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The Protectionist Revival in French Colonial Trade: The Case of Senegal

BY C. W. NEWBURY

STANDARD works on nineteenth-century French economic history recognize the growing strength of the movement against economic liberalism in the early years of the Third Republic. For example, both Girault¹ and Clough,² though they disagree on the identification of a depression in the period 1873–82, describe the agitation for tariff protection by French metallurgists, textile manufacturers, and agriculturalists. Clough saw the tariff Law of 7 May 1881, modified by existing trade treaties, as a corner-stone in the protectionist edifice that was completed by the Méline Tariff of 1892; Girault dates the origins of the revival of colonial preferences and the formation of a “colonial party” in French politics from about 1883 or 1884, when Algeria was assimilated to the metropolitan tariff, and when the Old Colonies (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion) were persuaded to revoke their own legislation and favour imports of French origin. At the same time, other colonial assemblies were forbidden control over Customs tariffs in order to avoid the development of freer trade, detrimental to metropolitan interests, as had happened in the Caribbean territories after 1861.

It is argued in this essay that in the case of Senegal the reaction against the liberal policies introduced by the Second Empire into French colonial trade can be dated from the Decree of 1877 which raised a tariff differential against foreign cloth imported at St Louis and Dakar.³ The volume of this trade in West Africa was, of course, very small compared with the interests at stake for manufacturers and merchants in the metropolitan tariff structure. Nevertheless, the debate on the principles involved provides a useful index of the way in which, in the 1870's, various pressure groups in France and the colonies aligned themselves on an issue which was the thin end of a very much bigger wedge. In particular, it has been possible to account for the attitudes of the French chambers of commerce, notably Bordeaux and Marseilles, and the two government departments which took opposite sides on the Senegal question—the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Marine and Colonies.

I

The demand for protection against foreign imports of cloth into Senegal began as early as 1873, as part of a general campaign by Rouen manufacturers to end the fiscal autonomy granted to the French Caribbean colonies in 1861 and 1866.⁴

¹ Arthur Girault, *The Colonial Tariff Policy of France*, ed. John Bates Clark (Oxford, 1916), pp. 80–92. This is the position taken, too, in Louis Rolland and Pierre Lampué (eds.), *Législation et finances coloniales* (Paris, 1930), pp. 272–4.

² Shepard Bancroft Clough, *France: A History of National Economics 1789–1939* (New York, 1939), pp. 214–20.

³ Cf. Girault, op. cit. p. 91, who mentions the Decree of 17 Oct. 1880—only one of a series on Senegal tariffs.

⁴ What follows is based largely on the official report, *Enquête sur le régime colonial des colonies françaises*

The government ordered an official inquiry by the *Conseil supérieur du Commerce, de l'Agriculture et de l'Industrie*; questionnaires on the effects of the liberal legislation of the 1860's were sent to the Old Colonies and Senegal; the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Marine prepared reports, attacking and defending, respectively, the right of the colonies to favour foreign goods. From the statistics manipulated freely by both sides it appears that the value of French exports to the Caribbean colonies which had been as high as 66 million francs in 1861 had fallen off to 31 million in 1871, and had recovered to only 45 million francs by 1873. The statistics for Senegal, 1854–75, suggested that French and foreign import values remained about even, as trade values grew, but textiles were dominated after 1863 by manufactures from British India, finished in Manchester and imported through Bordeaux.¹

When the *Conseil supérieur du Commerce* came to debate these reports and hear evidence from the colonies, it was unable to decide whether domestic textiles were suffering from a general trade depression or from an unfavourable position in colonial Customs legislation. In the case of Senegal, however, the local administration, after perfunctory consultation of traders at St Louis and Gorée, recommended a differential tariff to assist French Indian "guinea" cloth and French cottons which were unable to compete in price with British Indian and Manchester products. For the rest of the decade the debate between "protectionists" and "free traders" with West African interests centred around the ubiquitous guinea.

Guineas were about 16 yards in length and a handsome dark blue colour. They differed in weight, depending on their place of manufacture—a difference reflected in their wholesale price of about 15 francs for the heavier grade and 7 francs for the lighter in the Senegal coastal markets.² They were used extensively in the gum trade with the Moors, in the Dyula gold and salt trade, and in the slave trade. They were also used as currency or units-of-account, roughly doubling in value in the Upper Senegal where they entered the complicated salt, powder, and millet trade between Buré and Niore (in Segu), with a nominal value of 9,000 cowries.³

The fact that there were two varieties of guinea cloth in circulation added yet another price variable to existing differences arising from transport costs and the structure of credit in Senegal trade. Obviously it was in the interests of the merchants to let out on "trust" the cheapest cloth available, and this seems to have been predominantly of British origin up till the 1870's. But whatever its origin, guinea cloth was carried and imported exclusively by merchants of Bordeaux.⁴

(Paris, 1877), containing the minutes of the *Conseil*; and Archives Nationales, Section Outre-Mer, Paris (hereafter A.N.O.-M.), series Sénégal; Archives Nationales, series F¹² and F¹⁴.

