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MAHATMA  
GANDHI

XIV  
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GANDHI - XIV



236. MESSAGE TO SATYAGRAHI AGRICULTURISTS<sup>1</sup>

NADIAD,  
April 17, 1918

You did well to listen to Mr. Pratt attentively and courageously. That is the right way for satyagrahis. We have had to disobey the orders of the Government about revenue, but we should not fail in the courtesy due to Government officers. We want freedom from fear and slavery, but have no desire to forget our manners. Rude, of course, we can never be. In satyagraha, one should always show due courtesy.

The Commissioner pointed out the rights as also the duties of agriculturists and his advice in regard to both was worthy enough, but the gentleman failed to say that every human being has one fundamental right and obligation. A man owes it as a duty to refuse to do anything out of fear and, therefore, when anyone holds out a threat in order to force him to do something, he has a right to resist. By virtue of this right, the people of Kheda are at present respectfully disobeying the Government's order. We believe that the crops this year have been less than four annas and that, accordingly, the collection of Government dues should be suspended. If, therefore, we pay the assessment which ought to have been suspended, we shall be doing so only out of fear that our movable property or our lands might be confiscated. If we give way to this fear, we shall become incapable of any manly effort. About eighty per cent of the farmers have paid up the dues out of this fear and, therefore, it is for the remaining twenty per cent to redcem the honour of all. Anyone who has lost his manliness cannot even show true loyalty. The difference between animals and man lies only in the latter's manliness. This is a fight for asserting our manliness.

If the orders of the Revenue Department or any other Government orders are not revised despite petitions, it is not the spirit of the British Constitution that they must be obeyed meekly. There is no such political doctrine. It is the birth-right and the duty of the people to disobey orders which, on mature consideration, they

<sup>1</sup> Gandhiji dealt with Commissioner Pratt's speech in his letter to the Press dated April 15. According to Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji issued this as a pamphlet to elaborate the points he had made in his speech at Nadiad on April 12.

regard as unjust or oppressive. The rule which obtains in the affairs of a family is equally applicable to the relations of a Government and its subjects and a violation of this rule leads to a conflict between the two : the subjects turn disloyal in secret and the Government ceases to trust anyone and becomes suspicious. In disobeying an order of the Government, one thing must be remembered. We cannot claim with certainty that the order in question is unjust; though we may think it so, it may in fact be just. Therefore, as in private dealings, so a difference between a Government and its subjects should be settled through a *panch*. This is what our ancient kings used to do. The British Government always does so. Such a *panch* is called a 'commission' or 'committee' and in order to save the prestige of the Government the recommendations of the *panch* are not made enforceable through a court but are left to the discretion of the former. The ultimate result, though, is the same as in arbitration of the usual kind. Government cannot be carried on without taking into account public opinion. What should be done, then, if the Government refuses to appoint a committee or commission? A people amongst whom brute force is the sole arbiter resorts to violence and seeks justice with arms. My own experience is that this method is futile. I believe also that the scriptures of all religions have denounced this manner of obtaining justice through violence and we certainly do not employ it in our domestic affairs. The straightforward course is to disobey the order and submit patiently and without anger to the consequent suffering. This will serve many purposes. *If it turns out that we were in the wrong, the suffering we may have gone through would be justified; if we are right, the other party, that is, the Government, cannot remain unmoved and ultimately it will have no option but to do justice. This is vouched for by the scriptures; they assert truth to be ever victorious; and time and again we find it is.* The people of Kheda have come forward to suffer in this manner for the sake of truth, of dharma.

Lest we should become weak, we have bound ourselves by a pledge. No people can ever rise without doing this. *A pledge means unshakable resolution. The undecided man is swept from this side to that like a rudderless boat, and finally destroyed.* The Commissioner says that the pledge itself was improper and taken without thought. That it was not improper, we saw earlier, inasmuch as we have the right to disobey what we believe to be an unjust order; and that it was not taken thoughtlessly, everyone who took it knows. The course of the sun may alter, but this pledge, just and taken after full deliberation, shall not be abandoned.

I am sorry that Mr. Pratt has misrepresented the facts in his reference to the mill-hands' strike in Ahmedabad and has violated the dictates of courtesy, justice, propriety and friendship. I hope that he has done so inadvertently. If any people in this world have honoured their pledge, the mill-workers of Ahmedabad have. They had always maintained that they would be prepared to accept any wage that the arbitrators fixed. It was because, at the time of the strike, the mill-owners repudiated this principle that the mill-hands demanded thirty-five per cent. Even afterwards, they did not refuse arbitration. They secured thirty-five per cent for the first day and so kept the letter of the pledge. To decide what they should get afterwards, an arbitrator was appointed and the workers agreed to accept whatever he awarded. Pending the award, the wages were fixed at between twenty per cent as offered by the mill-owners and thirty-five per cent as demanded by the workers. Even for this intervening period, adjustments were to be made subsequently in accordance with the arbitrators' award. Thus the spirit of the pledge was kept. However that may be, the mill-hands certainly did not deliberately abandon their pledge, as alleged by Mr. Pratt. He is free to believe that they did; he is his own master. What is material is how the matter appeared to the workers, and this has been misrepresented by Mr. Pratt. He was present when the terms of the agreement were being explained to the mill-hands. It was shown to them how the pledge could be considered to have been kept and the agreement was readily welcomed by the workers. The gentleman was a witness to all this. Speaking on the agreement, he said :

I am happy that the two parties have arrived at a settlement. So long as you seek and follow Mr. Gandhi's advice, I am sure, you will succeed in improving your lot and securing justice. You must bear it in mind that Mr. Gandhi and the ladies and gentlemen who helped him have suffered a great deal for you, have put themselves to trouble and shown their love for you.

With what little intelligence I have, I fail to understand how, despite this, he talks of the pledge having been given the go-by.

The Commissioner uttered many threats and even said that he would carry them out. That means that he will confiscate the lands of all those who have taken this pledge and will even debar their heirs from owning lands in Kheda district.

This is a very fearful, cruel and heartless threat. I believe it issues from intense anger. When the anger has subsided, he will

feel sorry for having uttered such a cruel threat. He holds the relationship between the Government and the people to be the same as between parents and children. There is no instance in the whole history of the world of parents having disinherited their children for having resisted them in a non-violent manner. The pledge you have taken may be a mistaken one—that is not inconceivable—but there is not even a trace of discourtesy or insolence or defiance in it. It is still inconceivable to me how punishment of this serious nature could be meted out for taking a pledge in a more or less religious spirit for one's own uplift. India cannot tolerate such punishment nor will the British statesmen ever uphold it. The British public would be horrified at it. If such fearful injustice should be perpetrated in the British Empire, I can live in it only as an outlaw. But I have far greater faith in British statesmanship than the Commissioner has. And I will repeat, what I said to you before, that I consider it impossible that you should lose your lands for anything done with such pure motives as yours. Nevertheless, we too must be ready to lose our lands. On the one hand, there is your pledge and, on the other, there is your property. All that property—both movable and immovable—is as nothing compared to your pledge. Your honouring the pledge will be a far more valuable legacy for your posterity than property worth lakhs of rupees. This is a way by following which the whole of India can raise itself and I am sure you will never abandon it. I pray to God that He may give you the strength to keep the pledge.

[From Gujarati]

*Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol. IV