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THE TARIFF AND THE WESTERN FARMER:

1860-1890

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THE TARIFF AND THE WESTERN FARMER:

1860-1890

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THE TARIFF AND THE WESTERN FARMER:

1860 - 1890

CHAPTER I

THE BACKDROP: 1789-1860

Nineteenth century America was one of triumph and distress for agriculture. Unparalleled expansion and production were coupled with unprofitable prices and declining social prestige. Rapidly and inexorably industry encroached on the farmer's place of pre-eminence in American life. The agrarians, confused and divided, struggled to understand the basic causes of their problems.

One particular aspect of public policy, the tariff, was especially perplexing. No other single economic and political issue in the nineteenth century persisted like the tariff which had roots going back into the colonial period. Producers in the colonies, farmers included, favored protection.¹ With nine-tenths of the people involved in agriculture, a number of colonies enacted laws to protect farm

¹William Hill, "Colonial Tariffs," Quarterly Journal of Economics, VII (October, 1892), 78-79.

products. Massachusetts in 1652 prohibited the importing of barley, wheat, beef, malt, and flour. There were other colonies which effectively kept out livestock. Primarily, duties were levied for revenue only; however, protection was granted to any industry believed capable of development.²

The protective movement was given additional impetus by the American Revolution. The war had spawned new industries and at its close tariff advocates sought to increase the restrictive system. A part of the American attitude can be explained as a nascent nationalism. Americans remained deeply imbued with the colonial idea of frugality, and to "make do" without British luxuries was morally appealing.³

The large flood of European goods after 1783 led to a demand for restrictive legislation. Moreover, it was hoped that the specie flow to Europe could be checked. The lack of hard money was an old problem, and strong effort was made to keep available specie within the country.⁴ Consequently, the use of tariff imposts increased under the Articles of Confederation, as Pennsylvania alone enacted fifteen

²Ibid., 81-81; Louise P. Mitchell, "The Colonial Economy," Current History, XXVI (February, 1954), 65.

³W. G. Sumner, Lectures on the History of Protectionism in the United States (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 19-21.

⁴Carl W. Kaiser, History of the Academic Protectionist - Free Trade Controversy in America Before 1860, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), 15; M. E. Kelley, "Tariff Acts Under the Confederation," Quarterly Journal of Economics, II (July, 1888), 481.

such pieces of legislation between 1780 and 1788. The Massachusetts legislature stated in July, 1785, that, "it is highly necessary for the welfare and happiness of all states to encourage agriculture, the improvement of raw materials, manufactures and a spirit of industry."⁵ The Massachusetts Bill of 1785 placed specific and ad valorem duties on beef, cheese, butter, and pork.⁶ Rhode Island, New York, and New Hampshire likewise passed protective acts. Furthermore, the tariff was already precipitating lively debates in the newspapers of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Agriculture and manufacturing were to be encouraged either by duties or bounties.⁷

The tariff law of 1789 was slightly protective in nature, and proved a harbinger for the future. The early debates were illustrative of the sectionalizing effect of the tariff which quickly revealed its local and national character. Congressmen and Senators rushed to gain protection favored by their constituents. T. Fitzsimmons of Pennsylvania attempted to portray the bill of 1789 as one beneficial to the entire country, and he declared that "local considerations" must be cast aside. Agriculture could not

⁵Kelley, "Tariff Acts Under the Confederation, " 474.

⁶Ibid., 474.

⁷Ibid., 479; Pennsylvania Gazette, February 15, 1786.

place its welfare ahead of the nation as a whole. When one portion of the country prospered from the tariff, he said, eventually the remaining part would also benefit.⁸

The agricultural South remained cool to the idea of protection throughout the entire debate. Beverly Tucker, Representative from South Carolina, questioned whether even the smallest tax on steel should be allowed for fear it would burden agriculture. Richard Bland of Virginia stated that sufficient American shipping did not then exist to carry farm produce, and any extra tonnage duties paid by foreign shippers would be added to freight charges.⁹

Despite lack of enthusiasm, the planters were not unwilling to accept protection for special products. Virginia and South Carolina vigorously supported a duty on hemp. Both the West and South hoped to expand their production of this crop, and the latter also desired to levy a duty on rum and molasses. Although agricultural demands were not always in harmony with the businessmen of the East, proponents of the tariff viewed it as politically unwise to ignore the special interests of the expanding South and West.¹⁰

⁸William Hill, "Protective Purpose of the Tariff Act of 1789," Journal of Political Economy, II (December, 1893), 54-56; Annals of Congress, 1st Cong., 1st Sess., 145, 147-148, 153.

⁹Ibid.; Hill, "Protective Purpose of the Tariff Act of 1789," 56.

¹⁰Ibid.; Annals of Congress, 1st Cong., 1st Sess., 132-134, 221-225; Mitchell, "The Colonial Economy," 72.

The final schedule of the 1789 bill placed duties on hemp, molasses, and malt. Molasses paid six cents a gallon, malt ten cents a bushel, and hemp seventy-five cents per hundred pounds. Southern arguments against taxes on iron and metal products failed while the resistance to a duty on salt also went unheeded. Although not prohibitory, the rates on agricultural produce were generally higher than others levied.¹¹

The heated debates of 1789 gained close scrutiny from the British. England was a heavy purchaser of American farm products and worried about the growth of discriminatory rates against English industrial goods. Phineas Bond, British consul in Philadelphia, quickly allayed their fears. Bond advised his government to disregard the stormy philippics of the American Congress. American agriculture, he declared, had to have an overseas market to survive, and England was its best customer. Bond predicted that any attempt to curtail this market would work great hardship upon the American economy.¹²

Fresh from their triumph in 1789, agrarians met a more serious challenge in 1791. The publication of Alexander Hamilton's Report on Manufactures stands as a line of demarcation for agriculture in American economic life. This skillfully written document placed the farmer on the defensive.

¹¹Sumner, 23-24.

¹²Phineas Bond to the Duke of Leeds, August 15, 1789, American Historical Association Annual Reports, (1896-97), I, 608-614.

