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# The Tariff.

Man cannot Live by Tea and Coffee alone.

## SPEECH OF HON. JOHN T. BIRD, OF NEW JERSEY,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 24, 1872.

The House having met for debate as in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. BIRD said :

Mr. SPEAKER: I desire to call the attention of those members of the House who may honor me with their attention to the subject of a "free breakfast." Since this is the order of the day, a little examination into the subject will perhaps conduce to the benefit of the poor people of this country. But a few days since, this House, by a decided majority, voted to repeal all the duties on tea and coffee. This is claimed as being one important step toward securing "a free breakfast." Although, for the best interest of the people in my judgment, considering the immense revenues to be raised for the support of Government and the advantages sought to be and too often obtained by wealthy monopolists under the plea of "protection to home industry," I voted against the repeal, yet I accept the result as an honest expression of the Representatives of the people, and propose under this banner of "a free breakfast" to march on to the consideration of other interests which to the minds of the generous have a greater or less bearing on the same subject.

And thus, if revenue reform cannot be accomplished to the extent and in the manner I desire, and as I think will best promote the interests of the poor burdened tax-payer, and answer the ends of good government, it will in part. I have been prompted by the belief that a genuine and practical reduction of the tariff in the interests of labor would not be effected, nor indeed seriously regarded by those who in reality control legislation in Congress; but since many urge that we have taken a long stride in the advance, and admit, as I have no doubt, that the revenues should be reduced many millions more, it occurred to my mind that we could go on in the interest of the poor,

and without any doubt add to his comforts and enjoyments a thousand-fold when he sits at his breakfast sipping his tea and coffee. I was at once impressed with the fact, or what I believe to be a fact at least, that man's happiness does not consist in the use of tea and coffee alone. I think all will agree that by no art can these gentle and exhilarating beverages be made a substitute for fuel, light, lumber, knives and forks, crockery-ware, cooking-stoves, and other kitchen furniture; hats, pants, coats, vests, shirts, shoes and stockings, calicoes, muslins, spool-cotton, blankets, and many other important items.

Now, sir, since the House is in this favorable mood, I trust these articles last enumerated will be reached also. If justly the ear of the House has been open to the poor laborer, mechanic, and farmer, let it not be closed until more ample though tardy justice be done, by greatly reducing all if we cannot repeal some of the heavy duties now resting on so many of the articles consumed by them. I hope this work will be pressed with the utmost zeal and judgment.

Mr. Speaker, thinking it desirable to move right forward while the mind of the House favors it, I concluded to inquire somewhat closely into the nature of the taxes on the material things that go to make up the temporal happiness and comfort of the American laborer, find him where you will. Having been hastily arranged, my thoughts will be perhaps not very clearly expressed, but I trust sufficiently so to lead to reflection and fortunate results.

It is very desirable, I admit, that all tariff duties should be reduced to the minimum standard, that all may be fed at as little expense as possible. Besides the tea and coffee which are used by the poor man, I find in my investigation of the subject that there is an acid—some may say insignificant—which the

poor man also uses, which is extensively used in manufacturing baking-powders—I mean tartaric acid—used in making bread, which, it is well understood, is quite as essential an element of life and health and well-being as tea or coffee. Now, this acid is taxed at the rate of sixty-seven per cent. *ad valorem*; and while the amount of duty received by the Government on tea and coffee exceeds nineteen million dollars per annum, the amount of duty received from this acid is \$57,707 only. Why, if we do not make this article free, should we not reduce very greatly the *ad valorem* duties on it? Manifestly it would result to the benefit of the poor man, and cheapen his breakfast. Who will regard that as insignificant?

Let the monopolists of the country answer. They have in their own pockets, thanks to their own ingenuity, a happy way of solving these interesting problems, more satisfactory, I admit, to themselves than to the poor man when he comes to take his breakfast.

But if it be thought unworthy to consider the duties on the acid mentioned, let me say then in my further investigation I find that it is necessary for the poor man and his family, when they take their breakfast, to be clothed. Now, if it is permissible for his wife or daughter to wear an alpaca dress, I would ask why not relieve alpaca of the onerous duty imposed on it; or if it be not practicable to make it free, why not reduce greatly the burden imposed on it?

If this article can be bought in Europe for seventeen and a half cents in gold per yard, at New York the poor man, if he would clothe his wife and daughter in it, would be obliged to pay forty-five cents per yard. Now, I ask the advocates of the repeal of the duty on tea and coffee, if we should not put our shoulders to the wheel and insist upon it that there should be a great reduction on this particular article also, the *ad valorem* duty on which to-day is sixty-nine per cent.? Would not a reduction of one half this amount be in the interest of the laborer without greatly reducing the actual revenues of the Government?

