

TARIFF REFORM-

SPEECH OF HON. ASHBEL P. FITCH.

THE TARIFF.

Unless the tariff men take heed, unless they consent to a rational and considerate adjustment of the tariff such as only can be made by the full light that a careful statistical study of the subject will bring, I fear from them, more than from any other source, a reaction which will bring us by and by into free trade and all its consequences of evil to the manufacturing interests of the country.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, and having under consideration the bill (H. R. 1015) to reduce taxation and simplify the laws in relation to the collection of the revenue.

Mr. FITCH said: Mr. CHAIRMAN: In the brief remarks which I desire to make on the bill under consideration, in the spirit of the words which I have just read, I do not propose to discuss at length the arguments which gentlemen on both sides of the House have already fully presented, nor shall I attempt to view or to put a new meaning into the great mass of customs figures which have been so carefully prepared and explained by the gentlemen who have preceded me. I do not intend to debate the question whether or not we shall have a tariff, or whether that tariff shall be one for protection or not.

I assume that, whether this bill passes or not, we shall continue to have in this country a protective tariff and that protective tariff, if it be fairly adjusted, if its burdens be distributed with justice so far as interests of my constituents are concerned, I expect to defend and advocate as long as I live. And as long as I live, whenever I find in the tariff laws or in any other of the laws which affect the people whom I represent anything which seems to me in any degree unfair or unjust, I shall not hesitate to advocate their revision and amendment. [Applause.] I propose here to discuss at this time only what seems to me to be the question before the House, whether or not the present tariff and the free-list which accompany it should remain unchanged during the existence of the Fiftieth Congress.

In the discussion of this question I shall not attempt to imitate the gentlemen who have with such wonderful patience and industry examined the views of the earlier Presidents and the construction of the tariff of 1789, and who have so carefully reviewed the whole course of legislation on this subject since the foundation of the Republic. They have analyzed for you every fluctuation in the prices of our manufactures, and they have accounted satisfactorily for each financial crisis in the history of the country. Every statesman who has in any way identified himself with this question has been quoted by them, and every text-book and essay on the subject has been examined. Each gentleman has found in the same material the most convincing proof that his particular theory was correct and that of his opponent mistaken.

For my part, and with the utmost deference to the learning and ability of gentlemen who have spoken, I am forced to believe that, owing to the changes in transportation, invention of new machinery, the growth and development of the country, and improvements which have accomplished modern civilization here and all over the world, the problem presented to us is entirely different from that considered by the earlier contestants over these questions. It seems to me that no two countries in Europe are to-day more strikingly different in the manner in which their inhabitants live, their means of communication, and their business customs than are the United States of fifty years ago and the country and people whose interests we are considering here.

I desire therefore to leave to other gentlemen who have done it so well the consideration of all the earlier precedents, and to speak only of what the Republican party in our day and generation has promised to do, and to consider what duties are incumbent on us here and now in connection with that promise. I propose also to speak of what I consider to be the interest of the people in my own district, whose condition and whose wants are naturally better known to me than those of others. It can hardly be denied that the present tariff was largely made up in this way. Different interests in special districts sent information and delegations to Washington, urging the enactment of duties specially favorable to them, and sometimes elected Congressmen especially with a view to obtaining a protection which they deemed necessary for their district. It is not probable that the views of the persons represented in this way were always unselfish, and it is possible that the advocates of these particular interests were not unwilling to profit by taxes which bore unequally upon other sections of the country.