Hamilton systematically analyzed and rejected the prevailing theory of agricultural superiority in the life of the nation. Secondly, he outlined a plan for the promotion of manufactures, the advantages of such a program, and actually laid the basis of protectionist thought for the next one hundred years.¹³

There is no evidence that agriculture viewed the Report with alarm. Indeed, the paper predicted a prosperous future for farmers who produced surpluses for an expanding home market. Without the advantage of hindsight farmers could not have known that government intervention in the form of tariffs on industrial goods might help to erect a wealthy and powerful business community which would eventually eclipse their role in society.¹⁴ Hamilton's strongest argument on behalf of agriculture was the home market. The tariff, he said, would stimulate new industries and they in turn would provide an outlet for farm surpluses. Moreover, new demands for raw materials would arise. Hamilton argued that, as the manufacturing labor force grew, the call for farm products had to increase.¹⁵ Also, he wrote, the home market removed agriculture from such heavy dependence upon

¹³F. W. Taussig (ed.), State Papers and Speeches on the Tariff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1892), 1-107.

¹⁴H. C. Lodge (ed.), The Works of Alexander Hamilton, IV (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 75-83.

¹⁵Ibid., 95-97; Louis M. Hacker, Alexander Hamilton in the American Tradition (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1957), 172-173.

the uncertainty of foreign exports. Without having to depend upon the caprices of overseas demands the market would become steady. The wars and famines of Europe would be of no consequence to United States producers. With outlets nearby, marketing problems would also be reduced. The division of labor arising from the tariff could also help the farmer as each section would produce that for which it was peculiarly suited. By recognition of this division of labor, Hamilton hoped to found an inseparable union between North and South.¹⁶

Despite hopeful statements for farmers, Hamilton challenged some basic agrarian doctrines. The young Secretary rejected the current belief in the superiority of agricultural production. Hamilton argued that the establishment of manufactures would markedly increase American productivity. Furthermore, the greater possibility of specialization by industry enhanced its chances of overtaking farm production. He also stated that, as industry harnessed new sources of power, production would increase.¹⁷

Hamilton did not discount the importance of agriculture. He admitted that it occupied a highly significant position in society. He conceded that agriculture did furnish the basic means of subsistence, raw materials for other

¹⁶Lodge, 140-147; John C. Miller, The Federal Union, 1789-1801 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960), 65.

¹⁷Lodge, 75-84.

industries, and went furthest toward creating "a state most favorable to the freedom and independence of the human mind."¹⁸ However, he attributed many of agriculture's problems to natural causes rather than to mistaken government policy. Planting cycles varied throughout the world, and this effected the supply and demand for potential markets. The harvesting of great crops simultaneously also worked hardship on sales. Yet, he viewed these as largely occupational hazards.

Certainly Hamilton's Report was of great importance to agriculture. He departed sharply from the physiocratic writings of the period when he questioned agriculture's superiority in relation to the rest of the economy. While Hamilton willingly admitted agriculture's great importance, he actually challenged its position of eminence in American life, and may well have been initially responsible for the erosion of its prestige. The document he authored aided in erecting a highly competitive industrial system, a system which ultimately superseded agriculture in importance. No one could read the Report without being struck by its seeming logic and simplicity, and it gave the most ardent free trader cause for reflection. As one author has written, the tariff argument to many farmers just plain "made sense."¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid., 73-82.

¹⁹Stevenson W. Fletcher, Pennsylvania, Agriculture and Country Life, 1840-1940, II (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1955), 366.

The period from 1790 to 1808 was one of prosperity for agriculture and the nation as a whole. The outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars brought sharp demands from Europe for corn, wheat, and meat. The years 1795 and 1796 found American flour selling at between \$12 and \$12.50 per barrel, whereas in 1792, the price was approximately \$5. Wheat and flour prices remained generally high with slight interruptions until 1817. In the sixteen year period between 1791 and 1807, exports originating in the United States increased some \$30 million.²⁰

These favorable conditions prevented the development of any strong protectionist movement for a time. The drop in prices caused by the Peace of Amiens in 1802 brought a short period of renewed interest, but any enthusiasm was lost in the economic upturn of 1805. During this time of prosperity the home market argument was largely forgotten. Opportunities for profitable sales overseas existed for farm products. Although imports were large, the goods were relatively cheap. Furthermore, heavy exports paid for them, and there was less interest in pushing industrial production at home.²¹

²⁰ Charles H. Evans, Exports, Domestic From the United States to All Countries, From 1789-1833 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1884), 18-22; American State Papers: Finance, III, 536.

²¹ George E. Hunsberger, "The Development of Tariff Policy in the Republican Party," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1934), 121; American State Papers: Finance, II, 29.

The attitude toward the use of tariffs had definitely changed by 1808. The reason for this new outlook was the tightening of trade restrictions by the European belligerents. The Milan and Berlin decrees issued by France and England greatly hindered United States shipping. Moreover, the passage of the Embargo Act of 1807 virtually ruined American foreign commerce. James Madison attempted similar economic coercion in 1809, but failing, yielded to the demand for war in June of 1812.

This restrictive legislation, and ultimately the war, had the effect of providing protection from foreign imports, and this gave strong impetus to produce at home the goods which had been formerly purchased abroad. Furthermore, those already engaged in manufacturing enjoyed a virtual monopoly. The woolen industry in particular expanded at a tremendous rate. In a two year period, 1808-1809, sixty-two woolen mills were built. Prior to this date, the manufacture of woolens was largely a domestic or household industry. Woolen producers and manufacturers shortly became vigorous advocates of the protective tariff.²²

The movement for protection gathered strength from other quarters. As early as 1802, Kentucky farmers complained

²²F. W. Taussig, The Tariff History of the United States (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923), 26-29.

that peace in Europe had greatly reduced the demand for their commodities, and made it impossible for them to compete with the eastern farmer, especially in flour production. This gave rise to the belief that the tariff might relieve their hard pressed condition. Kentucky had other reasons for her interest in protection; by 1810 she had manufacturing valued at over \$6 million. By that time, the speeches of Henry Clay revealed his growing enthusiasm for protection. Other farmers producing hemp, flax, and wool likewise hoped to gain some advantage from the tariff.²³

Peace in 1815 brought hard times to new industries. Few could stand the competition of Britain when she returned to peacetime production. The American entrepreneurs were as yet unskilled in management and marketing and the return of heavy British shipments imperiled their very existence.²⁴ Also, some of the ardor for restrictive legislation came from the ebullient nationalism that swept the country after 1812, as hatred and distrust of England were strong. Leading journalists took up the cry for protection. Hezekiah Niles, publishing his influential Niles' Weekly Register from

²³John B. McMaster, A History of the People of the United States, IV (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1895), 498; American State Papers, Finance, II, 713; The Works of Henry Clay, III (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 142.