What fairness or consistency is there in this House insisting upon the maintenance of a duty like this, when we want to give to the poor man a cheap breakfast, and propose to do it by simply relieving him of the duty on tea and coffee? But, again, I find on further investigation into this subject that it is useless for the poor man to seek for a cheap breakfast unless he can be protected from the cold during the days and nights of these long winters, and therefore it becomes us to ask what duty is imposed on blankets. Shall he not be relieved of this duty also? If we protect him in his breakfast, if tea and coffee add to his comfort during the day, will not blankets add to his comfort during the night?

Now blankets can be purchased in Europe for sixty cents per pound; the *ad valorem* duty is one hundred and fifty, and in New York they cost \$1 50 per pound—nearly two thirds more than they can be purchased for in Eu-

rope. The amount consumed of this article in this country is \$18,000,000 worth; the whole amount imported is only about nine thousand dollars' worth. May I not ask, with great propriety, why should we not also look to this item; and if you would add to the comfort of the poor man, do so by relieving him from the burdens now imposed on the article of blankets? Will it not become some gentleman to ask a suspension of the rules on Monday next, in order to instruct the Committee of Ways and Means to bring in a bill for this particular purpose? Bed-ticking may be added to the same category; the same remarks are applicable. While this article can be purchased in Europe for thirty-seven cents per yard, we are charged in New York city at wholesale rates seventy cents per yard, because of the *ad valorem* duty of forty per cent.

Now it may not be permitted to the poor man to enjoy the luxury of bathing-towels. It may be decreed that he must sweat on dirt and filth and rags because of the high tariff and of the necessities of maintaining our great monopolies. But these articles, if he should choose to use them, which he may purchase in Europe at three dollars a dozen, we say to him he shall be charged seven dollars for in New York. Our desire is to show our patriotism by legislating in the interests of the poor. There is one thing that our friends on both sides of the House will concur in, and that is that calico is essential to the poor man's interests and comforts. If you do not compel him to live in nakedness or rags, you cannot carry him beyond or below the point of wearing calico. Nothing is cheaper. Our law now requires him to pay twenty and a half cents per yard in New York for that kind of calico which he might purchase in England for nine and a half cents per yard, because of the *ad valorem* duty now imposed upon all importations of this particular class of seventy-eight per cent.

Let those who desire to harmonize the interests of labor and capital join with me in giving cheap clothing to the poor man's wife and daughters, and we will have made a glorious advance.

I am enumerating a few items only. It appears that cotton cloth in weight less than five ounces per square yard may be purchased in Europe at seven and a half cents per yard, but because of the *ad valorem* duty of thirty-seven and one eighth cents the poor man has to pay twelve or thirteen cents a yard in the city of New York. The same kind of goods bleached may be purchased in Europe for seven cents per yard, but because of the duty of forty-seven and five eighths per cent. the poor man is required to pay fourteen and a half cents per yard in the city of New York.

There are other items in the same category which I propose to submit with my remarks. There is an item of cotton spool-thread, the tax upon which is a tax upon the poor, for to them it is an absolute necessity, and it becomes us to inquire if we cannot to some extent benefit the poor laboringmen and poor

needlewomen in this country, those who toil from early in the morning until late at night, by a large reduction of the enormous duties imposed on cotton spool-thread. In Europe it may be purchased for thirty cents per dozen spools; but because there is a duty of seventy-five cents *ad valorem*, we must pay from seventy to eighty cents per dozen spools. If I understand the wants of labor at all, the cry comes up to us from every quarter for cheaper cotton thread. Who will say that this branch of the question does not appeal to us as loudly and forcibly as that of tea and coffee? How can the needlewoman earn her tea and coffee without cheap thread? It may not be amiss to inquire if some great monopoly interest does not stand between the seamstresses of our land and cheap thread; if so, I despair of relief, but we will labor on.

I do not desire to repeat, but I ask again, can we not safely make a reduction here in order that while we give the poor man a free breakfast as to coffee and tea, we may also give him an opportunity to clothe himself and his family with a moderate degree of respectability at a greatly reduced rate? Mr. Speaker, will you allow the poor man a carpet of the commonest kind? Shall he be permitted to tread softly upon his floor, or will you deprive him, by your enormous duties, of even the commonest ingrain carpet? If you would allow him to entertain his friends for even the shortest period of time which in his poverty and destitution he may desire to do, then I ask you to consider the propriety of reducing the duty upon ingrain carpets, so that the article which may be purchased in the foreign markets for eighty cents a yard, may not cost him here \$1 40 a yard. I do not say that a common ingrain carpet is a necessity, but who would deprive the poor man of so slight a comfort?

Mr. WHITTHORNE. Will my friend yield to me for a word?

Mr. BIRD. I will yield for a question.