It is easy to say, and everybody says, that the tariff should be adjusted to the necessities of the country, and that it should be so adjusted as to protect our manufactures, and that it should be so adjusted as to give us a fair competition with the foreign market, and that it should be so adjusted as to give us a fair competition with the foreign market, and that it should be so adjusted as to give us a fair competition with the foreign market.

legislate for our whole country and not for sections of it, and that this bill should be considered as to its effect on the people at large and not on particular classes. But how has it in fact been considered in this debate? One eloquent gentleman after another has told of the special needs of his district, and has protested solemnly against some proposed interference with the vested rights of his constituents in the present tariff. First of all, and above all, the gentlemen representing the farming interests have been heard. I have read, for instance, with profit, and almost with conviction, the argument of the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. Burrows] for the continuance of the present tariff in all its parts for the protection of the farmers, who, it seems to him, are now insufficiently protected, and with equal interest have studied the seconding appeal of his colleague and my friend, Mr. Brewer, to the same effect. Nothing could have pleased me more than the touching tribute from the gentleman from Maryland [Mr. McComas] to the virtues of the farming constituency, among which he is fortunate to live, unless it were the kindly offer of my genial and eloquent friend from Wisconsin [Mr. Guenther], the guardian of the American infant, to put a duty of 4 cents per dozen on the fourteen million dozens of eggs which are now imported free of duty, and which we in New York eat and are obliged to pay for in order to protect the American hen and her rural owner against the combined poultry of Europe.

I combined willingly the truth of all that the gentlemen say in the praise of their country constituents. We in New York have an intimate acquaintance with and a real liking for the New York State farmers, and will never willingly suffer them to be injured by any form of legislation if they will only be fair with us. It seems to us often that they hardly appreciate our friendship. It seems to us that they allow their representatives in the State Legislature to treat us unfairly at Albany. From there, in their wisdom, these representatives regulate our docks and control our street openings; they fix the height of our buildings and the depth of our sewers; they manage the quarantine in our harbor and they arrange the rate of fare on our elevated roads. We are relieved by their kindness from any particular responsibility or trouble about our local tax levy, and they improve, as seems to them necessary from time to time, the charter of our city. Above all, our morals and personal habits and the manner of our observance of the Sabbath are their special care. [Laughter.] They study with great personal attention the errors of our metropolis, and they prepare yearly new and elaborate schemes for our reformation. They vote enthusiastic indorsements of home rule in Ireland and explain to us at the same time that New York is hardly fitted to govern itself. We recognize the truth of all the praises which have been bestowed on the farmers in this debate by almost every gentleman who has spoken, but we will never let pass any opportunity to ask them to treat their city neighbors and friends more kindly. And while their interests in this bill are so carefully watched and protected, it is perhaps not unfair that one of us from the city should glance over his district and see if there are no people of whom we can say, as my eloquent friend from Iowa [Mr. Henderson] said of the farmers, that they are "hard-working, earnest, intelligent, frugal and moral," and whose interests may deserve some degree of consideration in connection with this bill.

The upper part of the city of New York is mainly a residence district. The majority of the people who live there live on fixed incomes paid them as salaries or wages every month, or by the proceeds of professional employment in which their incomes are limited. Some of them are architects, artists, clergymen; clerks in banks, insurance and law offices, journalists, musicians, lawyers, physicians, teachers, book-keepers, railroad employes, drivers, conductors, policemen, firemen, telegraph and telephone operators, salesmen, mechanical engineers, civil engineers, stenographers, printers and skilled mechanics of all sorts not employed in industries which have protection under the present tariff.

In that district lives, too, an army of deserving women who earn their living by unprotected labor, and often that of others dependent upon them. There is perhaps a necessity within the course of this long debate that somebody should say a word for these people. The farmer has his eloquent advocate trained in the county and State fairs, who is in arms to defend every product of his ground. The workmen in factories and the manufacturers have their special advocates, who lie awake at nights to study their interests and whose voices have been heard here every day since the beginning of this session, asking for one measure or another for their protection. Almost every class has had its advocates here, except perhaps the millionaires, whom nobody will own to represent, and who have no friends in this House.

Suppose, as examples of the class of people to whom I refer in the city of New York, we take the policeman, who guards our houses; the fireman, who will risk his life for our children; the reporter and the printer, who spend the night in preparing our morning papers; the carrier, who brings it through all kind of weather, and the locomotive engineer on the elevated railroad, who takes us up and down town. These classes of workmen have no direct protection. They are not overpaid, nor is their life more luxurious than it ought to be. The money which they draw at the end of every month is not more than they need, and they are often sorely pinched to buy even the taxed doll to fill the taxed Christmas stocking or to pay for the taxed medicine necessary for any member of the family.