²⁴American State Papers, Finance, III, 52-53, 103-107.

Baltimore, was ecstatic over the industrial prospects of the nation. He predicted that the current War would destroy American dependence on Britain. Baltimore now sold goods valued at half a million dollars a year where only five years earlier these same items had been purchased abroad. Niles saw the West as the great reservoir of raw materials. An ardent tariff advocate, he often coupled economic statistics with homey phrases describing the delights of domestic industry: "Our dashing bucks are proud to boast a homespun coat; and the prudent housewife delighted exhibits her newly made table linens, sheeting, carpets" ²⁵

This feeling culminated in the Tariff Bill of 1816. The report of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Dallas set the tone for the measure with regard to agriculture. Dallas admitted that farm products needed a "free and constant access to market for its staples," but in light of the national interest, he wrote, a domestic market should replace a foreign one. Also the farmer might now purchase his needs from domestic producers rather than from abroad. Generally, the duties suggested for agriculture by Dallas were higher than those finally passed. ²⁶

²⁵Niles' Weekly Register, January 23, 1813, 328-329.

²⁶American State Papers, Finance, III. 85-90.

The acrimony that marked other tariff debates was absent in 1816. To be sure there was disagreement, but there was little of the intense hostility that later helped the tariff to become a sectional and political issue. Few men seemed to doubt the virtues of protection. The question centered around the amount of duties needed and the necessity for everyone to share in whatever gains were made. Those in favor of the tariff and desiring agricultural support utilized the Hamiltonian argument. Samuel Ingham of Pennsylvania wooed farm support with promises that less reliance upon foreign demand meant a steadier market.²⁷

Thomas Telfair of Georgia was the most incisive critic of the measure. Telfair doubted the wisdom of passing a bill for protection. Why, he asked, should the planter, a consumer of manufactured articles, pay the "difference between the wages of labor in factory and field, together with the difference of profit which superior skill in foreign manufactures gives over the manufactures of this country?" Industrialists, he stated, wanted to lessen competition, yet gain even larger markets. Telfair's argument stirred little real sympathy. Only John Randolph of Roanoke was ready to heap invective on the measure. Randolph characterized the

²⁷Annals of Congress, 14th Cong., 1st Sess., 1238-1239.

Bill as a "scheme of public robbery" and stated that he opposed the "mushroom interest lately sprung into favor."²⁸

Although Southerners remained divided, they were willing to go along with the measure. Most of all, they hoped to protect their weak banking system. They feared that the purchase of India cotton would drain precious specie and consequently, they allowed a duty on cotton. Furthermore, the South and West had a direct interest in the ailing textile industry. Many farmers had moved into the production of wool and cotton for bagging and they were not averse to aid.²⁹ On April 4 John C. Calhoun rose to speak on behalf of the measure, declaring that it was in the country's broad national interests. Both commerce and agriculture had suffered during the War, he said, and because these were the nation's pillars of strength, they must be protected.

Calhoun said that the wealth of the country depended upon the healthy state of all industries, and, that no single segment of the economy was responsible for prosperity. He predicted that when manufactures had matured to the point necessary, "the farmer will find a ready market for his surplus; and what is almost equal consequence, a

²⁸ Ibid., 1315-1318, 1328.

²⁹ Albert S. Bolles, The Financial History of the United States, 1789-1860 (New York: D Appleton and Co., 1885), 362-364.

certain and cheap supply of all he wants."³⁰ Only a few months earlier a more distinguished southerner, Thomas Jefferson, had acknowledged the necessity of placing the "manufacturer at the side of the agriculturist." He stated that the defense, unity and prosperity of the nation were at stake.³¹

Farmers enjoyed a temporary boom during the years immediately following the passage of the tariff. Grain prices reached their highest level in 1816. In the following year, flour brought \$14.00 a barrel at Philadelphia, a mark not reached again until the Civil War. Yet, trouble was in the offing and by 1818 prices began to tumble and the brief prosperity triggered by the poor crop yields in Europe slackened. As exports dropped, so did prices. By 1821 flour had plummeted to \$4 a barrel.³² Further consternation resulted from other factors. The passage of the British Corn Laws lessened demand in England. Compounded with that, British goods inundated American markets and created problems for both agriculture and industry. Resentment

³⁰Annals of Congress, 14th Cong., 1st Sess., 1330-1335; Robert L. Meriwether, The Papers of John C. Calhoun, 1801-1807, I (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 347-356.

³¹The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, XIII-XVI (Washington: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1905), 386-392.

³²George R. Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 361-362; For slightly different figures see Evans, Exports, Domestic From the United States to All Countries, 23.

swelled with falling land values and a gyrating money market. Unable to escape this dilemma, the farmer sought a remedy in protection.

Agricultural societies petitioned Congress for relief by guarding the home market. Protectionist sympathy among farmers centered in the western and middle states. The wheat producers of this area, unable to get prices which enabled them to market profitably, joined the protectionist fold. Sheep farmers of Ohio, Vermont, and Pennsylvania, along with the hemp raisers of Kentucky, believed imposts might ease the depression. Corn and flax producers also sought help.³³ The crisis of 1819 holds special meaning for a study of agriculture and its relation to tariff policy because the idea of protection gained a stronger hold on agrarians than ever before. The farmer developed a faith in the tariff that he never completely lost.

