

THE
COLLECTED
WORKS
OF
MAHATMA
GANDHI

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THE PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

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GANDHI

XIV
(1917-1918)

GANDHI - XIV



176. AHMEDABAD MILL-HANDS' STRIKE

[*March 16, 1918*]¹

LEAFLET No. 15

It is necessary to understand the motive and significance of Gandhiji's vow to fast. The first thing to remember is that this is not intended to influence the employers. If the fast were conceived in that spirit, it would harm our struggle and bring us dishonour. We want justice from the employers, not pity for us. If there is to be any pity, let it be for the workers. We believe that it is but the employers' duty to have pity for the workers. But we shall be ridiculed if we accept 35 per cent granted out of pity for Gandhiji. Workers cannot accept it on that basis. If Gandhiji exploited his relations with the employers or the people in general in this manner, he would be misusing his position and would lose his good name. What connection could there possibly be between Gandhiji's fast and the issue of workers' wages? Even if fifty persons resolve to starve themselves to death on the employers' premises, how can the employers, for that reason, give the workers a 35 per cent increase if they have no right to it? If this becomes a common practice for securing rights, it would be impossible to carry on the affairs of society. Employers cannot and need not pay attention to this fast of Gandhiji, though it is impossible that Gandhiji's action will have no effect on them.

We shall be sorry to the extent the employers are influenced by this action. But, at the same time, we cannot sacrifice other far-reaching results that the fast may possibly bring about. Let us examine the purpose for which the fast has been undertaken. Gandhiji saw that the oath was losing its force with the workers. Some of them were ready to break their pledge out of fear of what they thought would be starvation. It is intolerable that ten thousand men should give up their oath. A man becomes weak by not keeping a vow and ultimately loses his dignity as man. It is, therefore, our duty to do our utmost to help the workers to keep their oath. Gandhiji felt that, if he fasted, he would show through this how much he himself valued a pledge. Moreover,

¹ This leaflet appears to have been issued on the day following the fast. On the next day, i.e., March 17, a leaflet was issued by Shankarlal Parikh and a settlement was reached in the morning of March 18.

the workers talked of starvation. 'Starve but keep your oath' was Gandhiji's message to them. He at any rate must live up to it. That he could do only if he himself was prepared to die fasting. Besides, workers said they would not do manual labour, but said, all the same, they stood in need of financial help. This seemed a terrible thing. If the workers took up such an attitude, there would be utter chaos in the country. There was only one way in which Gandhiji could effectively teach the people to submit to the hardships of physical labour and this was that he himself should suffer. He did manual work, of course, but that was not enough. A fast, he thought, would serve many purposes, and so commenced one. He would break it only when the workers got 35 per cent or if they simply repudiated their pledge. The result was as expected. Those who were present when he took the vow saw this well enough. The workers were roused; they started manual labour and were saved from betraying what was for them a matter of religion.

The workers have now realized that they will secure justice at the hands of the employers only if they remain firm in their oath. Gandhiji's fast has buoyed them up. But they must rely on their own strength to fight. They alone can save themselves.

[From Gujarati]

Ek Dharmayuddha

177. LETTER TO GOVERNOR OF BOMBAY

[Before March 17, 1918]

I hope that on the basis of facts ascertained by me and my friends, and having regard to the hardships caused by the epidemic and plague and enhanced cost of living, either the recovery of land revenue would be postponed or an inquiry by an independent board would be made, such as the one I had originally asked for. But if this last request of mine is ignored and properties are confiscated or sold, or land forfeited, I shall be compelled to advise the peasants openly not to pay up land revenue.¹

¹ Officials had coerced agriculturists saying that the crop yield was adequate to pay the revenue assessment. Gandhiji protested against this coercion. Commissioner Pratt repudiated the opinion expressed by Gandhiji and his associates, and insisted that the right course was for the farmers to pay up their dues. This was the background against which Gandhiji wrote to the Governor.