



## LAND & LIBERTY

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## FREEDOM OR RESTRICTION

By Henry George

In seeking to raise wages, to improve the conditions of labour, we are seeking not the good of a class, but the good of the whole. The number of those who can live on the labour of others is and can be but small as compared with the number who must labour to live. And where labour yields the largest results to the labourer, where the production of wealth is greatest and its distribution most equitable, where the man who has nothing but his labour is surest of making the most comfortable living and best provide for those whom nature has made dependent upon him, there will be the best conditions of life for all—there will the general standard of intelligence and virtue be highest, and there will all that makes a nation truly great and strong and glorious most abound.

There is nothing in the tariff question that cannot readily be mastered by anyone of ordinary intelligence, and the great question whether what is called "protection" does or does not benefit the labourer can be settled for himself by anyone who will ask himself what protection really is, and how it benefits labour.

Now what is "protection"? It is a system of taxes levied on imports for the purpose of increasing the price of certain commodities in our own country so that the home producers of such commodities can get higher prices for what they sell to their own fellow-countrymen.

This is all there is to "protection." Protection can't enable any producer to get higher prices for what he sells to people of other countries, and no duty is protective unless it so increases prices as to enable someone to get more from his fellow-citizens than he could without protection. How "protection" may thus benefit some people is perfectly clear. But how can it benefit the whole people? That it may increase the profits of the manufacturer or the income of the owner of timber or mineral

land, is plain. But how can it increase wages? "Protection" raises the price of commodities. That may be to the advantage of those who buy labour and sell commodities. But how can it be to the advantage of those who sell labour and buy commodities?

The only way protection can benefit anyone, or by "encouraging" him give him power to encourage or benefit anyone else, is by enabling him to get from his fellow-citizens more than he could otherwise get. This is the essence of protection; and if it has any stimulating or beneficial effect it must be through this. The protective effect of any protective duty is precisely that of a subsidy paid by the government to some people out of taxes levied on the whole people. The only difference is, that in what is called the subsidy system the government tax-gatherers would collect the tax from the whole people and pay it over to some people, while in what is called the protective system the government tax-gatherers collect a tax on foreign goods so as to "protect" the favoured people, while they for themselves collect taxes on their fellow-citizens in increased prices.

Now, would it be possible by levying a general tax (especially a tax, which like all protective taxes bears on the poor far more heavily than on the rich, on the labourer far more heavily than on the capitalist), and paying out the proceeds directly to the labourers engaged in certain industries, to raise wages, or even to raise wages in those industries? Everyone who thinks a moment will say no! If we were to levy such a tax and pay out the proceeds directly to glass workers or iron-ore miners or the hands in cotton or woollen factories, in addition to what they get from their employers, the consequence would simply be that labour would be attracted from the unsubsidized to the subsidized employments, and wages would go down to a point that would give the subsidized labourers no more than they got without the subsidy!

But if such a plan of raising wages is utterly hopeless, what should we say of a plan to raise wages by levying a tax upon all labourers and giving the proceeds, not to all labourers, or even to some labourers, but only to some employers? This is the plan of protection. If protection can increase or maintain wages, it must be in this way. What protective duties actually do is to increase the profits of certain employers—to allow them to collect a tax from their fellow-citizens without any stipulation as to how they shall spend it.

The first step in this precious scheme of plunder which is called protection to labour is really to reduce wages. Wages do not really consist of money. Money is the mere flux and counter of exchanges. What the man who works for wages really works for are commodities and services for which he pays with the money he receives in wages. Necessarily, therefore, to increase the price of the commodities he buys with his money-wages is to decrease his real wages.

The protective taxes imposed for the purpose of increasing the prices of commodities must in the same way operate to reduce the real wages of labour. Therefore the protective scheme for raising wages

fully stated is simply this: Wages generally are in the first place reduced by taxes which increase the price of certain commodities, in order (1) that a comparatively few employers who profit by this increase in the price of what they have to sell may voluntarily increase the wages of their employees, and (2) that this benevolent raising of wages in some occupations may cause the raising of wages in all occupations.

Whomsoever protection may benefit—and analysis will show that it cannot even benefit the employing capitalists whom it assumes to benefit, unless they are also protected from home competition by some sort of a monopoly—it cannot benefit the labourer. It is to the labourer a delusion and a fraud—a scheme of barefaced plunder that adds insult to injury; that first robs him, and then tells him to get down on his knees and thank his robber!