¹ *Enquête*, pp. 129–320. Textiles accounted for about one-third of import values—about 7 or 8 million francs a year in the period 1854–74. "French" manufactures in some cases may be simply foreign goods imported through French ports. In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion there was a steady rise in the proportion of foreign imports from 25.7 million francs to 56.6 million francs, 1865–80, while the value of French merchandise fell from 50.6 million francs to 34.8 million francs.—Girault, *op. cit.* p. 89.

² A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 22–9; *Enquête*, pp. 50–1; Paul Soleillet, *Voyage à Ségou, 1878–1879*, ed. Gabriel Gravier (Paris, 1887), p. 80.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 94–5; Dr Colin, 'Le commerce sur le Haut Sénégal. Conditions de son développement', *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie commerciale de Paris*, v (1882–3), 162.

⁴ There is no detailed study of Senegal trade. For a brief mention of the importance of the guinea see

During the American Civil War, when cotton prices rose, they gave a larger quota to British, Belgian, and other foreign cloths—a proportion which was subsequently held at the expense of Rouen and Pondicherry. Factories in French India were forced to close down in 1863, and were auctioned off to a cotton syndicate for re-equipment with the help of a French government subsidy. By 1867 the Bordeaux merchants had begun to tranship directly from India to Senegal as well as from British ports. Rouen textile manufacturers complained that they were no longer getting a fair share of orders—a development they blamed on colonial legislation rather than on uncompetitive prices.¹

Thus the rather austere blue guinea pieces which were exchanged throughout the Senegal–Gambia region in the nineteenth century were the product of a complex manufacturing and export network in India, France, and Lancashire, where competing interests were engaged. The simple distinction between “British” (Indian and Manchester) and “French” (Indian and Rouen) made during the 1875 inquiry tended to obscure some of the realities of their export and use. The fact that they were of different origins and differed in weight and price was of much less importance to Bordeaux shippers and merchants with a stake in the Senegal trade than to French domestic suppliers and industrialists. Appeals to patriotism fell on the deaf ears of the partisans of free trade, where this trade entailed securing a ready supply of cheap cottons. On the other hand, the position of French Indian manufactures at Pondicherry, subsidized to the extent of 100,000 francs a year in the late 1860’s and 1870’s, could not be ignored. Nor could the recommendations of the Senegal administration, under Governor Valière, justifying a differential tariff on imports of foreign guinea cloth.² This recommendation, moreover, had the backing of the St Louis Chamber of Commerce, representing 14 agents of French firms, thus strengthening the hand of metropolitan protectionists. At the same time, a refusal on the part of traders and importers at Gorée to adopt protective taxes showed that opinion in Senegal was divided on the issue.³ Nevertheless, Valière advised in favour of a 15 per cent differential, on the basis of weight, which would effectively discriminate between the two varieties of foreign and French guinea.

It is clear that from the point of view of the Senegal administration there were fiscal considerations behind this recommendation. Although the trade of Senegal from 1860 to 1880 was marked by a phenomenal rise in the quantity of groundnut exports and a fairly steady export of the traditional gum staple, the value of exports and imports declined sharply in the early 1870’s to about 30 million francs and was slow to recover.⁴ The depression in prices affected trade over a large

B. Schnapper, ‘La fin du régime de l’exclusif’, *Annales Africaines* (1959), p. 159; A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 27b, ‘Note sur le Décret du 19 Juillet 1877’, March 1879.

¹ Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce archives (hereafter B.C.C.), *Procès-verbaux, lettres et mémoires* (1867), fos. 161–2; Rouen to Bordeaux, 18 March 1867; Bordeaux to Rouen, 22 March 1867.

² A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 27b, Valière to Ministry of Marine, 22 May 1876.

³ *Ibid.* Minutes of the St Louis Chamber of Commerce, 12 Feb. 1875; ‘Assemblée des commerçants et notables de Gorée’, 22 June 1875.