A large part of this may be traced to the growing market orientation of agriculture. Farmers were being drawn into the commercial life of the nation more fully than ever before, and the old practice of self-sufficient husbandry was breaking down. As the business frame of mind developed in

³³Hunsberger, "The Development of Tariff Policy in the Republican Party," 131-135; Niles' Weekly Register, December 23, 1820, 278; F. W. Taussig, "The Early Protective Movement and the Tariff of 1828," Political Science Quarterly, III (March, 1888), 17-18.

succeeding decades, many farmers came to believe that a tariff might assure them a better market.³⁴ This enthusiasm for protection was not universal, however, and sectional differences became increasingly pronounced. Southerners argued that farming needed no artificial stimulants or incentives. Perhaps, because the industrial attempts in the waning years of the second decade had failed, the South realized that she was irrevocably tied to agriculture. Her capital was invested in labor - a commodity increasing in cost. Any tariff was likely to make those goods which she purchased more expensive. Furthermore, southerners believed that the tariff was dividing the nation into two parties - an agricultural one and a manufacturing one.³⁵

The confusion and division that existed within agrarian ranks was evidenced by the actions on the Bill of 1820. While a large number of farmers were willing to accept protection, some were not. The vote on the measure revealed their quandary. In the House, the vote was 91 to 78. The South registered 63 nays, while Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois gave 8 yeas. New England divided almost evenly while the Middle

³⁴Taussig, "The Early Protective Movement and the Tariff of 1828," 17; Vernon Carstensen, "The Changing Nature of the American Farm," Current History, XXX (September, 1954), 135.

³⁵Niles' Weekly Register, August 22, 1818, 435; Ibid., June 17, 1817, 226; L. B. Schmidt, "Agriculture in Transition," Current History, XXVI (February, 1954), 77-78; Taussig, "Early Protective Movement and the Tariff of 1828," 20.

States were close to unanimity for the bill. In the Senate where the Bill failed by a single vote, the South cast sixteen nays, the West two, while the Middle States were unanimous for the measure.³⁶ Kentuckians viewed the bill's defeat as a horrendous blow. Clay's home newspaper, the Lexington Public Inquirer, announced the news in columns swathed in black:

Mourn o ye sons and daughters of Kentucky. O ye inhabitants of the United States, put on sackcloth and ashes, for the great enemy of your independence has prevailed. You must remain tributary to the workshops of Europe. Your factories must remain prostrate. Your agriculture production must lie and rot on your hands.³⁷

The growing protectionist sentiment among northern agrarians carried over to 1824. A Committee on Agriculture established to investigate the effect of the tariff on farm products declared that farmers favored a home market. The Committee also believed that increased duties on many goods then imported could benefit farming. A duty was desired on every imported raw material available within the United States. It was hoped that the tariff would result in a division of labor and thus drain off some people who currently engaged in agriculture.

³⁶Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 2138-2139.

³⁷Niles' Weekly Register, June 3, 1820, 241.

The Committee denied the theory of reciprocity. Foreign nations bought American farm commodities only out of necessity, and Britain or France would not hesitate to bar agricultural products in self-interest. Consequently, American foreign sales depended not upon the amount nations purchased in the United States, but upon the selfish needs of a particular country. American duties were needed to protect raw materials as well as to stimulate manufacturing.³⁸ Tariff enthusiasts also gained support from President Monroe who in his December message of 1823 recommended an upward revision. A reapportionment of the House occurred just prior to the new congressional session which increased representation from northern and western states sympathetic to the tariff. In addition, every locality found at least one commodity for which protection was paramount.³⁹

The ensuing debate was protracted and bitter. Complicating the issue was the general economic slump that covered the nation. The imminence of a Presidential election did nothing to temper feelings. Andrew Jackson,

³⁸Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 1858-1859.

³⁹James D. Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents, II (Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1910), 784; Orin L. Elliot, The Tariff Controversy in the United States, 1789-1833 (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1892), 231.

candidate of the growing West, refused to fully commit himself on the question. He spoke of a "judicious tariff" with careful regard for agriculture. In a letter of April, 1824, he came closest to revealing his sentiments:

Take from agriculture in the United States six hundred thousand men, women, and children, and you at once give a home market for more breadstuffs than all Europe now furnishes us. In short, sir, we have been too long subject to the policy of the British merchants.⁴⁰

Yet, to Henry Clay fell the task of building the case for tariffs, and in a two-day speech he brilliantly enunciated the cause for protection. That the young Kentuckian should have accepted the challenge was not surprising. As early as 1809, he had introduced a resolution in the legislature calling for every member to dress only in clothing produced within the borders of Kentucky. Long a champion of protection, he represented a region enthusiastic about local industry. Lexington, Clay's home town, was itself representative of enterprising capitalism. By 1817 Lexington had three paper mills, twelve cotton factories, four hat factories, four coach factories, three woolen mills, and a flourishing gun powder business.⁴¹

⁴⁰J. Spencer Bassett (ed.), Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, III (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1931), 250.

⁴¹Daniel Mallory (ed.), The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay, IV (New York: Van Amringe and Bixby, 1844), 405-406; E. Merton Coulter, "The Genesis of Henry Clay's American System," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXV (June, 1934), 46-54.

His ringing plea called for a system which would include the interests of all sections - an American system. Surveying the state of the nation, Clay declared that its prostrate condition was due to the illogical dependence upon foreign trade. Only when America freed herself from the uncertainty of European demands could the crisis be truly alleviated. Agriculture, America's paramount interest, had to be guarded. Clay reiterated that the extension of industry would lessen competition among farmers and provide greater profits for those remaining in agriculture. The tariff would provide a safe and steady home market for the sale of farm produce.

A second portion of Clay's program also appealed to agrarians. Combined with the home market argument was his proposal for internal improvements which would cheapen transportation and the market for agricultural produce. The entire plan found a receptive audience in much of the farming community. It sounded logical. Also it carried an emotional appeal against foreign interests, to which many farmers believed they had long been sacrificed.⁴² Despite

⁴²Mallory, 405-424; The true economic condition of the nation in 1824 has been a question of some debate; for further information see: "The Tariff Question," North American Review, XIX (March, 1824), 231-232; Thomas H. Benton, Thirty Years View, I (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1854), 266.

the derision heaped upon Clay's plan, the Bill of 1824 became law. The sectional division was clear. The South cast 57 negative votes. The commercial interests of the Northeast led by Daniel Webster also rejected the measure. Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky joined with Pennsylvania, Vermont, New Jersey, and New York to pass the measure.⁴³

The demands of hemp and woolen producers were answered. Hemp was taxed at \$35 a ton, while the raw and imported woolen duties were placed at 30 and 33 1/3 per cent respectively. The following rates were established on other farm products: wheat, 25 cents per bushel; butter, 5 cents per pound; beef and pork, 2 cents per pound; wheat flour, 50 cents per hundred weight; cotton bagging, 3 3/4 cents per square yard; and, hams and bacon, 5 cents per pound.⁴⁴

There was intense popular hostility to the new law. Niles' Register frequently referred to the filled galleries in the House where people followed the debates. Partisan feeling on both sides ran high, and Niles admitted that his circulation dropped due to his unyielding stand on

⁴³Annals of Congress, 18th Cong., 1st Sess., 708-733.

