

"TRADE BARRIERS TO KNOWLEDGE"

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation has listed the tariffs and other Governmental measures which in 43 countries hamper the free flow of educational, scientific and cultural material between nations. While the publication is intended primarily as a handbook for those concerned with importing and exporting such material, its compilers hope that its publication will stimulate the campaigns being waged in many countries to reduce and finally abolish these barriers. So many and so complex are existing regulations that individuals and organisations are discouraged from making the international exchanges essential to the advance of civilisation. At a time when more than half the world's population is still illiterate, and vast areas are under-developed or devastated by war, artificial restrictions which limit the means to dispel ignorance cannot be tolerated. They can and should be lifted, declares this publication.

Before listing the tariffs, quotas, exchange controls, sales taxes, etc., operating in each of the countries surveyed, the Manual traces briefly the historical development of economic controls on the dissemination of knowledge. A century ago, "informational materials" benefited by the movement in favour of free trade. In Europe a number of commercial treaties inspired by liberal principles were concluded. Thus in 1860, the United Kingdom negotiated with France a commercial treaty providing specifically for free trade in books. Despite the subsequent return to protectionist practice in various European countries, books continued to be immune from the tariffs which affected most classes of goods. By 1906 France, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Japan and many smaller countries had removed all barriers to the free flow of books. Italy, Russia, Spain and the U.S.A. freely admitted foreign language books, imposing duty only on imported books printed in the native language.

The World War of 1914-18 brought tariffs and import licensing designed to give Governments control over foreign trade. Many articles of educational value were deemed "non-essential" and suffered accordingly. Further harm was done by the division of the world into currency blocs, and the introduction of quota systems following the economic depression of the 1930's. With the exception of educational films, which 24 States agreed in 1933 to exempt from import duties, political pre-occupations diverted attention from the damage done to science, education and culture by tariffs, quotas and exchange controls. The destruction of the multilateral trading system by the second World War reduced to a mere trickle the international exchange of "informational material" at a time when it was most needed. Faced by "extremely complex payments difficulties," most countries have confined their trade to what they considered "essential goods" at the expense of books, films, newsprint and similar articles.

Committed by its Constitution to encourage "co-operation among nations in all branches of intellectual activity," and including "the exchange of publications, objects of artistic and scientific interest and other materials of information," U.N.E.S.C.O. has sponsored a variety of proposals to overcome trade barriers to knowledge. These include international agreements, an international coupon scheme designed to overcome "currency difficulties," and propaganda work, of which this publication "Trade Barriers to Knowledge," is an

example. In all this work, U.N.E.S.C.O. has achieved some success. Here and there barriers have been lowered. Sales taxes and tariffs have been reduced, quotas increased. The volume of trade between some countries has been increased.

The object of finally removing all barriers to these particular commodities is most desirable. Yet there is something ironical about an organisation which consists of delegates from protectionist countries, their salaries paid by protectionist Governments, urging these Governments to free one section of international trade. It lies within the power of their several Governments each to abolish all artificial restrictions on these and all other goods, *irrespective of what other nations may or may not do*. The United Kingdom does not apply Customs duties or other charges on the importation of, for example, newsprint. Yet Austria, Belgium, Ceylon, Denmark and other countries right through the alphabet do. Honduras, Lebanon and Thailand do not restrict imports of newsprint and other printing paper by exchange control, licensing and quotas, because it is not in their own interest to do so. Ignoring the import regulations adopted by other nations, India, Iraq and Ireland included, and without recourse to international agreement of any kind, they have gone about their own business their own way. What can thus be done by *some* countries regarding *some* commodities can equally be done by any country, or all countries, with all goods. Sir Robert Peel did not need the advice of an international organisation, nor reciprocal trading agreements, duly ratified by foreign Parliaments, to abolish the Corn Laws which starved the bodies of Britons a hundred years ago. The tariffs, quotas and, more especially, exchange controls which to-day starve their intellects could just as readily be scrapped.

The free trader is indebted to U.N.E.S.C.O. for this book. Its facts and arguments form a useful weapon in his armoury while, by drawing attention to the harm done to one field of human activity by restricting trade, the Manual strengthens the hands of those in all countries who argue for the abolition of all interferences with men's inherent right to exchange among themselves to their mutual advantage the products of hand and brain.

One word of warning is necessary, however. Where tariffs have been imposed primarily to raise revenue, and exchange controls have been introduced to limit expenditure of foreign currency, to free trade in cultural, scientific and educational material *while maintaining protection* will inevitably lead to increased tariffs on other goods. This is no criticism of U.N.E.S.C.O.; it is a matter beyond their concern and competence. But it would be a hollow victory for their protracted deliberations if bread and bacon are made dearer so that books and stuffed birds may cross frontiers freely. P. R. S.

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