be prepared to proceed to Ranchi to place his plans before Government, accompanied by a local officer and Mr. Gandhi says that he would be willing to go. I think a lot might be done in this way to clear up the situation. At present I cannot speak with authority of Government's proposals for dealing with local problems. If Mr. Gandhi is informed of these, he may incline to think that his local mission may do more harm than good in precipitating a position which will be difficult to control, will endanger the lives of Europeans and will raise controversial and racial questions at a time when the Empire is heavily engaged in war. That Champaran will have to face publicity is probably inevitable. That a body of planters should state themselves ready to ask for a public commission of enquiry is proof of the seriousness with which everyone views the situation created. Mr. Gandhi is insistent on the immediate redress of what he calls "admitted

and continuing wrongs" and would not wish them deferred to the ultimate findings of commission (were one to be appointed); but it should not be difficult to reach a point of agreement.

14. On matters which require redress, Mr. Gandhi is prepared to go to any length to secure it, and would willingly immolate himself in that cause: nor will he disengage from the district until very great changes are effected; but he is, I am sure, amenable to reason in his treatment of these difficult problems.

15. Will you kindly put my suggestion before Government if you agree with it? Mr. Gandhi is further prepared for the time being to discontinue touring through the village, if you so require it, and would, if necessary, remain in the towns of Bettiah and Motihari.

Yours sincerely,

W.H. LEWIS.

The letter was shown to Mr. Gandhi before being set off, as I wanted him to know what I was writing. I append a copy of his reply.<sup>1</sup>

W.H. LEWIS.

[No. 53.]

*Letter, dated Motihari, 30 April, 1917, from W. B. Heycock, District Magistrate, Champaran, to L. F. Morshead, Commissioner, Tirhut Division.*<sup>2</sup>

MY DEAR MORSHEAD,

I enclose a letter<sup>3</sup> from Lewis which he has brought to me to-day. I saw Mr. Cox and Mr. Jameson on behalf of the planters yesterday.

2. The situation is briefly this. Mr. Gandhi is making an exhaustive enquiry and is accumulating a great deal of evidence. Mr. Gandhi's object is to apply remedial measures at once. The view of the planters is that this enquiry is irresponsible, directed by one man who has associated with himself, others whom they do not trust, that Mr. Gandhi himself represents one shade of opinion only and that his report, however, well-intentioned, must inevitably be one-sided and biased. They argue that, if there is to be an enquiry...the enquiry should in fairness to themselves be a public

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<sup>1</sup> *Vide* No. 51 *ante*.

<sup>2</sup> Political (Special) Department file No. 1571 of 1917.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* No. 52 *ante*.