⁴ G. Hervet, *Le commerce extérieur de l’Afrique occidentale française* (Paris, 1911), *passim*; Ernest Fallot, *Histoire de la colonie française du Sénégal* (Paris, 1884), p. 143. The price of palm oil in France fell from 100 francs per quintal in 1872 to 90 francs in 1874.—B. Schnapper, *La politique et le commerce français dans le golfe de Guinée de 1838 à 1871* (Paris, 1961), pp. 140–1. The price of Senegal groundnuts declined in the period 1863–80 from 29 francs f.o.b. per quintal to 25 francs.—H. Muller, *Le commerce du globe* (Le Havre,

area of the coast in the neighbourhood of Senegal. It also affected revenues which depended on indirect taxes. In addition, there was a substantial decrease in the import of materials for public works construction, after the end of Faidherbe's governorships and the completion of the new port at Dakar. In 1873 the metropolitan subsidy to the local budget was withdrawn, leaving the sum of 400,000 francs to be found from other sources. As the deficit grew, the pressure for new duties on trade became irresistible. A temporary remedy was found in the extension of consumer taxes and an *octroi de mer* (import duty) to ports south of St Louis. But by 1877 expenditure in the Senegal budget had grown to 1,714,000 francs (excluding the municipal budget of 122,000 francs)—an increase of 130 per cent in ten years.¹ Both Valière and his successor, Governor Brière de L'Isle, launched a programme of Customs reform in order to end anomalies in the existing system and to extend the range of posts at which import and export duties were levied. If the programme could be made to benefit national trade and manufactures, so much the better.²

II

On the whole, both the Marseilles and Bordeaux chambers were composed of convinced free traders in the first decade of the Third Republic. Both ports favoured the flow of cheap colonial products of whatever origin. At Bordeaux, in particular, the *Association du libre échange* kept an eye on colonial tariffs to avoid heavy indirect taxes for which exporters would have to pay. It is necessary to keep their views on African questions in perspective. The minute books do not reveal a great preoccupation with the affairs of Senegal or the west coast enclaves on the eve of European partition. The burning problems of internal communications in France, port development, the revision of the general tariff, and relations with departmental authorities—all these tended to reduce traders' petitions from West Africa to the status of "other business", to be finished as quickly as possible. But occasionally, if a matter of principle was involved, particularly on the issue of tariff protection and free trade, then a question of minor commercial importance could be raised by the chambers and the government ministries to the level of national debate. In such a debate the evidence of merchants with experience of African trade was a pertinent contribution; and relatively small vested interests were allowed a voice in colonial policy through the *Conseil supérieur du Commerce* to which the chambers sent representatives, and through the Ministry of Marine and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Secondly, if an influential member of one of the chambers had a large stake in African trade (as was the case when Tandonnet, Prom, and Maurel sat on the Bordeaux chamber in the 1870's, or when Cyprien Fabre became president of the Marseilles body in 1881), then West African problems received special treatment. A combination of these two factors—national interest and private interest in West African trade—is apparent in the case of Senegal textile imports.

1872), p. 644; Joseph Fouquet, 'La traite des arachides dans le pays de Kaolack, et ses conséquences économiques, sociales et juridiques', *Études Sénégalaises*, VIII (1858), 60.

¹ B.C.C. *Procès-verbaux* (1878), fos. 159–60, Bordeaux to Ministry of Marine, 29 Jan. 1878; A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, IX, 20a; Benoist d'Azy, 'Note sur les droits de Douane au Sénégal', Jan. 1876.

² The new policy, begun in 1877, is set out in A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, IX, 21b, Brière de L'Isle to Ministry of Marine, 2 April 1877, 7 Oct. 1878.

The reaction of the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce to the 1875 inquiry and its result was one of astonishment that the governor and commercial agents in Senegal wished to protect Pondicherry cloth.¹ Such a move was contrary to their declared principles as free traders and against their interests as exporters and produce buyers. An official protest was drawn up disagreeing point by point with Valière's reply to the government questionnaire and sent to the Ministry of Marine.² The ministry replied that all interests would have to be considered by the *Conseil supérieur du Commerce* which was still hearing evidence. In 1876 more information was requested from the chambers of commerce on the retention of free-trade legislation in French colonies. Bordeaux answered in the following terms:

Que le régime actuel soit maintenu pour les guinées, mais en réservant son opinion entière pour le cas où la question étant élargie, au lieu de ne viser qu'un article spécial, elle serait consultée sur la convenance d'établir pour toutes les colonies françaises, à l'importation, un régime identique à celui qui régit la France elle-même.³

This qualified opinion against tariff protection (with its hint of tariff assimilation) was sent to the Ministry of Commerce, 7 November 1876. The Marseilles chamber, after consulting Bordeaux, sent in an identical reply.⁴

For the moment, then, the free traders in the chamber had their way, despite rumours of a "protectionist majority" in 1876 on the *Conseil supérieur du Commerce*.⁵ But at this point other factors had to be considered by the government. The Ministry of Finance refused to continue the subsidy to the Pondicherry cotton company. At the end of 1876, the governor of French India requested special consideration in the Senegal market for cloth from his Indian posts. In a private letter to the Director of Colonies, in June 1877, when a draft decree on guinea differential duties was delayed in the Ministry of Finance, he prophesied complete ruin for local factories—"et je pourrais dire pour nous aussi; car les milliers de consommateurs qui vivent directement ou indirectement de cette industrie s'en iront sur le territoire anglais, et nos contributions indirectes s'en ressentiront."⁶ This argument carried great weight in the Ministry of Marine, where Admiral Fourichon was in favour of protection, and even more in the Ministry of Finance, where the prospect of keeping the Indian posts solvent by subsidies to the local budget was less welcome than the prospect of protecting Pondicherry cloth.

