

Women Versus the Tariff

By JOSEPHINE BILLINGTON

FREE TRADE is the cornerstone of world peace. The tariff barriers which nations raise against one another are undeniably important factors in the cause of wars. Women want peace, permanent peace; but continue to ignore the part they might play to bring this about by crusading against the obstructions to peace.

Tariffs restrict expansion at home and alienate friendly countries. South America is constant proof of this. In refusing to accept their products in payment for ours we have with one stroke shut out wealth and good will. But viewed in the aspect of self interest alone, women should perceive that tariffs injure them by raising the price of nearly every article they buy. The twenty-five million housewives, the greatest buyer-consumer group in our country, aroused to individual thought on this subject, might be a potent force in correcting this uneconomic policy. It is indeed strange that, although the results vitally concern their daily lives, few women have attempted to think through this aspect of our foreign trade.

South America has lost forty per cent of her foreign markets since the outbreak of war. Now they must purchase from us the manufactures they need to develop their resources which are 'as yet almost untouched—and they must pay us in *dollars*. If we but offered free trade to South America, we would have no difficulty in holding her markets and expanding them enormously as the resources of that great continent are developed. In addition, a free trade policy now with South America would tend to remove all fear of our Southern neighbors' ever entering the Axis orbit. Most important, it would make them our sincere friends, instead of cautious unwilling acceptors of our so-called bounty, as expressed in our Export-Import loans. These are in effect a dole, and doles are resented by self-respecting nations and men. Jealousies and misunderstandings and future enmities are likely to result from this method of "aiding" Latin America, just as was the result of the loans made to Europe during the last war. If South America sold us her products and bought our tools, machines and manufactures in exchange, all nations concerned would benefit. But instead of such a free transaction, we offer her loans and credits, which are raised by taxing our entire population, because we refuse her goods in payment. The inevitable result is that all concerned are made so much the poorer. Another consequence follows—these potential and rapidly expanding markets for our industries are very difficult to regain, if at all.

We are told that Argentine beef menaces our home producers. Therefore we have enacted a tariff of six cents a pound on imported meats. Every housewife is vitally

concerned with the price of meat. When she markets she discovers prohibitive prices on beef, especially if she is in the lower income bracket, which has the largest number of consumers. This six cent tariff has done two things: It has raised the price of imported beef; and it has automatically allowed our home producers to add that amount to their actual costs, raising the selling price and giving them a greater profit than they could have obtained in an openly competitive market. No wonder beefsteak is seldom eaten in the homes of the laboring class. Is this raising our standard of living?

The removal of this tariff would lower the price of both Argentine and native beef, and result in immediate and greatly increased consumption, not only of imported, but also of home grown beef, thereby improving the diet of our citizens. Argentina's purchasing power would be enormously stepped up, and she could buy our manufactured goods which she needs so intensely. In turn there would arise a greater demand for these manufactures, and we would consequently produce more and employ more labor in the highest paid industries.

But the cry of cheap foreign labor is loudly heard when there is a move to lower tariffs. What would happen to our highly paid beef producers? This bogey dissolves when we consider the cowboy's wage, always at mere subsistence level. He has no hope of security or a home. In summer it is the chow wagon and the range, in winter the bunk house and lack of all social contacts. Every opportunity is denied him to better himself; nor can he hope, as in former days of free lands, to become a ranch owner himself, since land speculation has raised prices of good ranges beyond his buying ability. Only in the movies and in dude ranches does he seem a romantic figure. Our tariff on beef has not helped him to a more abundant life. It has protected none but the few powerful groups who control the market and the owners of grazing lands who are enabled to charge increased rent.