Perhaps an impartial examination may show that these people are as intelligent, as patriotic, and as deserving of consideration in the matter now before the House as are the Rhode Island mill operators or the Kansas farmers. Their wishes and views may be even as important to the Republican party. If you are to get any Republican votes in New York City you must get them from these people. These classes gave you under the wise management of Arthur votes enough to keep down the Democratic majority in the city so that a Republican President was elected by the vote of the State of New York. They gave in my district a Republican an election to Congress, largely because his Democratic opponent refused to support any measure of tariff reform, and voted against the consideration of the Morrison bill.

You can hardly afford to pass these voters over in your desire to conciliate the factory operatives and the farmers, unless, indeed, you have decided to elect your candidate without the vote of New York State. I have had it explained to me that this can easily be done. It is a favorite theory apparently of the same gentlemen who have decided that the city workmen who gave the most outspoken and determined free-trader in this country, Mr. Henry George, 68,000 votes at an election when we could only get 60,000 for so good a candidate as Theodore Roosevelt, are wild with enthusiasm for the absolute maintenance of the present tariff; and of those other wise leaders of the party whose declared policy is to alienate the German voters who are still true to the Republican party, in order to please the Protectionists, who laugh at their concessions and have always sought and always will seek the downfall of that party.

I for one am not willing to accept such theories or acknowledge such leadership. In the interest of the Republican party, and in the interest of common fairness, I propose to ask gentlemen on this side of the House to consider for a moment how the present tariff, which we have promised to revise, now affects the people whom I have described, and to consider what they pay taxes on in the general distribution of the customs taxes now in force.

They pay upon everything. Look for a moment at what they eat. There is a tariff duty on beef, on pork, hams and bacon, butter and lard, cheese, molasses, grapes, wheat flour, oats, corn meal, rye, barley, potatoes, raisins, vinegar, honey, rice and rice meal, sugar, extract of west, pickles, currants, apples, salt, and condensed milk. The list is substantially an inventory of the stock of the grocery store at which they buy. There is a duty on the coal which warms them, on their cooking and household utensils, on their entire clothing from their hats to their stockings, on the medicines given them when they are sick, and on the roofs over their heads. What the professional men object to pay is shown by a letter which I will ask to have printed as a part of my remarks.

NEW YORK, MAY 15, '88. To Hon. ASHBEL P. FITCH, M. C. I beg to address you as a member interested in the revision of the tariff. My plea is in behalf of instruments used in scientific medicine, which is the same as saying that they contribute to the exact information of the profession at large, and are without money profit to the possessor.

I can make you understand me by citing my own case. For six years I have been pathologist to the New York Foundling Asylum, making post mortem examinations for purposes of study upon the children that die, and record the findings in detail. I have contributed to the professional stock of extract records nearly 1,500 cases. These are available for all time to the profession for reference. A complete case for purposes of study consists in a carefully recorded clinical history, with post mortem findings and microscope examination of the structural changes in the tissues of the organs. Now, it is the expert work of the pathologist to make the examinations, both gross and microscopic, of the ravages of disease, and it is upon this kind of work that medicine is to advance to the dignity of an exact science.

For my microscope I sent to Jena, where are made the best instruments for my work. At the factory it cost \$94; to get it out of the custom house 40 per cent. more. Later I sent for an oil immersion lens, and paid \$80 at the factory, 40 per cent. more at the custom house. Hermann Katsch, of Berlin, makes an instrument called microtome, for cutting infinitely thin sections or shavings from the surface of a piece of an organ that die, hardened in alcohol. Herr Katsch is the only man in the world who makes this particular variety of the instrument. To prepare a section thin enough for careful study under the high powers of the microscope, this mechanism is necessary. To get this microtome from the custom house I had to wait two weeks and pay a duty of 40 per cent. on its factory price.