And so for the benefit of French India, Senegal traders were made to pay additional duties on guinea cloth of foreign manufacture, against the wishes of Bordeaux and Marseilles. As a slight concession the differential was reduced from

¹ B.C.C. *Procès-verbaux* (1875), fos. 531-7, meeting 21 July 1875.

² *Ibid.* fos. 593-4, meeting 4 Aug. 1875. The protest was signed by the main Bordeaux houses represented in Senegal—Maurel and Prom, Marc Maurel, Teisseire, Rabaud and Jay, Devès and Chaumet, Delmas and Laporte.

³ *Ibid.* (1876), fo. 452. The questionnaire was examined by a committee which included Prom and Maurel, Schoengrun-Lopès-Dubec, Labrunie, Beylard.

⁴ Marseilles Chamber of Commerce archives (hereafter M.C.C.), series M.A. 72 (1876-7), fos. 100, 122.

⁵ B.C.C. *Procès-verbaux* (1876), fos. 467, 479. Reports by Vice-President Lalande, Bordeaux delegate to the *Conseil*.

⁶ A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 27a, Trillard to Benoist d'Azy, 12 June 1877, and for the draft decree, approved by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Commerce, 14 and 18 July 1877.

15 per cent to 10 per cent and made law by the Decree of 19 July 1877. The only protest received came from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce through the British embassy in Paris.¹ This was fairly easily disposed of by French officials who pointed out that Manchester exaggerated the amount of the differential; and that free-trade treaties with Great Britain did not apply to French colonies other than Algeria.

But the fiscal and protectionist policy of the Senegal administration did not stop with a differential on guinea cloth. In April 1877 the governor's council approved a plan to increase *ad valorem* duties on imports from 5 per cent to 7 per cent for goods of French origin, plus an extra 5 per cent on foreign manufactures and specific duties ranging between 15 per cent and 40 per cent on foreign luxury items. The new duties were to be levied within the whole area under Senegal jurisdiction—from St Louis to the Casamance and the posts north of Sierra Leone.² This project, moreover, which ran counter to the liberal measures introduced under the Second Empire, was approved in principle by the Minister of Marine, Admiral Roussin:

Le tarif différentiel est contraire au Décret du 24 X^{bre} 1864, ainsi conçu: Les marchandises de *toute nature* et de *toute provenance* peuvent être importées par *tout pavillon* à St. Louis et à Gorée. Je n'ai pas cru, toutefois, devoir le repousser en principe; il me paraît avantageux en effet de favoriser au Sénégal l'introduction des produits français, et déjà une dérogation en ce sens aux dispositions précitées a été apportée à St. Louis par le Décret du 9 Juillet 1877 sur le régime des guinées. Les fixations proposées (6 à 8% pour les produits français, 12 à 18% pour les produits étrangers, 20 à 40% pour les armes et munitions) m'ont paru [*sic*] toutes-fois trop élevées.³

A draft decree embodying these differentials was sent to the Ministry of Commerce and Agriculture by Roussin's successor.⁴ The Minister of Commerce approved the differential in favour of French manufactures, but criticized the high level of duties on spirits and arms.⁵

Rumours of the increased costs that would have to be borne by traders to pay for the Senegal administration soon reached Bordeaux.⁶ The Chamber of Commerce came out strongly against the proposal to raise a higher proportion of duties on goods of foreign origin, because of the conditions of West African trade:

Dans tous les comptoirs de la côte d'Afrique les produits s'échangent contre les mêmes marchandises, c'est-à-dire le tabac en feuilles de Kentucky, les armes de Belgique et d'Angleterre, l'eau-de-vie de France, de Hollande ou d'Allemagne, les cotonnades de Rouen, de Manchester et de Gand etc. Si un droit de douane exagéré élève le prix de ces articles dans nos comptoirs, nous nous trouverons dans l'impossibilité d'acheter aux mêmes conditions que les Anglais et les Portugais des produits que se vendront au même prix sur les marchés français, et que notre

¹ A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 27g, Ministry of Marine to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 Aug. 1877, encl. Manchester Chamber of Commerce to Ministry of Finance, 10 Aug. 1877.