⁴⁴U. S., Statutes at Large, IV, 25-29.

the bill. Benton, in his Thirty Years View, reported that 111 members unable to leave their beds were wheeled in to cast crucial ballots.⁴⁵

Tariff feeling abated only briefly in the decade of the 'twenties. Wool growers continually agitated for higher rates. Shortly after the passage of the 1824 bill, Britain lowered duties on raw wool entering her ports. This enabled English woolen manufactures to undercut their American competitors. Flax growers joined forces with the woolen people in the demand for additional duties. These persistent claims led to the introduction of a measure in 1827 to boost woolen rates. The bill failed by a single vote. However, protectionists gained a powerful ally in 1827, when Daniel Webster led Massachusetts into their ranks. Likewise, the changing economy of other New England states made it expedient to do the same.⁴⁶

Frustrated in their attempt, the tariff forces huddled to plan strategy. The result was a grand convention

⁴⁵Niles' Weekly Register, February 28, 1824; 401; Ibid., April 24, 1824, 143; Ibid., March 6, 1824, 1; Benton, 34.

⁴⁶Robert V. Remini, Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party (New York: Columbia Press, 1959), 159; Paul W. Gates, The Farmer's Age, 1815-1860 (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1960), 326-327; Tausaig, "The Early Protective Movement and the Tariff of 1828," 24-25.

staged at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1827 where delegates were present from all walks of life. The recommendations for higher duties were sweeping. Agricultural commodities, iron, glassware, woolens, and other products were singled out as in need of protection. By wide publicity the tariff advocates sought to gain new legislation.⁴⁷

The farmer's role in the election of 1828, and the passage of the so-called Tariff of Abominations of the same year, was crucial. Fortunately, for the Jacksonian party, large numbers of western agrarians had come to believe that the tariff was a necessity for "good times." Theoretical or practical proof of this was unimportant; they were convinced the tariff could bring prosperity. Thus Andrew Jackson had to appear as a friend of the tariff - at least in the North and Northwest. It was here that his opponent had been strongest four years earlier.⁴⁸ Martin Van Buren, as Jackson's campaign manager, was the key figure in formulating strategy. Van Buren, gambling politically, bet on the certainty that the South would not desert the Democratic party for Adams. Furthermore, he aimed at solidifying the remaining sections of the country through their hope for internal improvements.

⁴⁷Niles' Weekly Register, July 30, 1827, 389 ff.

⁴⁸Robert V. Remini, "Martin Van Buren and the Tariff of Abominations," American Historical Review, LXIII (July, 1958), 903-904.

The Committee on Manufactures in 1828 was dominated by Jackson men and they carefully publicized duties favorable to agriculture. Prospective rates on hemp, wool, molasses, and flax carried considerable increases. These duties were bait to insure western and middle state support in the coming election. The North or New England vote could be ignored because any rate hike favorable to this area meant nothing as they were certain to cast their ballots for Adams any way. Thus, the seemingly generous rates to farmers, although real, and welcomed by large numbers of them, carried the election hopes of the Jackson party. Unfortunately for southerners, they misconstrued Jacksonian tactics. They believed that the bill was an intentional hoax and consequently united in an effort to prevent its improvement. They trusted that it was so obnoxious that its defeat was inevitable. Unbeknown to them, the campaign strategists had no intention of allowing the measure to fail.⁴⁹

The important duties as finally passed were cotton bagging at 5 cents per square yard, raw wool at 4 cents per pound plus an ad valorem of 40 per cent to be increased 5 per cent yearly until reaching 50 per cent, hemp and flax at \$45 a ton to be increased \$5 yearly until reaching

⁴⁹Ibid., 904-914.

\$60 a ton; and manufactured wool, 45 per cent.⁵⁰ The country's reactions to the passage of the Bill were mixed and many were surprised that the measure even became law. Merchants and importers who had hoped for high prices were disappointed, and a wave of confusion beset the most avid protectionists.⁵¹

The South viewed the law of 1828 as treasonous. John C. Calhoun, the section's greatest spokesman, called the bill's passage "worse than folly, it was madness itself." The farmers of the South, he said, were being victimized. They paid for northern protection and in doing so could not compete in the world market. Southern farmers could not survive without an international market. Calhoun feared that "not one quarter of Southern agricultural output could be consumed in the United States alone. If the tariff . . . became the settled policy of the government . . . the separation of the Union will inevitably follow"⁵² There is no doubt but that the tariff worked a hardship on the southern agricultural economy. Yet, this was but a part of the South's problem. Southeastern farmers were

⁵⁰U. S. Statutes at Large, IV, 270-275.

⁵¹Bolles, 406-409.

⁵²Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun, American Patriot (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 170-171, 186, 230-231.

having an increasingly difficult time competing with those planters who moved to the new and fertile Southwest. Production lagged behind the developing areas of the Southwest and Northwest. As the South's earlier attempts at industrialization had failed, she was left heavily dependent upon the cotton economy. The problem was crucial and the South blamed the tariff for her difficulties.⁵³

A reduction of duties in 1830 had failed to appease the South and the animosity increased during the years just prior to the Compromise bill of 1833. Banquet speeches throughout the South were marked by demagoguery and veiled threats of secession. One popular anti-tariff toast stated: "The tariff; a thing to detestable to have been contrived except by Yankees; to be enforced by Kentuckians; or to be endured except by the submission of the South;"⁵⁴ Niles' Register attributed southern hatred to British agents. He believed that English free traders were willing to provide muskets free of charge to Southerners willing to revolt.⁵⁵

⁵³Louis B. Schmidt, "Andrew Jackson and the Agrarian West," Current History, XXVIII (June, 1955), 324-325.

