

# PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRACY<sup>1</sup>

## THE TARIFF

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

**I** BELIEVE in a protective tariff, but I believe in it as a principle, approached from the standpoint of the interests of the whole people, and not as a bundle of preferences to be given to favored individuals.

In my opinion, the American people favor the principle of a protective tariff, but they desire such a tariff to be established primarily in the interests of the wage-worker and the consumer. The chief opposition to our tariff at the present moment comes from the gen-

eral conviction that certain interests have been improperly favored by over-protection. I agree with this view. The commercial and industrial experience of this country has demonstrated the wisdom of the protective policy, but it has also demonstrated that in the application of that policy certain clearly recognized abuses have developed.

It is not merely the tariff that should be revised, but the method of tariff-making and of tariff administration. Wherever nowadays an industry is to be protected it should be on the theory that such protection will serve to keep up the wages and the stand-

<sup>1</sup> In a series of editorials, of which this is one, Mr. Roosevelt is repeating in essence the statement of his political faith made before the Progressive Convention at Chicago.

ard of living of the wage-worker in that industry with full regard for the interest of the consumer. To accomplish this the tariff to be levied should, as nearly as is scientifically possible, approximate the differential between the cost of production at home and abroad. This differential is chiefly, if not wholly, in labor cost. No duty should be permitted to stand as regards any industry unless the workers receive their full share of the benefits of that duty. In other words, there is no warrant for protection unless a legitimate share of the benefits gets into the pay envelope of the wage-worker.

The practice of undertaking a general revision of all the schedules at one time, and of securing information as to conditions in the different industries and as to rates of duty desired chiefly from those engaged in the industries, who themselves benefit directly from the rates they propose, has been demonstrated to be not only iniquitous but futile. It has afforded opportunity for practically all of the abuses which have crept into our tariff-making and our tariff administration. The day of the log-rolling tariff must end. The progressive thought of the country has recognized this fact for several years, and the time has come when all genuine Progressives should insist upon a thorough and radical change in the method of tariff-making.

The first step should be the creation of a permanent commission of non-partisan experts whose business it shall be to study scientifically all phases of tariff-making and of tariff effects. This commission should be large enough to cover all the different and widely varying branches of American industry. It should have ample powers to enable it to secure exact and reliable information. It should have authority to examine closely all correlated subjects, such as the effect of any given duty on the consumers of the article on which the duty is levied; that is, it should directly consider the question as to what any duty costs the people in the price of living. It should examine into the wages and conditions of labor and life of the workmen in any industry, so as to insure our refusing protection to any industry unless the showing as regards the share labor receives therefrom is satisfactory. This commission would be wholly different from the unsatisfactory Tariff Board which was created under a provision of law which failed to give it the powers indispensable if it was to do the work it should do.

It will be well for us to study the experience of Germany in considering this question. The German Tariff Commission has proved conclusively the efficiency and wisdom of this method of handling tariff questions. The reports of a permanent, expert, and non-partisan tariff commission would at once strike a most powerful blow against the chief iniquity of the old log-rolling method of tariff-making. One of the principal difficulties with the old method has been that it was impossible for the public generally, and especially for those Members of Congress not directly connected with the committees handling a tariff bill, to secure anything like adequate and impartial information on the particular subjects under consideration. The reports of such a tariff commission would at once correct this evil and furnish to the general public full, complete, and disinterested information on every subject treated in a tariff bill. With such reports it would no longer be possible to construct a tariff bill in secret or to jam it through either house of Congress without the fullest and most illuminating discussion. The path of the tariff "joker" would be rendered infinitely difficult.

As a further means of disrupting the old, crooked, log-rolling method of tariff-making, all future revisions of the tariff should be made schedule by schedule as changing conditions may require. Thus a great obstacle will be thrown in the way of the trading of votes which has marked so scandalously the enactment of every tariff bill of recent years. The tariff commission should render reports at the call of Congress or of either branch of Congress, and to the President. Under the Constitution, Congress is the tariff-making power. It should not be the purpose in creating a tariff commission to take anything away from this power of Congress, but rather to afford a wise means of giving to Congress the widest and most scientific assistance possible, and of furnishing it and the public with the fullest disinterested information. Only by this means can the tariff be taken out of politics. The creation of such a permanent tariff commission, and the adoption of the policy of schedule by schedule revision, will do more to accomplish this highly desired object than any other means yet devised.

The Democratic platform declares for a tariff for revenue only, asserting that a protective tariff is unconstitutional. To say that

a protective tariff is unconstitutional, as the Democratic platform insists, is excusable only on a theory of the Constitution which would make it unconstitutional to legislate in any shape or way for the betterment of social and industrial conditions.

The abolition of the protective tariff or the substitution for it of a tariff for revenue only, as proposed by the Democratic platform, would plunge this country into the most widespread industrial depression we have yet seen, and this depression would continue for an indefinite period.

There is no hope from the standpoint of our people from action such as the Democrats

propose. The one and only chance to secure stable and favorable business conditions in this country, while at the same time guaranteeing fair play to farmer, consumer, business man, and wage-worker, lies in the creation of such a commission as I herein advocate. Only by such a commission and only by such activities of the commission will it be possible for us to get a reasonably quick revision of the tariff schedule by schedule—a revision which shall be downwards and not upwards, and at the same time secure a square deal not merely to the manufacturer but to the wage-worker and to the general consumer.