² Ibid. 21b, Brière de L'Isle to Ministry of Marine, 2 April 1877, 7 Oct. 1878.

³ Ibid. Roussin to Brière de L'Isle (draft), 4 Oct. 1877.

⁴ Ibid. Pothuau to Ministry of Commerce, 8 April, 26 June 1878. Admiral Pothuau also agreed to differential tariffs in Senegal.

⁵ Ibid. Teisserenc de Bort to Pothuau, 24 July 1878.

⁶ B.C.C. *Procès-verbaux* (1878), fos. 879-81, meeting 29 May 1878.

Douane métropolitaine accueillera en franchise sans distinction. Ce serait la protection à l'étranger.¹

At the same time Bordeaux renewed its old complaint about the Decree of 1877 which protected French India and Rouen cloth.

There is no evidence that this explanation changed the minds of officials in the Paris ministries in 1878. But in October Admiral Pothuau informed the Ministry of Commerce that the differential Customs project had been delayed for the moment, until Senegal was given elected representation in the form of a General Council.² In the meantime, Brière de L'Isle's administration was allowed to carry out the Customs unification by extending duties to the southern dependencies of the colony, under the Decree of 20 January 1879. This measure again brought to a head opposition in Senegal and Bordeaux to the differential duty on guinea cloth (largely because the traders had freely imported through the ports of the Petite Côte below Dakar, where only export duties had been levied). Much was made of the threat that smuggling through the Gambia would increase. The Ministry of Marine therefore reopened the debate on guineas by asking the chambers of commerce for a second opinion on the Decree of 1877.³

This time Bordeaux interests were much better represented in the colony than in 1875. The General Council voted against the differential duty.⁴ The administration was not bound to accept this opinion which ran counter to the governor's protectionist policy. Brière de L'Isle recommended that the vote be ignored:

Vous penserez, sans doute, Monsieur le Ministre, que le Sénégal déjà inondé de marchandises étrangères de traite, tabacs, poudres, armes etc., ne peut pas voir s'étendre de jour en jour les importations étrangères au dépens des nôtres; qu'il est temps que la production française soit protégée sur ce marché que la France entretient au prix de si gros sacrifices d'hommes et d'argent.

Dans un tel pays la théorie du libre échange ne peut pas être mise en pratique, et ceux qui l'invoquent pour avoir des marchandises de troque, à bas prix, seraient les premiers certainement à la repousser si on leur proposait de l'étendre à ce même commerce d'échange des objets manufacturés contre les produits naturels de la Sénégambie. Il ne paraît pas possible qu'au moment où la France cherche à augmenter la production de son commerce au Sénégal, à mettre en lumière les ressources de sa Colonie et à lui créer de nouveaux débouchés jusque dans le cœur de l'Afrique, tous ses efforts soient faits au profit de l'industrie étrangère alors que l'industrie française serait exclue, en quelque sorte, par quelques maisons de Bordeaux du marché Sénégalais.

Je demande donc avec plus de conviction que jamais, le maintien du décret de 1877 en y fixant, pour seule modification, le poids de la pièce [de guinée] à 1 k. 600, au lieu de 1 k. 800, pour favoriser l'industrie métropolitaine.⁵

Nothing could have better illustrated the conception of economic imperialism held by a governor who laid the foundation for the French advance to the Upper

¹ Ibid. A petition on these lines was sent to the Ministry of Marine, 29 May 1878; and A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 21b.

² A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 21b. Pothuau to Ministry of Commerce, 24 Oct. 1878. The *Conseil général* of 1879 was (like its counterparts elsewhere in French colonies) an advisory body of French citizens elected from the four communes of Senegal with very restricted powers over the local budget.

³ M.C.C. Series M.A. 76 (1879-80), fos. 327-9.

⁴ A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 27b, Brière de L'Isle to Ministry of Marine, 7 Jan. 1880. ⁵ Ibid.

Niger. But it was a conception divorced from the commercial thinking of the merchants at St Louis: the gulf between those who preached imperial control in the name of national trade and those who were national traders was still large.

There were signs, however, that in France the gulf was being bridged. Brière de L'Isle's advice was passed on to the newly formed *Commission supérieure des Colonies* which began to hear evidence on colonial tariffs in May 1880. The special committee which dealt with the guinea-cloth question included the Director of Colonies, Michaux, a Deputy as president, two Senators from French India, and the Deputy for Senegal, Gasconi.¹ The arguments of the Marseille and Bordeaux merchants who appeared before the committee were balanced by the men who spoke for Pondicherry. Gasconi, an ardent expansionist, tended to side with the free traders, Michaux with the protectionists. The chambers of commerce were asked for their opinion on the 1877 Decree. This time their evidence was decisive.