⁵⁴Niles' Weekly Register, May 15, 1831, 190-191

⁵⁵Ibid., September 20, 1828. 44.

In 1832 Congress further reduced duties slightly and protectionists claimed they were being sacrificed to the South and to western land speculators. The rate on hemp was reduced from \$60 a ton to \$40 and flax was admitted duty free as were poorer grade woolens. However, this slight modification failed to stall the nullification crisis.⁵⁶ In November, 1832, South Carolina nullified the tariff acts of 1828 and 1832. Jackson met the move with a sweeping proclamation and talked about using force, but he tempered threats with compromise. The concession was in the form of the Verplanck bill, a measure that promised to reduce rates 50 per cent by 1834. Proponents of this bill argued that a tariff reduction would not mean a treasury deficit.⁵⁷ In the debates, the agricultural South adopted no new stand. It held the position that the tariff restricted southerners to being producers of raw materials for northern merchants and manufacturers. The collusion of greedy Yankee and British industrialists, southerners said, was sacrificing the economic welfare of the South. Their survival was dependent upon some measure of relief.

⁵⁶ McMaster, VI, 136; George T. Curtis, Life of Webster, I (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1930), 392-396.

⁵⁷ Glyndon Van Deusen, The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 74-79; Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 947.

The Compromise bill of 1833 was carefully designed. Clay cautiously stated that he offered his measure only because the tariff stood in "imminent danger." In answer to criticism that the compromise sacrificed protection, Clay held that conciliation meant the preservation of the American System lest it be completely destroyed. A willingness to compromise prevailed in part because the new measure was not a dramatic change.

The Act provided for the gradual lowering of duties on all goods. The reductions were to be made yearly at 10 per cent in 1834, 1835, 1838, and 1840. By 1842, no article was to carry more than a 20 per cent tax. The percentage that remained in 1840 would be withdrawn in January and July of 1842. Actually, the Act gave those who were strongly opposed to the tariff ten years to make adjustments.

The bill passed the Senate easily where the South voted unanimously for the Act. In the House, New England and the middle states went heavily against the measure, while the West divided. Senator Benton of Missouri best expressed the sympathies of those Westerners who opposed the bill. The Missourian argued that the measure was a clever scheme. For seven years the government would have surplus revenue, but then a shortage would occur. The alarm, caused by a deficit,

declared Benton, would prevent any further reductions. Nevertheless, the bill became law on March 2, 1833.⁵⁸

Interest in the tariff dropped sharply after 1833. The constant agitation that had marked earlier Congressional sessions disappeared. Vested interests and the general public seemed wearied by the subject. Moreover, the talk of a home market for farm products lessened its importance. The general lack of interest by agriculture in protective legislation in the two decades just preceding the Civil War might be attributed to a number of factors. Farming was in a period of expansion and transition, and shortly after 1812 settlers had begun pouring into the Mississippi Valley. Also, settlement was made easier by the Land Acts of 1820 and 1841. Coinciding with this emigration were generous land grants encouraging canal, road, and rail construction. By 1825 the Erie Canal had opened, providing a market route for farmers in the Northwest, particularly Ohio. Steamboat facilities as well aided in trade and family mobility. Eastern markets also became more accessible by the middle 'fifties when railroads reached the Mississippi River.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 809-810; U. S. Statutes at Large, IV, 629-631; Benton, 308.

⁵⁹Schmidt, "Agriculture in Transition," 74-75; Dan E. Clark, "The Westward Movement in the Upper Mississippi Valley During the Fifties," Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, III, 1913-1914, 212-213.

As the eastern United States moved more and more into manufacturing, a larger market was available and farming became more commercialized. The former self-sufficient and individualistic agrarian disappeared as his isolation broke down and as he was drawn into the market economy. He now specialized in certain cash crops such as wheat. The New England farmer, tilling marginal soil, was either drawn into the city to find work or joined the westward trek.⁶⁰

A part of the agrarian problem was fluctuating prices. Until 1855 farm prices climbed gradually but continued to be unsteady. Much of this well-being resulted from the heavy investments in transportation. This redirected the capital and labor which might otherwise have gone into farming. Furthermore, the discovery of gold after 1848 acted as an additional stimulant to the entire economy. The repeal of the English Corn Laws in 1846 opened a large market for farm produce and agrarians exporting to free-trade Britain tended to ignore the tariff question.⁶¹

⁶⁰Louis B. Schmidt, "The Internal Grain Trade of the United States, 1850-1860," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XVIII (June, 1920), 96-103; Richard Current, Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1955), 73.

⁶¹Anne Bezanson, Robert Gray, Miriam Hussey, Wholesale Prices in Philadelphia, 1784-1861 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), 23-24; Taylor, 136; Douglas C. North, The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1961), 146, 195.

The depression of 1837 and the ensuing government deficit brought cries for protection from the tariff faithful. But among farmers, only the hemp producers appeared intensely interested in the bill of 1842. The measure which ultimately passed was protective. Duties were raised on items such as cotton goods, woolens, and steel wire and businessmen immediately attributed the economic upturn to the passage of the tariff measure. Yet this theory is open to question, as the "good times" continued under the revenue bill of 1846.⁶² The measure passed in 1846 was the strongest attack on the tariff system up to this time. As Secretary of the Treasury, Robert Walker laid before Congress a bill in sympathy with administration thinking. Much of the report accompanying the measure dealt with the effect of the tariff on agriculture.

Walker emphasized the importance of farming and the inequities which the tariff placed upon agrarians. He declared that the bill of 1842 discriminated against agriculture because higher duties were placed on manufactured fabrics than on the farm goods from which they were made. Farmers suffered under high duties on industrial products and Walker said that their continuance was absurd. The

⁶²Taussig, 116-120; U. S. Statutes at Large, V, 548-567.

farmer, Walker stated, already had the home market without the tariff. Moreover, the home market could never absorb all the farm produce.⁶³ Walker wrote that "the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, if cultivated to their fullest extent, could, of themselves raise more than sufficient food to supply the entire home market."⁶⁴

Walker also believed that farmers could obtain more foreign sales without fear of losing domestic ones. He declared that farmers were deprived of the foreign market by high duties, and that they must purchase goods in a domestic market whose price was enhanced by the tariff. In essence, retaliation by foreign countries prevented farmers from selling abroad. On the other hand, protection was rewarding to industry. By gaining a monopoly of the market, manufacturers were able to charge higher prices. Farmers were forced to pay exorbitant prices for home manufactured goods and still lost their overseas markets. Remove all barriers from agriculture, Walker stated, and the United States would feed and clothe the world.⁶⁵

⁶³William Letwin (ed.), A Documentary History of American Economic Policy Since 1789 (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1961), 27-41.

