

MR. GLADSTONE'S SPEECH ON THE TARIFF,  
SO FAR AS  
 RELATING TO SUGAR,

Delivered in the English House of Commons,  
*April 7th, 1864.*

In my clear judgment, and that of all my colleagues, the first claim is that of the article of sugar. (Loud cheers.) I need scarcely remind the Committee of the enormous importance of that article. I believe that in its importance to the comforts of the people it may be said to be the next to corn. (Hear, hear.) *I believe it may be said with probable truth that, next to the subject of corn, the question of the sugar duty is, to the mass of the people, of the greatest interest.* (Hear, hear.) That duty was raised for the purposes of war, and the principal part of what was then imposed has never been removed. We have had at various times 10 claims more expedient, more urgent, with reference to the general wants of the people; but I know of no such claim at the present moment. (Hear, hear.)

We propose, therefore, to the Committee, to make a considerable change and reduction in the sugar duties. There is but one considerable objection as far as I am aware, and that is, that at the present moment, we are labouring under a sort of quasi scarcity in consequence of increased price. At the present moment there is an increase of from 8s. to 10s. per cwt. over the prices of 1863. That is a considerable augmentation, and it is 6s. per cwt. above the price of 1861-2. Perhaps, we may say that that represents the excess of price above the fair average level of prices. I wish to present this observation to the Committee, that in the case of sugar we can hardly say that the existence of this partial and relative dearth is a reason for refraining to legislate. 25

In a case like that of tea it might be so, because in the case of tea, in the first place, you are dependent upon one source of supply, and you are yourselves the great consumers of the world, exceeding all other consumers in so great a degree that what you can hope to draw from them by giving peculiar inducements in your markets at a given moment, would be a comparatively small supply. But that is not the case with regard to sugar. Our consumption, vast as it is, is comparatively small in reference to the total consumption of the world. Sugar is produced in a multitude of countries, it is sent to the multitude of markets, and the consequence is, that if at a particular time the supply be diminished, an alteration in our law, made at that peculiar crisis, has the effect