There was a break in the ranks of the Bordeaux chamber in 1880, when a small pro-Pondicherry faction was organized by the owners of the French India textile factory—Amalric and Chaumel Durin. These were opposed by Maurel and his supporters who demanded the abolition of the 1877 Decree.² A compromise view was argued by the Bordeaux financier, Schoengrun, who pointed out that the Decree was perfectly consistent with other pieces of restrictive legislation in Senegal, such as closure of the river to foreign traders and a special tax on foreign tonnage. There might be a case, he concluded, for lowering the differential tariff, if foreign cloth was so necessary to the gum trade. When a vote of the Bordeaux chamber was called on the issue, six members abstained; three voted against the 1877 Decree; and four voted for the continuation of the differential tariff.

When the views of other chambers of commerce were taken into account, this split vote in favour of protectionism in Senegal carried the day. Of the five metropolitan chambers canvassed, Lille was not interested; Le Havre and Marseilles came out against the 1877 Decree; Rouen considered the Decree "un devoir patriotique" and good for business; and the Nantes chamber upheld the principle of tariff protection, judging it "équitable que les produits nationaux continuent à trouver dans les possessions françaises un traitement de faveur, et nous regrettons que cette règle ne soit pas étendue à toutes nos Colonies".³

At the end of June 1880 the *Commission supérieure* reported in favour of protection in Senegal; and the new draft decree prepared by the Ministry of Marine adopted Brière de L'Isle's proposals for the revised tariff on guinea cloth. The Ministry of Commerce lowered the duty slightly to four centimes per metre, keeping the differential at double this amount for cloths of foreign origin. This became law on 19 October 1880, and was modified slightly in a second Decree of 14 June 1881 which maintained the four centimes differential.

¹ A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 27g, Minutes of the *Commission*, 23–25 May 1880, and correspondence with government departments.

² B.C.C. *Procès-verbaux* (1880), fos. 416–18, meeting 20 April 1880; fo. 486, meeting 5 May 1880.

³ A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, ix, 27d, Jauréguiberry to Rampon, 25 June 1880, encl. Ministry of Commerce to Ministry of Marine, 21 June 1880; Rouen to Ministry of Commerce, 12 Feb. 1880; Nantes to Ministry of Commerce, 5 March 1880; M.C.C. Series M.A. (1879–80), fo. 379, meetings 3 Feb. and 11 May 1880.

III

The changed balance in favour of the Senegal guinea tariff, particularly in the case of Bordeaux, may be looked on as part of a much wider swing towards protectionist policies in France in the late 1870's. There is evidence that the chambers of commerce which had stoutly resisted pressure to introduce differentials into the national tariff were weakening by 1879. By then, Bordeaux and Marseilles were caught up in the debate on the non-renewal of commercial treaties. The former was opposed to metallurgical and textile interests; the latter recognized in 1879 that the chemical and cotton industries had a case for protection in the conventional and general tariffs.¹ This view was passed on to the Ministry of Commerce and the tariff commission appointed by the French Chamber. Marseilles was still anxious, however, to have the commercial treaty with Great Britain renewed; but when the Chamber decided on a prorogation, Bordeaux and Marseilles limited their opposition to a request for a delay of six months. They made no effort to fight against the protectionist general tariff of 1881.²

Furthermore, in the special province of French colonial trade, both Bordeaux and Marseilles were reconciled to ending the liberalism allowed the Old Colonies in the 1860's. In January 1884 the chambers received a circular from the Ministry of Marine which was directed at the colonial General Councils, requesting help for French industry by the re-establishment of Customs duties on foreign imports.³ Where once it would have fought against such a request, the Bordeaux chamber merely "reserved its position". Neither Bordeaux nor Marseilles made any comment on the compliance of the Old Colonies in 1884 and 1885, when differential duties were restored, or on the Law of 1886 which allowed a rebate of 12 per cent on French colonial sugar and imposed special duties on unrefined sugars from European countries. By 1887 the Bordeaux chamber was writing to the Ministry of Finance:

Le retour à des tarifs différentiels nous paraît aujourd'hui justifié par la nécessité de resserrer les liens trop relâchés dans ces dernières années, qui unissent la France à ses colonies.

L'expérience a prouvé que la France dont les exportations à l'étranger tendent à se restreindre sous la pression d'une concurrence de plus envahissante, a besoin de trouver, dans les colonies habitées par ses nationaux, des débouchés assurés pour ses produits naturels et industriels.⁴

The conversion of the great ports to the protectionist position was fairly complete. All this had been said by the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Marine, or by administrators like Brière de L'Isle at least six or seven years previously. The metropolitan merchants with colonial interests had caught up on the bureaucrats, parliamentarians, and theorists like Leroy-Beaulieu.

