

New trade treaty aids U.S. economy

With House approval already in place and the Senate likely to follow suit, the United States is poised to add its name to the list of more than 100 other countries participating in the newest revision of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

It is an intelligent move that will yield substantial benefits for the United States, and while some naysayers have criticized the agreement as a threat to U.S. sovereignty and a danger to certain American industries, the potential gains far exceed the feared losses.

The new GATT treaty will create, and effectively be replaced by, a new World Trade Organization. The WTO would be an international body capable of making binding decisions on member countries' trade regulations. The idea is to lower tariffs, eliminate import quotas and otherwise reduce impediments to free international trade, so that no country will enjoy an unfair advantage in global commerce.

Critics, including consumer advocacy guru Ralph Nader, have argued that the new agreement would allow other countries the right to overturn U.S. environmental and safety regulations. This is a legitimate concern, but history provides the greatest reason to put those concerns to rest.

Under the old GATT, which has been in place since 1948, the U.S. has been charged with only 33 complaints from other countries. Most of those complaints, once considered by GATT panels of legal experts, have been decided in the United States' favor. There is no reason to suspect this would change under the WTO.

Other opponents of the new agreement, such as conservative Pat Buchanan, complain that the one-country, one-vote format of the WTO gives small member countries, like Surinam, too much power relative to economic giants such as the United States.

However, the old GATT operated under similar rules and was still dominated by the United States and Europe. Major economic powers will have a de facto veto power simply because they — and any other member nation, for that matter — are allowed to withdraw from the WTO with just six months notice.

Admittedly, not everyone wins with the new agreement. U.S. trade regulations designed to protect the American clothing and textile industries would have to be largely abandoned, but these industries have been on the decline for decades anyway.

Major gains will be made by U.S. farmers, whose products could finally compete in heavily protected markets such as Japan's. The American software and entertainment industries would enjoy huge upswings, as well.

The United States already has some of the world's most liberal and lax trade policies. Under the WTO, U.S. tariffs in some areas will go down, it's true, but other countries will have to cut taxes on imported goods even more — sometimes by more than half.

The Senate should follow the House's example by not listening to the claims of paranoiacs like Buchanan and Ross Perot, and by taking this opportunity to help facilitate more fair and efficient global commerce.



OPINION

Republicans stymie culture



PAUL VAN SICKLE

I am scared. All the talk of conservative leadership coming back to Congress and the possibility of a new Republican president, quite frankly, frightens me. Not because of criminalization of abortion. Not because of the sanctioning of school prayer. Those things scare me too, but what really makes me shake is the fate our culture will suffer.

That's right, I said our culture.

See, I have this theory that the leadership in Washington has an effect on America's popular culture. Does anyone remember the 1970s? Disco? Leisure suits? The cancellation of the *Brady Bunch*? It has only been in the last few years that we have been able to recover from the stagnant nature of the 1980s, and the thought of returning to that should be enough to make just about everyone vote Democrat in two years.

I can't prove Ronald Reagan is responsible for the breakdown of good taste during those years, but between the years of 1973 and 1989, nothing happened — unless you count leather ties, Burt Reynolds' movies and *Three's Company*. Sadly, nothing interesting happened while Republicans were in office.

We can examine conservative leadership through recent history to prove my point. The 1950s brought the United States one of the most conformist and conservative periods in American history. It brought us the suburbs and Senator McCarthy. The term "bubble gum" was originated to refer to the music of the time.

During the 1960s, popular culture exploded, albeit far beyond what anyone expected it would. It was probably a backlash against the conservative atti-

tudes they had been experiencing for the last 20 years. Music, although largely drug-influenced, became experimental and more progressive. Clothing of the time finally came away from the hat-and-suit outfits of the past, and both the civil rights and the women's movements underwent tremendous upheaval and progression, which they had not experienced since the 1920s. The Kennedys (Democrat, and relatively liberal) were in power.

Then the seventies hit. Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Bell-bottoms had refused to die, and disco was taking hold as a (gulp) popular music form. *Saturday Night Fever* was nominated for an Academy Award, and polyester became the fabric to wear. Many of the great bands of the late sixties were still around, like the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, so music wasn't completely repulsive, yet one might have gotten the feeling it wasn't going anywhere new.

The *Brady Bunch* was canceled, as was the *Partridge Family*. *Star Trek* began making animated episodes, and so did *Scooby Doo*, but let's face it, was the show really that good?

The drug culture was still in force, but it seemed to have become more a way to escape reality rather than the form of expression it had been 10 years ago. Despite what our contemporaries would say, the slacker culture actually started at this time.

I hope I don't have to recap the eighties for you, because it really frightened me looking back. I'll only mention Ronald Reagan.

The nineties have brought us

“ In the 70s, bell-bottoms had refused to die, and disco was taking hold as a (gulp) popular music form. ”

Bill Clinton, and the most Democratic Congress we have had in some time. It has also brought us a resurgence of creativity in the music business that we haven't seen since the sixties. Interestingly, much of the new music coming out appears to have been influenced by much of the culture of the sixties.

Alternative culture has mirrored that of the sixties in many ways, at least in its interest in drug use. The film industry has seen a rise in popularity and diversity in the types of movies it produces. The gay movement has progressed as far as it ever has in American history, as has the women's movement.

It is possible that the type of leadership in office describes the kinds of attitudes the public holds. Popular culture typically mirrors the attitudes of the people in general. Otherwise, I suppose the only proof I have is pretty circumstantial. Still, my case holds that if conservative leadership is let back into the White House in 1996, we may be thrust back into the muck that was the seventies and eighties.

That is why I am scared. I couldn't face the eighties again. Could you?

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