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GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE

The Seeds of War

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Part 4

Could a man of 10,000 BC or a man from the moon or Mars be less astonished when walking down our streets with one of our protectionist statesmen than was the Indian chief from the great plains when he first was shown the sights of our big eastern cities? His guide explained the marvels of the white man's labor saving devices but he saw on every corner throngs of unemployed? Might not this moon-man conclude, just as did the Indian chief, that "Pale-face, him big fool"?

We are told by no less an authority than that great world traveling engineer, Mr. Herbert Hoover, that "Without continued interchange of tropical products, with those of the temperate zone, whole sections of the world, including our own country, must stagnate and degenerate in civilization. We could not run an automobile, we could not operate a dynamo or use a telephone, were we without imported raw materials from the tropics. In fact the whole structure of our advancing civilization would crumble and the great mass of mankind would travel backward if the foreign trade of the world were to cease." This is what Mr. Hoover said in 1928. In 1930 he signed the Hawley-Smoot tariff bill which did its share toward making us "stagnate and degenerate."

But our protectionist friends in reply maintain that Secretary Hull's free trade policy and reciprocal trade treaties must result in America becoming the dumping ground for all of the cheaply made goods from the rest of the world.

Now wherein lies the truth? Let us consider first principles for the solution and then apply this test to actual life.

When we speak of a protective tariff we are thinking of a trade wall that keeps out of a designated area commodities that would compete with commodities produced within that area.

Is a nation a geographical whole and by nature self sufficient? If such is the case then England, that is the British Isles, is geographically an entity and should practice protectionism with unbounding success. It should have to trade with no one, but the reverse is true. With a population density twice that of Japan, England needs must trade with the world if she is to survive.

Perhaps England is not a good example, let's look at America. In the early days of this country we had a federal revenue tariff as a means of revenue which could be applied against all foreign nations, but we were forbidden to have a tariff between the states. Geographically the United States was a haphazard conglomerate on the Eastern seaboard. We could practice a tariff against Canada, which geographically was part of us. We could practice a tariff against Louisiana, which had not yet come into the Union. Then, as the nation expanded, we took in Louisiana, and found that we could survive better with it as a state and practicing free trade than with it out of the Union and practicing tariff wars.

When Scott prepared for the Mexican war Texas was on the list of nations against whom a tariff was desirable, for she was part of Mexico, as was Arizona, New Mexico, etc. When subsequently they came into our union as states the tariff boundary was pushed further and further away from the original 13 states, and as that barrier has been dropped for each of those commonwealths all of us have prospered. What is this extraordinary condition that makes California of pre-Fremont days an enemy, and to be kept off with a tariff, and the California of Statehood one of the pillars of our civilization? The high Sierras have not changed, the Pueblo Indians still climb to their shelters as did their fathers a thousand years ago, but now man through the length and breadth of these United States may move in peace and trade as he will.

Why then do we have barriers at the Mexican border when at one time Arizona was part of Mexico? Can any one show that on the Canadian side of the border the grass is different than on our side, or that cattle need less care, or that men have less desires? Were Canada and Mexico to come into our Union the tariff would cease to exist and we all would prosper immeasurably. Why then have a tariff?

If the Central American Republics and those farther South were to request Statehood would not these very tariffs by which we now fight each other and injure ourselves cease at once? Would not the cessation of these barriers enormously facilitate trade and make for social intercourse between nations as between states? Does not the old proverb hold true to nations just as infallibly as it does to men: "He who would do evil to another injures first himself"?

If a tariff is good for nations why is it not good for states, for cities and towns, and lastly for families?

We are told that we must protect our infant manganese industry which before the war produced 20,000 tons. We must protect it from the British and Russian industries that imported 1,200,000 tons. We must protect our amebic industry and we do protect it \$12,500,000 worth annually. It would be cheaper to close the business and retire every man who works in it on a \$50,000 a year annuity. If we protect manganese why not protect everything else? Why should not we all be protected and subsidized? This is the very question and attitude which is festering in our nation, and while we profess to believe in equality of opportunity we brazenly favor a few at the cost of the many.

But that our tariffs are not just against people of another nation let us consider the following: Wisconsin is one of the great dairy states and produces quantities of butter which it sells to the rest of the nation. Butter is expensive, and while we all like it we cannot all afford it. The south's main crops is cotton and cottonseed oil is used in the manufacture of oleomargarine. Oleomargarine is a cheap substitute for butter, and so for those who cannot afford the Wisconsin butter the South's oleomargarine comes next. Wisconsin wants to sell her butter in the South but does not want competition from oleomargarine. Accordingly she has done everything possible to impose prohibitive barriers, even up to taxing oleomargarine five cents a pound. For the Wisconsin dairy industry this is fine, but for the poor man who cannot afford butter it is just five cents more per pound for a substitute. The oleomargarine you buy is white, not because the manufacturer could not have added color more cheaply than you, but because if the maker added the color a prohibitive tax would have to be paid.

To recognize the menace in our state barriers but glance at the multiplicity of State Highway regulations as to axle loads, and you will appreciate how our state police weighing stations are in very truth customs houses and tariff barriers to the exchange of American goods.

Try to find a state legislature where there is not a railroad lobby bent on increasing the difficulties of truck transit, by claiming that the trucks that move our produce to market are too heavy for our highways, or any of a thousand other objections by which they pose as interested in the public good while actually securing protection at the public expense.

Man's society is a reflection of himself, but a condition in which each cell within our body would be protected against every other cell is inconceivable. So likewise is the condition of protection incompatible with growing civilization where interchange of effort and interest is the essential for survival.