

Protectionist Fallacies Exposed

A speech delivered by Dr. Michael Clark, M.P. at a luncheon of The Free Trade League of Canada in Manitoba Hall, Winnipeg, on April 4, 1916

When I received a letter informing me that a body to be known by the ambitious title of the Free Trade League of Canada had been formed, you will not be surprised to know that I felt that at least I ought to be a member of it. After I read further in the letter and learned that I had been elected one of its honorary presidents, I can assure you that I felt that I was the recipient of a very distinguished honor.

I think it is of good augury for the League that I should have on my right at this luncheon a lady who comes from Manchester (Mrs. Holling, a member of the executive), and much as people may to-day laugh at what is called the Manchester school, believe me, the doctrines of the Manchester school, properly understood, are founded upon the doctrines of the New Testament, and, in the end, like all other truth, will prevail. So that if we are to have a Manchester school in this country, I repeat, I don't know that we could have founded it under more happy auspices than in the presence of the lady on my right. And certainly there is no better place to found it than in the central metropolis of Canada that I have the honor of visiting today.

Time is Opportune

Now, I dare say some critics will think that we should have found a more opportune moment for the foundation of this league. Well, I demur to that view. I think the moment is opportune, and the people who talk most about a truce, after all, seem to think that the truce is a very good thing to be observed by the side of it that they don't belong to. That is so. I think, more or less, in the general field of politics, both in this country and in the Old Country. But, certainly, on this trade question, there is no truce so far as our Protectionist friends are concerned. On both sides of the Atlantic they are discussing, in press and on platform and in parliament, trade conditions as they are to exist after the war. When a Protectionist comes to me and tells me that we must throw away our shibboleths, the shibboleth he is thinking of is my shibboleth. He wants me to throw away my shibboleth determined all the time to stick to his like grim death. That is the position, then, of most of those who tell us that this is not an opportune time to discuss things of a controversial nature.

At the very time they give this friendly advice you have people in the Old Country who are talking in so many words of a policy of permanent economic hostility to our present enemies. I think the same idea has found expression both in the Canadian Parliament and in many of the newspapers of Canada, and is finding all too common expression, according to my view, in the ordinary walks of life, where men converse with one another. This idea of permanent economic hostility to our present enemies is being coupled with our old friend of mutual Imperial preference within the Empire and with the various portions of the Empire, and with it are now being coupled our present Allies.

Room for All Reformers

Now you know what I have said is accurate history as to what is going on on one side of the question. Well, it appears to me that when that kind of an argument is being put forward, when Protectionists are realizing that protection needs the adventitious help of spurious loyalty to help it out, I think it is most opportune that there should have been formed a Free Trade League of Canada to offset it. And let me say at this juncture that as a progressive form of thought a Free Trade League is a peculiarly happy organization.

Because if the tariff be a bad thing then all reformers ought to be members of the Free Trade League. Single-taxers, Income-taxers, Labor men, Socialists, fundamental reformers of all kinds, ought all to find themselves under this banner. Because until you have cleared the ground of the robbery and the rottenness which free traders believe rest upon the tariff, you cannot build up any of the other reforms in which their parties are interested. So I look at it. If you accept that view, then, however you may classify yourselves, I hope you will all be members of the Free Trade League of Canada and work amongst these classes to increase their appreciation of it.

Now I propose in the few minutes I intend to keep you to devote myself entirely to as non-contentious an examination of the proposition to which I have just referred which is being put forward on both sides of the Atlantic, as is possible to a somewhat contentious man where fiscal matters are concerned.

Economic Hostility Immoral

Perhaps you will allow me to start out by saying that as regards a permanent economic hostile policy towards our enemies there are good grounds for thinking that it is morally indefensible. I don't think it is morally defensible, and I am old-fashioned enough to believe that if you can prove a thing to be morally indefensible, you need not go much further in condemnation of it.

To get the right hang of this end of the question we want to ask ourselves: What is it we are fighting about, and whom is it we are fighting? Now, I don't think I could quote two authorities who ought to carry me further in Canada than the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Robert Borden, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier. When these two gentlemen are in perfect agreement, you can be nearly sure that they are nearly right, because these two gentlemen have a tendency to deny everything that the other says. You can take my word for it if you haven't heard of it.

In the short war session Sir Wilfrid Laurier said, in the first speech referring to the war, that we

ism of the race, and to a better state of affairs in the nearer approach of the millenium we long for. (Loud cheers.)