⁶⁴Ibid., 41.

⁶⁵Ibid., 40, 42.

The Act as it finally passed divided imported articles into various schedules. Duties ranged from one-hundred per cent on luxuries, to an extended free list that included tea and doffee. Goods such as iron and wool, however, still paid a 30 per cent duty. Thus the bill was less free trade in orientation than many were led to believe. The South and West united to pass the measure over the negative votes of New England and the middle states.⁶⁶

How much the tariff bills of 1846 and 1857 contributed to farm prosperity remains a matter of debate. The reductions did come at a time when productivity was increasing and greater markets were needed. Yet, it is clear that at least northwest farmers wanted protection. The West and Northwest cast 35 votes against reduction, and only 14 for it. These actions can hardly be attributed to the panic of 1857, as the depression barely touched farmers. In part, this behavior resulted from the failure to impose duties on lead, hemp and raw wool - all products of the West. Furthermore, some agrarians were joining the newly formed Republican party which was sympathetic toward the tariff and promised to defend northwestern farm interests against the expanding slavocracy.⁶⁷

⁶⁶U. S. Statutes at Large, IX, 42-49.

⁶⁷Thomas Monroe Pitkin, "Western Republicans and the Tariff," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXVIII (December, 1940), 401-403; 413; Thomas Monroe Pitkin, "The Tariff and The Early Republican Party" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Western Reserve, 1935), 255.

At the same time, the drift toward higher duties was part of a larger movement. The Panic of 1857 had quickly revived the cry for a protective tariff. This was particularly true in the East, where Pennsylvania, caught in the throes of a depression, feverishly renewed demands for protection. Yet, if the East wanted a tariff, a latent desire for protection also existed in the states farther west. Many of the cities in the Great Lakes region were sympathetic to the tariff argument, and believed that with adequate protection they were destined to become great manufacturing centers. Republicans in Detroit worked hard to make the tariff an integral part of party philosophy.⁶⁸

In the protectionist strategy of the late 1850's lies one of the keys to the formulation of farm attitudes toward the tariff in the 19th century. High tariff journals in the Pennsylvania and New York published large amounts of pro-tariff literature, and this was spread rapidly throughout the West. Many western editors, ignorant on the tariff, and unwilling to study the complicated issue gladly accepted protectionist articles furnished them by eastern presses. Wisconsin newspapers such as the Milwaukee Daily Wisconsin and the Madison Daily State Journal were strongly pro-tariff

⁶⁸Henry C. Hubbard, The Older Middle West, 1840-1880, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1936), 20; Pitkin, "Western Republicans and the Tariff," 402.

and impressed upon their readers the idea that, with protection, the Northwest would industrialize. The eastern newspapers acknowledged the effect of their propaganda in the West, as did that part of the press which opposed the high tariff movement.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, the home market argument without any favorable propaganda, had endured as an integral part of "farm folk lore." Many farmers, despite prosperous years under a low tariff, held to the general theory of protection. If American capitalism were allowed to develop to its fullest, the desired home market must be obtained and enlarged.⁷⁰ In the confusion that accompanied the coming of the Civil War, American agriculture remained divided on the tariff. When the war prosperity ended and farm prices began the long downward skid, the question returned. Unorganized and uninformed economically, agrarians sought various kinds of relief. As a panacea, the tariff confounded the western farmer. He believed in it, and yet he did not. It sounded logical, but somehow he was convinced that it cheated him. Slowly, cautiously, and hesitatingly, he moved toward a decision - a decision

⁶⁹Ibid., 402-410, 415.

⁷⁰W. P. Sterns, "The Foreign Trade of the United States from 1820-1840," The Journal of Political Economy, VIII (December, 1899), 40-45.

so crucial that it elected presidents and dethroned Congresses -
a decision that could change the course of American politics.

CHAPTER II

THE FARM DILEMMA: PROSPERITY AND PANIC

The twenty years between 1860 and 1880 were ones of immense importance for the American farmer. Labeling these decades a time of "agricultural revolution" is hardly satisfactory to convey the dizzying problems and changes that swept farm life during this period. Many agrarians, struggle as they might, slipped from a position of prosperity to one of financial insecurity, from insecurity to despair and, in some cases, from despair to destitution.

Why the continued economic reversal? This was the question that haunted agrarians. The decade of the 1860's had begun auspiciously. Despite the outbreak of conflict in 1861, the sharp differences that prevailed on the political scene in the North were momentarily dulled by the onslaught of patriotic fervor. The task of winning the war overshadowed all other problems. For farmers of the North and West a number of factors joined to usher in

unparalleled production and expansion, and for nearly a decade, general prosperity.¹

Numerous forces contributed to agricultural development in the West. Generous federal legislation made it easier than ever before to acquire a farm on the frontier. The Homestead Law of 1862, coupled with the Timber Culture Act of 1873 and the Desert Land Act of 1877, made it possible for an eager settler to obtain up to 1,120 acres of land. However, the importance of the land legislation for the people that moved West lay not so much in the amount of land obtainable, as in the fact that the opportunity for ownership existed.²

The railroads, crucial to western development, were also the recipients of government lands. Washington was eager to encourage the construction of new rail lines. Examples of this were the Union and Central Pacific roads which were given ten square miles for each mile of track laid. Later the acreage granted railroads for construction increased and roads received over 134,000,000 acres from the federal government - a figure which does not include gifts by states

¹Emerson D. Fite, "The Agricultural Development of the West During the Civil War," Quarterly Journal of Economics, XI (February, 1906), 259 ff.

