

Second Letter to Lord Irwin (1930)

by [Mohandas K. Gandhi](#)

SOURCE: *Wikisource*

May 4, 1930 letter to Viceroy, Lord Irwin, announcing plans for raid of Dharasana Salt Works

Dear Friend,

I must Commence the March.

God willing, it is my intention...to set out for Dharsana and reach there with my companions, ...and demand possession of the Salt Works. The public have been told that Dharsana is private property. This is mere camouflage. It is effectively under Government control as the Viceroy's house. Not a pinch of salt can be removed without the previous sanction of the authorities.

It is possible for you to prevent this raid, as it has been playfully and mischievously called in three ways:—

by removing the salt tax;

by arresting me and my party unless the country can as I hope it will, replace everyone taken away;

by sheer goondaism unless every head broken is replaced as I hope it will.

It is not without hesitation that the step has been decided upon. I had hoped that the Government would fight the civil resisters in a civilised manner. I could have had nothing to say if, in dealing with the civil resisters, the Government had satisfied itself with applying the ordinary processes of law. Instead, whilst the known leaders have been dealt with more or less according to the legal formality, the rank and file has been often savagely and in some cases even indecently assaulted. Had these been isolated cases, they might have been overlooked. But accounts have come to me from Bengal, Behar Utkal, U. P. Delhi and Bombay confirming the experiences of Gujrat of which I have ample evidence at my disposal. In Karachi, Peshawar and Madras the firing would appear to have been unprovoked and unnecessary. Bones have been broken, private parts have been squeezed for the purpose of making volunteers give up, to the Government valueless, to the volunteers precious, salt. At Muthra an assistant magistrate is said to have snatched the National Flag from a ten year old boy. The crowd demanding restoration of the Flag thus illegally seized is reported to have been mercilessly beaten back. That the Flag was subsequently restored betrayed a guilty conscience. In Bengal there seem to have been only a few prosecutions and assaults about salt, but unthinkable cruelties are said to have been practised in the act of snatching flags from volunteers. Paddy fields are reported to have been burnt, eatables forcibly taken. A vegetable market in Gujerat has been raided, because the dealers would not sell vegetables to officials. These acts have taken place in front of crowds who, for the sake of Congress mandate, have

submitted without retaliation. I ask you to believe the accounts given by men pledged to truth. Repudiation even by high officials has, as in the Bardoli case, often proved false. The officials I regret to have to say, have not hesitated to publish falsehoods to the people even during the last five weeks. I take the following samples from Government notices issued from Collector's offices in Gujarat:—

1. Adults use five pounds of salt per year, therefore pay three annas per year as tax. If Government removed the monopoly, people will have to pay higher prices and in addition make good to the Government the loss sustained by the removal of the monopoly. The salt you take from the sea-shore is not eatable, therefore the Government destroys it.
2. Mr. Gandhi says that the Government has destroyed hand spinning in this country. whereas everybody knows that this is not true, because throughout the country there is not a village where hand-spinning of cotton is not going on. Moreover in every province cotton spinners are shown superior methods and are provided with better instruments at less prices and are thus helped by Government.
3. Out of every five rupees of the debt that the Government has incurred, rupees four have been beneficially spent.

I have taken these three sets of statements from three different leaflets. I venture to suggest that everyone of these statements is demonstrably false. The daily consumption of salt by an adult is three times the amount stated and therefore the poll tax and the salt tax undoubtedly is at least 9 as. per head per year. And this tax is levied from man, woman, child and domestic cattle irrespective of age and health.

It is a wicked falsehood to say that every village has a spinning wheel and that the spinning movement is in any shape or form encouraged or supported by the Government. Financiers can better dispose of the falsehood that four out of every five rupees of the public debt is used for the benefit of the public. But those falsehoods are mere samples of what people know is going on in every day contact with the Government. Only the other day a Gujarati poet, a brave man, was convicted on prejudged official evidence in spite of his emphatic statement that at the time mentioned he was sleeping soundly in another place.

Now for instances of official inactivities. Liquor dealers have assaulted pickets admitted by officials to have been peaceful and sold liquor in contravention of regulations. The officials have taken no notice either of the assaults or the illegal sales of liquor. As to the assault though they are known to everybody, they may take shelter under the plea that they have received no complaints.

And now you have sprung upon the country a Press Ordinance surpassing any hitherto known in India. You have found a short cut through the law's delay in the matter of the trial of Bhagat Singh and others by doing a way with the ordinary procedure. Is it any wonder if I call all these official activities and inactivities a veiled form of Martial Law? Yet this is only the fifth week of the struggle.

Before then the reign of terrorism that has just begun overwhelms India, I feel that I must take a bolder step and if possible divert your wrath in a cleaner if more drastic channel. You may not know the things

that I have described. You may not even now believe in them. I can but invite your serious attention to them.

Anyway I feel that it would be cowardly on my part not to invite you to disclose to the full the leonine paws of authority, so that the people who are suffering tortures and destruction of their property may not feel that I, who had perhaps been the chief party inspiring them to action that has brought to right light the Government in its true colours, had left any stone unturned to work out the Satyagraha programme as fully as it was possible under given circumstances.

According to the science of Satyagraha, the greater the repression and lawlessness on the part of authority, the greater should be the suffering courted by the victims. Success is the certain result of suffering of the extremest character voluntarily undergone.

I know the dangers attendant upon the methods adopted by me. But the country is not likely to mistake my meaning. I say what I mean and think— And I have been saying for the last fifteen years in India, and outside for twenty years more, and repeat now that the only way to conquer violence is through non-violence pure and undefiled. I have said also that every violent act, word and even thought interferes with the progress of non-violent action. If in spite of such repeated warnings, people will resort to violence, I must down responsibility save such as inevitably attaches to every human being for the acts of every other human being. But the question of responsibility apart, I dare not postpone action on any cause whatsoever if non-violence is the force the seers of the world have claimed it to be and if I am not to belie my own extensive experience of its working.

But I would fain avoid the further step. I would therefore ask you to remove the tax which many of your illustrious countrymen have condemned— led in unmeasured terms and which, as you could not have failed to observe, has evoked universal protest and resentment— expressed in civil disobedience. You may condemn civil disobedience as much as you like. Will you prefer violent revolt to civil disobedience?

If you say, as you have said, that the civil disobedience must end in violence, history will pronounce the verdict that the British Government not bearing because not understanding non-violence, goaded human nature to violence, which it could understand and deal with. But in spite of the goading, I shall hope that God will give the people of India wisdom and strength to withstand every temptation and provocation to violence.

If therefore, you cannot see your way to remove the Salt Tax and remove the prohibitions on private salt-making I must reluctantly commence the march adumbrated in the opening paragraph of my letter.

I am,
Your sincere friend,
M. K. GANDHI

Source: *Famous Letters of Mahatma Gandhi*, Indian Printing Works, Lahore (1947)