The celebrated Dr. Koch, of Berlin, published a report of the cholera commission, conducted under the auspices of the Government. At most twenty men in this country could require this work, and they must needs pay 25 per cent. duty to get it from the custom house after paying its publisher's price and freight. What use could this report be to these scientists? To aid them in maturing methods of recognizing the disease when it appeared on ship-board in our harbors; to devise means to suppress it; to protect the country. It was to the expert work of one such scientist that the city of New York must give its gratitude that a certain steamship just developing cholera among its steerage passengers was detained at quarantine and the city escaped overwhelming infection. For Koch's report he paid 25 per cent. duty and never received anything from the city or Government.

When we look up from our laboratory tables, microscopes, microtomes, and alcohol—taxed to suffocation—and read in the papers of the United States Treasury filled with suffocation, we reflect that our scientific work takes much time, brings no money return, increases our outgoes, and has not even the encouragement of the Government nor liability. Respectfully yours, DR. WM. P. NORTHRUP.

Is it unfair to ask for these people a little consideration? Grant that we are to have a protective tariff; must we have this particular one forever? The gentleman from Indiana [Mr. Browne], whose argument against this bill has interested me greatly, said the other day, "Human wisdom has never devised statutes of taxation or methods of industrial development which are not subject to just criticism." I can not put in any better words my conviction that this tariff is a fair subject of discussion. We had lately a Republican President, under whose able and skillful management the Republican party was an important factor in political affairs in New York City, and who gained for us the last victory which our party has had in the city of New York. Few men knew the people of that city of all classes as well as he did. He had been collector at the port of New York and knew well the practical effect of the tariff, and he said in his message:

I recommend an enlargement of the free-list so as to include within it the numerous articles which yield considerable revenue, a simplification of the complex and inconsistent schedule of duties upon certain manufactures, particularly those of cotton, iron and steel, and a substantial reduction of the duties upon those articles, and upon sugar, molasses, wool and woolen goods. On such Republican doctrines as that I am satisfied to rest: On such Republican doctrines as that we can ask for votes in the city of New York from the classes I have spoken of, and we will not then be forced to stand and defend, before people whose monthly wages hardly suffice for their necessary expenses, a tariff which imposes 25 per cent. on India-rubber boots and shoes and 10 per cent. on precious stones. [Applause.] The commerce of New York, where most of the customs duties are collected, while it asks in vain for the money which is necessary to improve the water ways where \$147,000,000 of our revenue is collected every year, pays cheerfully taxes which are used to keep up custom houses where nothing is ever collected, and to carry the mails on routes which use up the great profits of the city offices, to build harbors in Texas, where a sailor who happened to be stranded would be lost and homesome, to improve rapids in Tennessee which no one but the lumberman ever sees, and to dredge out creeks in Georgia which the Government engineers who are given charge of the work spend a month in trying to find. Just so the people of the city of New York, sooner than object in any way to the protective tariff, which they believe to be, if properly laid and fairly administered, for the good of the whole country, have paid without objection and cheerfully, on everything they use or touch or handle, from the beginning these customs duties for the benefit of the manufacturer and his employe and the long-suffering farmer. The time has now come when a revision of the tariff has been promised by both parties, and when the present duties yield so large a revenue that its further accumulation has become admittedly dangerous. Is it strange that at this time and under the circumstances they ask that a readjustment, partially at least, in their interest, may take place? And is it unreasonable to ask that a tariff which puts jewelry at 25 per cent. and oil-cloth for tenement-house floors at 40 per cent. and valenine; which brings in silver-plated harness at 35 per cent. and children's cotton stockings at 40 per cent.; under which India shawls of the finest quality pay 40 per cent. and common woolen shawls 85 per cent., should be modified? On the theory of protecting or pleasing the manufacturing laborer and farmer the mass of people in my district in the city of New York have paid for many years, each of them, out of money which they can ill spare more for their meals, their shelter, their clothes, and their medicines than these things ought to cost them.

