

Letter to Louis F. Post, Pres., Manhattan Single Tax Club, from Tom L. Johnson, Cleveland

March 31, 1891

Dear Sir: --

To my great regret, pressing duties will prevent my presence at your meeting, but I wish to express my unreserved concurrence in its subject. Count me at all times for free trade and direct taxation.

I am a free trader because I am a democrat; because I believe in equal rights to all; because protective tariffs are a robbery, and revenue tariffs an injustice.

I am opposed to taxes on necessities, because they put the burden of government on those least able to bear it; and to taxes on luxuries, because they confine luxuries to the few. I am opposed to all forms of "crooked taxation," because they increase the public burden, multiply officials, create crime, corrupt politics, and engage moneyed interests in the manipulation of government. I am for straight, honest taxation, because it is the cheapest, the fairest, the purest; because it collects the revenues without the intervention of middlemen, and the people know what they pay.

I am for Mills, of Texas, for Speaker of the House, because I want to have an out-and-out free trader take the chair held by Reed, and to let the trusts and monopolists know that at last a democratic Congress has come that means to undo class legislation.

Grover Cleveland should be our candidate for President next year, because the tariffists of all degrees fear him, and he well justifies their fear.

We should not permit any question to come up that will divert attention from the tariff fight. When men are attacked by wolves, they have no time to kill rats or fight gold-bugs.

Democrats must see that we have passed the babyhood state of tariff reduction, and even the boyhood of anti-protection. Let Democratic leaders, then, be men. They acknowledge free trade in private; let them stop talking in public of percentages merely. Let them trust the people, as Thomas Jefferson did, and learn that tariff reduction raises as much opposition as free trade, without gaining its strength. I know, as my free trade colleague from Kansas who is to address you knows, that free trade will not frighten the people, but will rally to its standard those who will not turn their hands for the talk of the timid.

Tariff reduction is like moderate cancer, reasonable small-pox, or temperate delirium tremens. The only complete cure for protection is absolute free trade.

With best wishes for the success of the meeting, I am,

Very truly,