To return, finally, to the case of the guinea. Two questions arise: did the dif-

¹ M.C.C. Series M.A. 75 (1879), fos. 75-7.

² For the passing of the 1881 tariff see Clough, *op. cit.* pp. 216-17; and for the details of specific rates on imports, Parl. Papers, 1881 (C.3051), xcii, 2883, 3014, 3050.

³ B.C.C. *Procès-verbaux* (1884), fos. 90-2. In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion, Customs (as opposed to the *octroi de mer*) could not be levied on French imports.

⁴ *Ibid.* (1887), fos. 86-7, Bordeaux to Ministry of Finance, 23 March 1887. This position was confirmed by the chamber's answers to a ministerial questionnaire in favour of surtaxes on foreign sugar in 1888.

ferential duty really serve its purpose? And what was there in the nature of Senegal trade to make the local agents of French firms first of all approve the idea of a special tariff in 1875, and then reject it for nearly a decade after 1880?

In the first place, it would seem that the import of guinea pieces expanded rapidly after 1877 to over 300,000 a year by the early 1880's, valued at just under 3 million francs.¹ French colonial cloth did not benefit very much (for example, in 1880 out of some 339,807 pieces only 760 came from French India). But, on the other hand, very few pieces came to Senegal direct from foreign ports: the bulk of textile imports were carried in French bottoms from French bonded warehouses and were sold through French firms. The main beneficiary from the tariff differential seems to have been Bordeaux, and to some extent the Senegal Customs. The guineas continued to flood the colony during expansion into the Upper Niger. Nearly 40,000 were used every year, 1881–5, to pay for labour on public works projects on the Senegal—to the profit of contractors like Buhan and Teisseire of Bordeaux. Attempts to fix the value of the guinea proved hopeless; administrative accounts using cloths as a basis of reckoning were soon out of joint; the temptation to lavish cloths as presents in return for personal services was irresistible.² In short, the use of the guinea as a unit-of-account and a major item of trade in the 1880's probably cost the French administration in Senegal more than it was worth to an ailing cotton production in Pondicherry.

The second question is harder to answer without some consideration of the gum trade from the late 1870's. The old privileges of the gum merchants had, in theory, been abolished by Decree in 1852.³ They could no longer fix purchase prices among themselves; and they were not allowed a monopoly of the sale of gum outside the colony. In place of this system the Bordeaux firms at St Louis tried to keep the trade carefully regulated in the river markets (*escales*) by allowing their middlemen (for the most part African buyers) to arrange the annual payments made to the Moors with goods forwarded on credit. But African traders found it difficult to buy goods from, or sell gum to, anyone but the accredited import-export merchant houses. By 1876, after a series of bad years, there is evidence that this close control of the gum trade was breaking down. Competition for supplies among the middlemen was fierce; some St Louis firms sent salaried employees up-river to undercut traders using goods on credit. By the end of the 1870's there was a serious problem of unstable prices in the gum markets. The smaller African buyers wanted to break away from their obligations to the merchants.⁴ Their position was directly threatened by a new generation of paid African clerks, while they themselves were prohibited from importing or exporting on their own account by the high cost of licences and by lack of credit.

In 1880, as a result of a petition from Maurel and Prom who were still using the independent African middlemen, the governor's administrative council

¹ *Procès-verbaux du Conseil supérieur des Colonies (séances 1884)*, pp. 9–11. The *Conseil général* in Senegal, however, did not cease opposing the guinea tariff till 1889, when it was tempted into the protectionist camp by the promise of a substantial rebate on goods of French origin.—*Sénégal et dépendances, Procès-verbaux et délibérations du Conseil général: 1888–1889* (Paris, 1890), pp. 97–369.

² A.N.O.-M. Sénégal, xiii, 74. Reports by Grodet, 20 June 1886, and Inspector Carnavant, 1 June 1888.

³ *Ibid.* 31b. Report by the *Chef du service de l'Intérieur*, Massy, to the *Conseil d'administration*, 5 and 6 June 1878.