Special privilege needs protection, and monopoly needs protection, and all legalized systems of robbery that enable men who do no labour to grow rich by appropriating the earnings of those who do labour, need protection. But what is labour, that *it* should need protection? What is labour, that votes should have to be bought and coerced, and lobbyist maintained, and congressmen interested, and newspapers subsidized, and our coasts and borders lined with seizers and searchers and spies and informers and tax-gatherers, to keep *it* from falling to pauperism? Is not labour the producer of all wealth? Is it not labour that feeds all, clothes all, shelters all, and pays for all? Is not labour the one thing that can take care of itself; that requires but access to the raw materials of nature to bring forth all that man's needs require? What benevolent capitalist drew a tariff wall around Adam to enable him to get a living and bring up a family? Whatever else may need protection labour needs no protection. What labour needs is freedom! Not the keeping up of restrictions and the perpetuation of monopolies, but the tearing of them down.

Who are these benevolent individuals, so anxious to protect the poor, helpless workingman, so fearful lest labour may fall to the level of "the pauper labour of Europe?" The coal barons and the factory lords, the iron and steel combinations, the lumber ring, and the thousand trusts that, having secured the imposition of duties to keep out foreign productions, band themselves together to limit home production and to screw down the wages of their workmen. And are not these men who are so anxious, as they say, to protect you from the competition of "foreign pauper labour" the very men who are most ready to avail themselves of foreign labour?

"Statisticians" may pile up figures to prove to the workingman how much better off he is than he used to be, and the editors of protection papers may picture the poverty of European workingmen in the darkest colours to show him how proud and happy and contented he ought to be. But the labour organizations, the strikes, the bitter unrest with which the whole industrial mass is seething, show that he is not contented.

It is not protection that has made wages higher here than in Europe. If protection could make

wages high, why has it not made wages high in Germany and Italy and Spain and Mexico? Why did it not make wages high in England when it was in full force there?

To give labour full freedom; to make wages what they ought to be, the full earnings of labour; to secure work for all, and leisure for all, and abundance for all; to enable all to enjoy the advantages and blessings of an advancing civilization—we must break down all monopolies and destroy all special privileges.

The rejection of protection and the abolition of the tariff will not of itself accomplish this, but it will be a long step towards it—a step that must necessarily be taken if labour is to be emancipated and industrial slavery abolished. Until workingmen get over the degrading superstition of protection they must be divided and helpless. But when they once realize the true dignity of labour, once see that the good of all can only be gained by securing the equal rights of each, then they can unite and then they will be irresistible.

And this is the question that you will be asked. Are you for restriction or are you for freedom? Are you in favour of taxing the whole people for the benefit of a few capitalists, in the hope that they will give to their workmen some of the crumbs? or are you against all special privileges and in favour of equal rights to all?

To the man who thinks the matter over there can be no question as to what answer best accords with the interests of workingmen. It is possible for the few to become rich by taxing the many. But it is not possible for the many to become rich by taxing themselves to put the proceeds in the hands of the few.

Labour cannot be hurt by freedom. The only thing that can be hurt by freedom is monopoly. And monopoly means the robbery of labour. What labour needs is freedom, not protection; justice, not charity; equal rights for all, not special privileges for some.

(From Volume VIII of the complete works of Henry George, entitled "Our Land and Land Policy.")

PRESS CORRESPONDENCE.—We have been glad to notice the following among letters on Land Value Policy appearing in the last few weeks:—

William Reid (*Glasgow Evening Times*), Charles A. Gardner (*Western Mail*), John Cameron (*Coatbridge Leader*), "A. J. M." (*Clydebank Press*), "Gracchus" (*Edinburgh Evening News*), W. Drury (*Everyman and Week-End Review*), A. H. Weller (*Manchester Guardian and Manchester City News*), "Georgeist" (*Estates Gazette*), E. J. Brierley (*Fairfield Review*), A. H. Stoakes, (*Portsmouth Liberal*), A. L. A. A. (*Liverpool Evening Express*), George A. Goodwin (*Manchester Guardian*), W. R. Lester (*Nation*), Andrew McLaren, M.P. (*Times and Staffordshire Sentinel*), F. R. Jones (*Liverpool Evening Express*), "Land Taxer" (*Halifax Daily Courier*).

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