Mr. WHITTHORNE. A word first, and then a question predicated upon it. I was one of those here who voted the other day to put tea and coffee upon the free list; and I may be allowed to add that if I could do so I would put every article upon the free list that it is possible to put there. Now, sir, I concur in what my friend from New Jersey [Mr. BIRD] says, and I will strike hands with him, and will put the poor man at the breakfast-table not only with his tea and coffee free, but with his hat, shoes, his clothing and blankets free; I will join hands in that with him. Now I ask the gentleman this question: if I cannot give to the poor man all I could desire to give him, shall I refuse to give him what I may or can do?

Mr. BIRD. I am exceedingly obliged to the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. WHITTHORNE] for his inquiry. The question suggests the very reason why I voted against repealing the duties upon tea and coffee. It was because, in my humble judgment, thereby there was an effectual bar to the reduction of the duties upon those items which are quite as essential

for the comfort and happiness of the poor man.

Mr. WHITTHORNE. Will the gentleman explain why?

Mr. BIRD. The votes given by the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. WHITTHORNE] and others, accomplished the very purpose which the monopolists of this country have been laboring and praying for for the last ten years. And they hope to carry this idea further, and get us to reduce the duties upon sugar and upon other commodities, so that there may be no demand made for the reduction of the duties upon iron, and upon all those particular modifications of iron which enter into the construction of our railroads, and which are used by our mechanics, our blacksmiths and carpenters, by our farmers in plowing and harrowing, in harvesting and wagoning; then one great and vital purpose of the protectionists has been accomplished.

Indeed, there was abundant proof of this in the glee manifested in this House the other day, when we were entrapped, as I think, upon this side into this vote by the cry of "the poor man's breakfast table." We deceived ourselves and the country, if it is supposed that a genuine work of reformation is seriously contemplated. The protectionists desire to allay agitation. They know that inquiry will turn the public mind against them. Their cry will be, "Have we not made tea and coffee free?" And here, I fear, they will close the door against reform. Hence, I think it was a fatal mistake for those who desire to benefit the poor man in voting to place tea and coffee on the free list, for the poor man can do without his tea and coffee, but he cannot do without bread; he cannot do without his cooking-stove; he cannot do without his knife and fork; he cannot do without clothing for himself and family; he cannot do very well without his table linen and his table; he must have a house to shelter him; in that house there must needs be windows; he must have light. Yet all these articles are heavily taxed; yes, very much beyond the revenue standard, and to that extent unfair and unjust to the poor laborer of every class. If tea and coffee may be classed among the necessaries of life, how much more salt, fuel, light, and clothing!

Will the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. WHITTHORNE] consider this important question, and ask himself the result of the vote he gave the other day? Why, sir, these Republican monopolists of this country will clasp hands with him every time he comes up and casts such a vote, and they will pronounce him a clever enough gentleman for them. Never was a greater charm to monopolists than when we here voted to reduce the duty upon tea and coffee. What was the amount of the burden thereby imposed? At the utmost not over fifty cents for each person in the country, every penny of which goes into the Treasury of the United States. Yet, upon the other hand, where we may possibly obtain a dollar for the Treasury from the duty imposed upon iron, steel, and cotton and woolen goods in

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their various modifications, we give three, and in many instances perhaps four or five dollars to the monopolists of the country.

I insist upon it that the greatest burden comes from this direction; that no genuine relief will ensue until we reduce the tariff on those articles which are taxed enormously high simply to prevent foreign competition; and that such reduction will not be tolerated by the great monopolists of the country until the last moment. In other words, it has become apparent to the iron manufacturers and to other great manufacturers that the revenues of the Government are now so great that the people will not be satisfied without a reduction of many millions. They at once begin to inquire what articles can be relieved from the payment of duties besides those which they manufacture. They insist upon it that the pruning-knife must not be applied to their interests. With great emphasis they tell us that they are the salt of the country. Therefore, to save these individual interests they urge the repeal of the duties on tea and coffee, striking at once about nineteen million dollars from the revenues of the country.

Sir, does not the statement of the case explain to the gentleman the real nature of the

interest exhibited by the protectionists? Does he not perceive that to the extent that other articles yielding a large revenue are placed on the free list, thereby approaching the amount of reduction which all concede must be made, to that extent the tariff on iron, steel, cotton goods, and woolen goods will be left unchanged? Mr. Speaker, I arose for the purpose of urging upon the attention of the House the necessity of carrying on this work of reform. If we cannot give the laborer a free coat, is it not our duty to give him a cheaper one? His coffee was taxed thirty and seven eighths per cent. and we have resolved to remove that; his coat, though of the commonest kind, is taxed forty per cent.; will he not rejoice if we reduce that at least one half? Would he not enjoy his "free breakfast" much more, if he had shoes moderately taxed, instead of thirty-five per cent., and a hat taxed twenty per cent. instead of seventy? Shall we forget that he pays a duty at the rate of at least one hundred per cent. on salt? Can we not render him essential service by greatly reducing this burden; or when we come to that will there be many who will turn their backs upon us? Who will then cry "free breakfast?"