

PROTECTION OR FREE TRADE?

BY HENRY GEORGE.
CHAPTER II. (CONTINUED.)
CLEARING GROUND.

What, however, in the United States at least, has tended more than any appeals to national feeling to dispose the masses in favor of protection, has been the difference of attitude toward the working classes assumed by the contending policies. In its beginnings in this country protection was strongest in those sections where labor had the largest opportunities and was held in the highest esteem, while the strength of free trade has been the greatest in the section in which up to the civil war slavery prevailed. The political party which successfully challenged the aggressions of the slave power also declared for a protective tariff, while the men who tried to rend the Union in order to establish a nation based upon the right of capital to own labor, prohibited protection in the constitution they formed. The explanation of these facts is, that in one section of the country there were many industries that could be protected, while in the other section there were few. While American cotton culture was in its earlier stages, Southern cotton planters were willing enough to avail themselves of a heavy duty on India cottons, and Louisiana sugar growers have always been persistent sticklers for protection. But when cotton raised for export became the great staple of the South, protection in the absence of manufacturers, was not only clearly opposed to dominant Southern interests, but assumed the character of a sectional imposition by which the South was taxed for the benefit of the North. This sectional division on the tariff question had no reference whatever to the conditions of labor, but in many minds its effect has been to associate protection with respect for labor and free trade with its enslavement.

Irrespective of this there has been much in the presentation of the two theories to dispose the working classes toward protection and against free trade. Workingmen generally feel that they do not get a fair reward for their labor. They know that what prevents them from successfully demanding higher wages is the competition of others anxious for work, and they are naturally disposed to favor the doctrine or party that proposes to shield them from competition. This, its advocates urge, is the aim of protection. And whatever protection accomplishes, protectionists at least profess regard for the working classes, and proclaim their desire to use the powers of government to raise and maintain wages. Protection, they declare, means the protection of labor. So constantly is this reiterated that many suppose that this is the real derivation of the term, and that "protection" is short for "protection of labor."

On the other hand, the opponents of protection have, for the most part, not only professed no special interest in the well-being of the working classes, and no desire to raise wages, but have denied the justice of attempting to use the powers of government for this purpose. The doctrines of free trade have been intertwined with teachings that throw upon the laws of nature responsibility for the pover-

ty of the laboring class, and foster a callous indifference to their sufferings. On the same grounds on which they have condemned legislative interference with commerce, free trade economists have condemned interference with hours of labor, with the rate of wages, and even with the employment of women and children, and have united protection and trades unionism in the same denunciation, proclaiming supply and demand to be the only true and rightful regulator of the price of labor as of the price of pig iron. While protecting against restrictions upon the production of wealth, they have ignored the monstrous injustice of its distribution, and have treated as fair and normal that competition in which human beings, deprived of their natural opportunities of employing themselves, are compelled by titing want to bid against one another.

All this is true. But it is also true that the needs of labor require more than kind words, and are not to be satisfied by such soft phrases as we address to a horse when we want to catch him that we may put a bit in his mouth and a saddle on his back. Let me ask those who are disposed to regard protection as favorable to the aspirations of labor, to consider whether it can be true that what labor needs is to be protected?

To admit that labor needs protection is to acknowledge its inferiority; it is to acquiesce in an assumption that degrades the workman to the position of a dependant, and leads logically to the claim that the employee is bound to vote in the interest of the employer who provides him with work. There is something in the very word "protection" that ought to make workingmen cautious of accepting anything presented to them under it. The protection of the masses has in all times been the pretense of tyranny—the plea of monarchy, of aristocracy, of special privilege of every kind. The slave owners justified slavery as protecting the slaves. British misrule in Ireland is upheld on the ground that it is for the protection of the Irish. But whether under a monarchy or under a republic, is there an instance in the history of the world in which the "protection" of the laboring masses has not meant their oppression? The protection that those who have got the law making power in their hands have given to labor, has at best always been the protection that man gives to cattle—he protects them that he may use and eat them.

There runs through a protectionist professions of concern for labor a tone of condescending patronage more insulting to men who feel the true dignity of labor than frankly expressed contempt could be—an assumption that pauperism is the natural condition of labor, to which it must everywhere fall unless benevolently protected. It is never intimated that the land owner or the capitalist needs protection. They, it is always assumed, can take care of themselves. It is only the poor workingman who must be protected.

What is labor that it should so need protection? Is not labor the creator of capital, the producer of all wealth? Is it not the men who labor that feed and clothe all others? Is it not true, as has been said, that the three great orders of society are "workingmen, beggar-

men and thieves?" Have, then, does it come that workingmen alone need protection? When the first man came upon the earth who was there to protect him or to provide him with employment? Yet when ever or however he came he must have managed to get a living and raise a family!

When we consider that labor is the producer of all wealth, is it not evident that the impoverishment and dependence of labor are abnormal conditions resulting from restrictions and usurpations, and that instead of accepting protection, what labor should demand is freedom. That those who advocate any extension of freedom choose to go no further than their own special purpose is no reason why freedom itself should be distrusted. For years it was held that the assertion of our Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights, applied only to white men. But this in no wise vitiated the principle. Nor does it vitiate the principle that it is still held to apply only to political rights.

And so, that freedom of trade has been advocated by those who have no sympathy with labor should not prejudice us against it. Can the road to the industrial emancipation of the masses be any other than that of freedom?

CHAPTER III. OF METHOD.

On the deck of a ship men are pulling on a rope and on her mast a yard is rising. A man aloft is clinging to the tackle that raises the yard. Is his weight assisting to raise or retard it? That, of course depends upon what part of the tackle his weight is thrown upon, and can only be told by noting whether its tendency is with or against the efforts of those who pull on deck.

If in things so simple we may easily err assuming cause from effect, how much more liable to error are such assumptions in regard to the complicated phenomena of social life.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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