The appreciation and kindly feelings which exist towards us in return from the most highly protected manufacturers is shown by the remark in this debate of the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. O'Neill, speaking in opposition to this bill, that "New York is in a large measure a foreign city." It is true, of course, that New York has many foreign-born citizens, and among them are a large number who bear the name of the gentleman from Pennsylvania. [Laughter and applause.] All of us in this country are foreign born or are the descendants of European immigrants. Whoever speaks deprecatingly of the patriotism of the citizens who came to this country by choice and not by accident throws thereby a doubt on the integrity of that ancestor of his who first took the oath of allegiance to the United States.

I have little regard for the man who contrasts his own patriotism with that of his grandfather, to the disadvantage of the latter. It is true, too, that a visitor from Philadelphia, when he first steps into the busy streets of New York and sees the movement of the commerce of a continent, when he enters first into the life and amusement of a city as interesting as London and as charming as Paris, may easily feel that he has passed a boundary line, and is in another country than his own. [Laughter.] But if the gentleman meant, as he probably did, that New York was a foreign city in the sense of being un-American, he was simply as much mistaken as he would have been if he had said that William Penn was a native American, or that the German settlers in Pennsylvania, and their children, were not as good and patriotic citizens of this country as we are.

Now when we ask of the manufacturers who are represented by our kindly critic, Mr. O'Neill, a fulfillment of the Republican promise to remedy the admitted irregularities of the tariff, they say that if we touch one article in the present dutiable list, if we add one article to the present free-list the whole protection scheme is in danger. Let me answer them by a quotation again from General Garfield, in the debate on the duty on coal, on March 10, 1871, in this House:

I was surprised at a remark of the distinguished gentleman from Michigan. He asserted that there is no item in the whole tariff that can stand alone on its own merits, but that all must be taken in a lump in order to stand. That coal must take salt by the hand, and they, too, must take something else by the hand; and thus all interests unite with all forces before they can make a stand before the country. If this remark be true it strikes a blow at the whole tariff system, a blow I am not willing to strike. I am unwilling to admit that bad taxes must be tied to good ones and thus be kept afloat. I think it unwise to continue this duty on coal, and I am therefore in favor of its repeal.

That, gentlemen, was the view of the last Republican President when a member of this House. I quote him always with peculiar pleasure, for he was one of the Republican candidates who could not only excite great enthusiasm in his own party and among his personal friends, but who could get votes enough from the business people who care little for politics to be elected to office. It seems to me that General Garfield fully answered that objection, but the highly protected manufacturers have endless objections. They seem to think that they see to have a monopoly of objections. We must not want cheaper vegetables in the city; the farmer objects. We must not want cheaper clothes; the wool-grower objects. We must not ask for cheaper carpets or house-hold utensils; the manufacturer objects. We must not ask for cheaper coal; the mine-owner objects. We must not claim cheaper sugar or rice; the planter objects.

Well, for one, I for my districts of consumers, object to this chorus of objection. We do not own sheep; we can not raise rice or vegetables or sugar; we mine no coal in the Thirtieth district of New York. If every interest in this country which is protected is to come here and cry out at any proposed addition to the free-list or reduction of the tariff taxes, in the interest of the great principle of protection, we, in our turn, shall ask that our monthly wages and the limited incomes on which many of us must live shall have the protection promised us by both political platforms, and that not by and by, but now and in the Fiftieth Congress.

We shall ask this courteously and modestly now. If we are only met by selfish and determined refusals the request will have to be made more emphatically. Certainly we are willing to have a protective tariff, but we do not want an unreasonable and unchangeable tariff. We want a tariff which shall protect where protection is needed, and a freelist which shall give us the necessities of life on terms that are at least fair to all.

Gentlemen say that the tariff builds up a home market. Very good. In the residence district of New York City we are the home market, we use our monthly pay the whole year around to buy your goods. Now that you have an opportunity, now that you can afford it, now that you have promised it, be fair to your home market. Show us by timely and reasonable concessions that you are not entirely selfish, and we will, as we have heretofore, go on cheerfully paying more for every thing which we use than we think the goods ought to cost us.

