

PROTECTION OR FREE TRADE?

BY HENRY GEORGE. CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY.

Not only is it true that its examination cannot fail to throw light upon other social-economic questions, but it leads directly to that great "Labor Question" which every day as it passes brings more and more to the foreground in every country of the civilized world.

In one way or another, we must get upon the tariff question. Throughout the civilized world it everywhere lies within the range of practical politics. Even where protection is most thoroughly accepted there not only exists a more or less active minority who seek its overthrow, but the constant modifications that are being made or proposed in existing tariffs are as constantly bringing the subject into the sphere of political action, while even in that country in which free trade has seemed to be most strongly rooted, the policy of protection is again raising its head.

For more than a generation the slavery agitation, the war to which it led and the problems growing out of that war, have absorbed political attention in the U. S. That era has passed, and a new one is beginning, in which economic questions must force themselves to the front.

It behooves not merely those who aspire to political leadership, but those who would conscientiously use their influence and their votes, to come to intelligent conclusions upon this question, and especially is this incumbent upon the men whose duty is the emancipation of labor.

Some of these men are now supporters of protection; others are opposed to it. This division, which must place in political opposition to each other those who are at one in ultimate purpose, ought not to exist. One thing or the other must be true—either protection does give better opportunities to labor and raises wages, or it does not.

If it does, we who feel that labor has not its rightful opportunities and does not get its fair wages should know it, that we may unite, not merely in sustaining present protection, but in demanding far more.

If it does not, then, even if not positively harmful to the working classes, protection is a delusion and a snare, which distracts attention and divides strength, and the quicker it is seen that tariffs can not raise wages the quicker are those who wish to raise wages likely to find out what can. The next thing to knowing how anything can be done, is to know how it cannot be done.

rate of wages the state has no concern. I hold with those who deem the increase of wages a legitimate purpose of public policy. To raise and maintain wages is the great object that all who live by wages ought to seek, and workmen are right in supporting any measure that will attain that object.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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