Besides the high tariff on meat, the housewife is daily confronted with another seemingly negligible increased cost. Whenever she purchases a pound of sugar she pays in addition to its cost a hidden tariff of about one and a quarter cents. Chicken feed! But watch it grow. Every time our twenty-five million housewives buy a single pound of sugar they pay \$320,937.50 extra—the tribute exacted to protect the sugar industry. Four pounds of sugar apiece for all the housewives and the cost of living jumps a million dollars. Millions for tribute, but not one cent for the consumer! Our beet and cane sugar industries can produce only about one-fifth of our requirements, and ~~still we allow~~

a tariff wall to "protect" them, while the major part of our sugar must be imported. Every pound of sugar we buy is taxed so that an industry which cannot justify its existence may continue to exploit us.

Again we may ask: Are the wages of workers in the sugar industry kept up by the tariff? The industry employs among the lowest paid wage earners in the country. Are the Okies who have been forced to resort to picking sugar beets an example of the more abundant life our tariffs have brought us? They, too, have lost the right to another start in life. In the days before all fertile land was appropriated by land speculation, a disaster such as theirs meant westward migration and a new attempt at making a home. Now there is no new territory to settle. They have become our nomads, itinerant workers of the fields. They might be absorbed into our higher paid industries if we did not keep our island neighbors impoverished with sugar quotas and tariffs. The chief industry of the Caribbean islands is growing cane sugar. Their entire economy practically revolves about this crop. They need our manufactured goods, are unable to raise their standard of living until they can import them. For these they can only pay by selling sugar. Again the tariff curtails our manufacturing. Expansion of highly paid labor in manufacturing is impossible if we continue to close our foreign markets, so we will remain unable to solve our tremendous unemployment problem.

When will women insist that our democracy protect the mass of its citizens, the consumers, instead of the pressure groups? These groups have lobbied through higher and higher tariff walls, until our trade has been seriously hampered and we are near ruin with paying these insidious hidden taxes on all we purchase. The founders of this nation fought the Revolution for the principle of free trade. They refused to be taxed on riches entering their country and saw rightly that imports were wealth exchanged for exports from the understanding of which a fuller life resulted. Their clipper ships captured the trade of the world. But today, our merchant marine has well-nigh vanished. Only free trade will rebuild it.

The founding fathers must have perceived the fallacy of a tariff-burdened European economy, and wrote a safeguard into our Constitution, prohibiting the separate states from raising tariff barriers against one another. This was an important factor in the attainment of a higher standard of living than existed in the Old World. Had our forefathers not had such vision, New York might now be paying tariffs on all Boston made shoes, and vice versa. There would be an automobile manufacturer in every state clamoring for tariffs to protect his product from all other states' cars. Every industry in each state would have obtained protection to keep its product from competition with others, and our great centers of industry would have been unable to develop.

Lately this safeguard of free trade between the states has been menaced, and America is dangerously close to following Europe's disastrous tariff policy. A multiplicity of false economic theories, advanced by separate small groups seeking individual benefits and showing only part of the whole structure, have confused our thoughts. They hide the truth that free enterprise cannot continue to exist unless privileges and monopolies are eliminated, instead of pyramided upon each other.

Hope lies in educating the women, this great group of buyers and consumers, to the burdens tariffs place upon each of them, individually. When they realize that tariffs only raise prices and lessen the amount of wealth they can buy, they will become conscious of this injustice. No pressure group will be able to lobby through another privilege. Let women but realize that free trade is the road to a more abundant life, and laws will be amended to conform to their enlightened view, as they were when women insisted on the right of suffrage.

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THE soundness of any civilization rests in the relation to the land. Right relation can be brought about only by heeding the fact that God gave it to meet the need of all men. To suffer it to be cornered by the few is indeed, as Tolstoi said, "the great iniquity." The special privilege that enables the few to monopolize it is deepest sin and stupidity of the government. It brings about misery and invites utmost disaster. Government's greatest obligation is to address itself to the taxation of land values. That government may come to realize this obligation, the people must be turned to God, not only because He is the giver of the land but because by justice and kindness they may be more in His image. Standing in the Light of God they see the inherent equality of His children, their fellowmen. Equality makes for equal opportunity in this life; it does away with the heinous disparities.—MARY FELS

Note to Readers

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