⁴ *Ibid.* Petition by African traders to Brière de L'Isle, 1878.

passed an ordinance to establish "free trade" on the river, by abolishing the duties paid by firms to the Moors, in favour of a general export duty on gum.¹

It is possible to see in all this that control of the import of guinea cloth (used extensively in the gum trade) was a factor in the administration's relations with the agents of Bordeaux firms. In 1875-6 the St Louis agents were prepared to concede a differential duty (against the views of their metropolitan offices) in return for the reorganization of an unstable market.² After 1880, when the legislation regulating the gum trade had been passed and approved by the *Conseil général*, it was found that the only people not consulted—the Moors—made the whole scheme unworkable. They refused to forgo their customary presents in favour of a system of fixed prices; and in retaliation they closed down many of the *escales* until there was a complete stoppage, 1885-6.³ Many firms turned to groundnuts during this period of expanding communications; and after the failure of the administration to set the gum trade in order, their agents resisted the differential tariff on guinea cloth. Another point which kept opposition to the guinea tariff strong in Senegal, long after it had been accepted in Bordeaux, was the fear among commercial agents that neighbouring colonies (Gambia, Portuguese Guinea, Sierra Leone) might reciprocate against French arms and spirits.⁴ A final argument which was sometimes urged in favour of free trade was the use made by the administration itself of construction materials of foreign origin in the Senegal railway programme.

But whatever the attitudes of the merchant houses, the idea of "free trade" in French colonies and in areas adjacent to them on the West African coast had a relatively brief history. It was gradually defeated under pressure from metropolitan and Indian manufacturing interests in the 1870's. In this respect, the guinea tariff preference, although economically insignificant, was important for its revelation of changing positions on the part of traders, officials, and parliamentarians at a time when France was about to expand into the interior of the western Sudan. The Senegal administration, in step with French India, saw more advantage in protection than the import-export firms. The agents of the firms, however, were prepared to support a discriminatory duty in return for administrative assistance in stabilizing the gum market. In France, the debate was a minor issue in the general argument about colonial preference and the value of colonies to national industry. In this discussion the regional chambers of commerce were at variance with each other (the great ports siding with the free traders against Reims, Paris, and Rouen). Opinions in the ministries were also divided between that of the Marine and Colonies which in 1875 favoured colonial fiscal autonomy and of the Ministries of Commerce and Finance which were for greater protection. Within a few years the Department of Colonies in the Ministry of Marine gradually supported the case for special treatment put forward by Pondicherry interests—as much on financial grounds as economic ones. Once this case had been recognized in the Decree of 1877, the differential tariff in Senegal was left intact. In the early 1880's the Old Colonies restored their own Customs

¹ Ibid. Maurel and Prom to Brière de L'Isle, 3 Jan. 1879; *arrêté*, 14 Oct. 1880, *Conseil d'administration*, Oct. 1880; Decree, 22 March 1880.

² Ibid. St Louis Chamber of Commerce, minutes, 5 Dec. 1876.

³ Ibid. XIII, 32, Genouille to Ministry of Marine, 20 Dec. 1886; *Moniteur du Sénégal*, 24 Feb. 1885.

⁴ *Procès-verbaux du Conseil général*, 15 June 1888, p. 97.

differentials abandoned in 1866. This movement in the colonial markets, seen in conjunction with the 1881 general tariff, marked a definite swing towards protection which culminated in the Méline Tariff a decade later.

In the context of West African partition, the guinea tariff preference was also looked on by foreign traders as further evidence of the need to stake out territorial claims on the coast, in order to counter exclusive national monopolies. In a sense, Brière de L'Isle was correct in charging French traders with only partial adherence to the doctrines of "free trade". The navigation of the Senegal was prohibited to all foreign vessels; apart from the guinea tariff, a differential was extended to other goods by means of anchorage duties in 1880, levied at the rate of one franc per ton on foreign vessels, compared with 50 centimes on French vessels; the Ogue River in Equatorial Africa was closed to foreign trade; and in Gabon, from 1883, there was a Customs rebate of 20 per cent for goods of French origin.¹ After the breakdown of attempts at equalization of tariffs in 1879 and the gradual conflict of fiscal and trading rights in the neighbourhood of Senegal, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Lagos, there was a feeling in both the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office that the protection of British traders entailed formal occupation of areas left to "informal" treaty rights and consular control.²

The guinea tariff preference, therefore, made for both fiscal and economic reasons, stands in a tradition of restriction which was much older than the movement towards freer trade developed during the Second Empire. And it was not without weight in the sum of Anglo-French differences in West Africa at the beginning of the final partition.

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¹ *Correspondence Respecting Differential Treatment of British Trade in French Colonies*. Foreign Office Confidential Print (1884), no. 4992, Crowe to Lyons, 20 June 1884.

² This theme is developed in the correspondence dealing with the Anglo-French agreement of 1882, the French reoccupation of Porto-Novo in 1883 and the commercial conflict with French firms in the Lower Niger. See *Correspondence respecting Affairs in the Oil Rivers*, Foreign Office Confidential Print (1883), no. 4825; P.R.O. Colonial Office 879/20, *Trade in the Niger and the Action of the French in that District* (1883), no. 259; C.O. 879/21, nos. 278, 279.