The answer to this seemingly reasonable demand on our side of the House seems to be this in substance: It is true that the tariff ought to be revised. The party platform promised it; the last Republican President and his Secretaries advised it; the party conventions in many States have agreed to it; but it must be done only by the Republican party in a House of which that party shall have a majority. There are two objections to this answer:

First. It is a postponement, an indefinite postponement of something which was promised four years ago, and ought to have been done before now. Whatever hopes gentlemen may have of the future, no one can say when we shall be strong enough to make and carry through by Republican votes alone a revision of the tariff. If you are to read out of the party everybody who reminds you of your promises, or who has any of the old Republican habits of free speech and candid criticism, perhaps you may never be strong enough to the House. [Applause.] Even if the fall elections should return a majority of Republicans, nearly a year and a half must elapse before the Fifty-first Congress can even meet, and if a tariff debate like this should then ensue, certainly two years must pass before the present tariff can be changed. And it is more than probable that even then the highly protected industries would still find some new reason why action should be postponed for another indefinite period, and that their representatives would vote again as many gems of poetry and prosaic tables of figures as we have heard for the last two weeks to demonstrate that the slightest elevation of the sacred tariff for the relief of the people, on whom some portions of it weigh heavily, would end forever the prosperity of the country.

And it is still more likely that gentlemen who are interested in the present tariff intact of the present tariff would claim that the election of a Republican House was a verdict of the people against any revision whatsoever. [Laughter.] For my part I desire to consider this question now, in the Congress to which I was elected partly for the purpose of considering it. Whether the Fifty-first or Fifty-second or Fifty-third Congresses are to be Republican or Democrat, what their action may be in the changed circumstances under which they may meet, is something which concerns me at present very little. I propose to do what I can—recognizing how very little it is—towards fulfilling the promises of the party on this subject now, when I have an opportunity. [Applause.]

Second. It is an unpatriotic answer to the reasonable demand that our promises to reform the tariff be fulfilled to say that as a condition precedent we must first have a success of our own party. If the revision is right, if it is in the interest of the business and development of the country, as our conventions and our leading statesmen have said it was, I for one am willing to make it, whether there is any political capital in it or not. It is a business question more than a political question, and it is a business question on which we are committed.

If a revision of the tariff is necessary, it seems to me to be as absurd to vote against it on party grounds as it would be to oppose the admittedly necessary appropriation for the Government because they are prepared in a Democrat committee and proposed to a Democratic House. I am one of those who were disappointed that we have as yet before us no Republican bill to reform the tariff. I do not forget the excellent bill to putting coal, sugar, molasses, rice, wool, and some raw materials on the free-list, introduced by my Republican friend from Minnesota [Mr. Nelson] whose 43,000 votes at the last election demonstrate what a hold on his people his fidelity to their interests has given him. I admired his speech and I would gladly vote for his bill. But I mean that I had hoped this we would have had submitted to us a bill put forward by authority, framed by gentlemen whose length of service and great ability fitted them for such a task, a bill in regard to which all of us would have been consulted, in which our varying views could have been compromised, a bill in which all of us would have yielded something to reach a common agreement.

For such a bill, framed by such high authority, erected by such consultation, and giving to the people of our city some of the benefits to which we think they are entitled, even if it did not give us all which we could desire, I would have given my support most heartily. Instead of such a bill, those of us who think that the reform of the tariff is a business question, and who are committed to its support, are given so far only an eloquent denunciation of the manner in which this bill under consideration was made. For myself, I do not know that I care particularly how it was made or who made it. If the gentlemen who denounce its authors and the place where it was constructed will prepare, in a manner in their judgment more suitable for the purpose, a better bill than this one, I shall certainly be glad to give my support to their measure in preference to any other. But if I am asked to oppose this bill not so much on account of its contents as on account of its history, I must decline to do so, even if I stand alone on this side of the House.

The history of the bill before us is as follows: It is a measure of the last Republican President and his Secretaries advised it; the party conventions in many States have agreed to it; but it must be done only by the Republican party in a House of which that party shall have a majority. There are two objections to this answer:

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