Protection is Cowardly

It took some time to get you round that corner, but I see that most of you have arrived. (Laughter.) Now that is our position as free traders from the moral point of view. I just want to touch on another point in a sentence. Perhaps the most despicable thing about protection in wartime, anyhow, is its cowardice. I read again and again with delight that sentence in which Emerson, one of the greatest men of mark that this continent has produced, protests against the rank injustice done to the workman by cunningly devised tariffs, and he adds with manliness, "Let your work speak for you. Protection in its essence is a cowardly thing, and there is nothing morally grand about cowardice."

What is the source of the greatness of Britain from this point of view? It is the fact that Britain goes into the world with the watchword of "A fair field and no favors," letting all come and strive who care to come, and saying to them, "We will win or take a beating every time." That is the language and the attitude of a strong man well set up on his limbs.

Grain Growers' Policy

I sometimes tell them in the House of Commons that I wish the apple growers of British Columbia and the manufacturers of Ontario would take a leaf out of the book of the grain growers of the plains and the cattle raisers of Alberta. What is that leaf? Why, it is this: That we raise such fine wheat and such beautiful beef that we defy competition, let it come from where it may. That is the kind of man the world has got to beat, and that is the kind of country one would be proud to inhabit.

So much for the moral aspect of the question, and I have only time to touch on one aspect of it today. I have given you some grounds, some points, from which you can think out this question along this moral aspect of it. The next thing I want to say about it is that the policy that I am referring to appears to me not only morally indefensible, but economically unsound, and the one follows the other, ladies and gentlemen. It follows the other just as surely as night does the day, because truth is a whole, and what is morally right will never be economically wrong. Never! What is morally right will be economically right, and what is morally wrong will be economically wrong. View it from the narrowest standpoint, from the point I raised in connection with my previous argument. Let me ask again: What are we fighting for and whom are we fighting? I have already asked: What are we fighting for? Well, I answer that question by saying: We are fighting for a better world, and I am optimistic enough to believe that that will come. But I think we are also fighting for victory, are we not? There is no one in Winnipeg, I am sure, who doubts that we are fighting for victory and that we are sure to obtain it. We must obtain it, because our cause is the right cause.

Indemnity Paid in Goods

What is to follow victory? In conversation I have asked everyone who has put up the point of view I am combatting: When you have beaten the Germans, are you going to get an indemnity and make them pay thru the nose to Belgium and to France? Their reply is invariably in the affirmative, and then I ask them how they propose that Germany shall make her payments. In most cases that was something they hadn't thought of. They look at me for a minute and then ask me how will it be done? I tell them there is only one way in the world in which it can be done. I say: You don't propose that Belgium and France should take the payments of the indemnity in the shape of depreciated marks, for they would soon exhaust the marks of Germany?

Now, it is the A, B, C of economics that if an indemnity is to be paid to the winning country, that indemnity must be paid in goods sent by the losing country. That is the A, B, C of economics. You can be as sure of that as that you are in Winnipeg at the present moment. So that that rule supplies

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BREAKING UP SCRUB LAND FOR CROP

were not fighting with the German people, and Sir Robert Borden, who followed him, hastened to dot his i's and stroke his t's and to repeat the same sentiment. Well, but if we are not fighting with the German people it would appear to me to be rather stupid, in the middle of a war, when people's thinking is perhaps not done with the greatest possible accuracy, to lay down the doctrine that you are going to fight them directly the war is over. It seems to me that such a doctrine is not logical, and I think it is quite indefensible from an intellectual point of view.

Fighting a System Only

What are we fighting? We are fighting a wrong system. We are fighting a form of government. We are fighting autocracy; we are fighting autocracy in people, who, in one sphere of their activities are militarists, but in another sphere of their activities are protectionists, because militarists and protectionists in Germany are the same people, bear in mind. So the argument of our friends just at this point is that after beating this system in Germany, we are to take it up and imitate it in the British Empire. That is not a very defensible position, as far as I can see. These new clothes in which protection flaunts itself don't commend themselves any more to me than the wretched old garments which were insufficient to cover its nakedness.

We are fighting militarism, but what are we looking for? Are we looking for an opportunity of imitating militarism; of picking up the very things which have led to this war? Surely not. Surely we are looking for a better time for the people of the world. Surely we are looking for a drawing closer together of the democracies of the world, looking away from these separate, narrow nationalistic ideas to the brotherhood, to the international