²Louis B. Schmidt, "Some Significant Aspects of the Agrarian Revolution in the United States," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XVIII (July, 1920), 372-374.

and smaller localities anxious to receive rail service.³ Consequently, the railroads were able to offer cheap lands and easy access to markets. Land companies were also eager to entice people to emigrate. Farmers, factory workers, immigrants, and adventurers answered the call, and poured forth in search of a "place" in the West.⁴

As transportation facilities improved, the population of the frontier swelled rapidly. Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas increased from 300,000 in 1860 to 2 1/2 million by 1880. Kansas alone between 1870 and 1880 gained 347,000. The largest growth was between 1860 and 1890 in the North Central states comprising Nebraska, Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana. Their population jumped from 8,000,000 to over 23,000,000 in this thirty year period. The number of farms increased from 77,000 to almost 2,000,000 in these same years, while acreage rose from 107,000,000 to over 250,000,000.⁵

As farm population and acreage increased, production was greatly enhanced. The introduction of farm machinery

³U. S. Statutes at Large, XII, 492; Ibid., XIII, 358; Albert B. Hart, "The Disposition of our Public Lands," Quarterly Journal of Economics, I (January, 1887), 179-180.

⁴Schmidt, "Some Significant Aspects of the Agrarian Revolution," 380; Fred Shannon, The Farmers' Last Frontier (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1945), 41, 43.

⁵U. S. Tenth Census, Agriculture (1880) I, 4; Schmidt, "Some Significant Aspects of the Agrarian Revolution," 374-375.

only added to productivity. By 1860 the productive power of the West was already formidable. The Governor of Massachusetts attested to New England's dependence upon the West as a reservoir of food:

The annual consumption of purchased flour by New England, . . . is something near 3,500,000 barrels, or more than one barrel to each inhabitant. In the year 1862 more than 800,000 barrels of Western and Northern flour were sold in Boston for domestic consumption, or three-fourths of a barrel for each person in Massachusetts.

I venture to affirm that the consumption of Western agricultural products within the six states of New England . . . during the year 1863, reached the value of \$50,000,000 the proportion of which taken by Massachusetts exceeded \$20,000,000.⁶

Other domestic markets purchased a part of the burgeoning produce of the West. The Gulf states by 1872 bought over 33,000,000 bushels of western grain, the Atlantic seaboard states, 104,877,000, the middle and south Atlantic states 63,745,000, and New England, 41,132,000 bushels. However, the home market alone could not absorb the increased surplus. Fortunately for agriculture during the early years of the 'sixties, Europe needed American farm products. The harvests in southern Europe were poor, and the British wheat crop had failed for three consecutive years between 1861 and 1863. Consequently, Britain resorted to heavy imports of American farm commodities. In 1862 alone she bought three

⁶Ibid.

times more wheat and wheat flour than ever before. France also purchased increased amounts of American farm produce.⁷

Farm exports throughout the war and immediate post-war period consisted mainly of livestock and breadstuffs. The Great Lakes ports handled the heaviest shipments in its history. Chicago grain exports increased from 31,000,000 bushels in 1860 to 52,000,000 bushels in 1865. Wheat, flour, and corn shipments continued to rise. Between 1867 and 1872 over 15 per cent of the entire flour and wheat crop was sent abroad. For corn during the same period, 4 1/2 per cent was shipped abroad, amounting to over 52,800,000 bushels. Between 1879 and 1883 wheat and flour shipments abroad averaged over 34 per cent of the total crop. After 1883 both corn and wheat dropped in foreign sales.⁸

Yet, for the farmer prosperity failed to keep pace with increased production and expansion. By 1868 agricultural prices had started to decline, and by the 1870's agrarians were caught in a grueling depression. The speculative boom of that decade brought no relief to farmers. They

⁷Fite, "The Agricultural Development of the West During the Civil War," 260-263; Schmidt, "Some Significant Aspects of Agrarian Revolution," 382-385; Louis B. Schmidt, "The Influence of Wheat and Cotton on Anglo American Relations During the Civil War," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XVI (July, 1918), 425-429, 431.

⁸Fite, "The Agricultural Development of the West During the Civil War," 260-262; Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1902, 344-345.

shared in none of its profits, but only paid higher prices for items they needed. It seemed to the agricultural community that the rest of America enjoyed the good things of life, while the farmers, the real producers in society, suffered. The tariff question capstoned the dilemma of the farmer. As the panic lengthened into depression the high duties were criticized. It was not that agrarians were unreceptive to the need for a tariff, but it seemed to them that the appetite of the protectionist could never be satisfied. Furthermore, the promise that the tariff would place the farm and factory side by side, reciprocating profit to each had not materialized. The home market theory had not worked out as the tariff advocates had claimed as prices had dropped, not risen. Increased numbers of farmers wondered if they had been duped into bearing the burden of protection. Many newspapers had seen the ruse, but agriculturalists en masse were hard to convince. Many did not grasp that the prices of farm products became fixed by the surplus sold in free trade markets. In essence they bought in a protected market and sold in a free one. What had happened to the "golden age" of agriculture that everyone assured them existed?⁹

⁹Thorstein Veblen, "Food Supply and the Price of Wheat," Journal of Political Economy, I (December, 1892), 69, 73, 76; James A. Barnes, "The Farmer Faces Industrialization," Current History, XXVI (February, 1954), 81; Theodore Saloutos, "The Agricultural Problem and Nineteenth-Century Industrialism," Agricultural History, XXII (July, 1948), 161, 164-165; William Maitland, "The Ruin of the American Farmer," Nineteenth Century, XXXII (November, 1892), 733-734.

No frontier spirit spawned the coming "farm revolt." It was the clash of industrial and agricultural America. By 1848 many farmers in Illinois complained they were not receiving profits due them. The grievances of the 1850's were markedly similar to those of the 1870's. The farmer was already worried about such problems as taxation, tariffs, middlemen and consolidation within the business community. Thus, some agrarians foresaw the coming industrial challenge. The open clash of interests would have occurred sooner had not secession taken place. However, the War tended to obscure farm problems as the public conscience centered its attention on the Civil conflict.¹⁰

The tariff, one question of importance to agriculture, failed to succumb to the crisis of the war. A new tariff philosophy evolved during the period of tumult. The controversy shifted from the point of protection versus revenue only, to simply "the kind of protection to be afforded."¹¹

¹⁰Jonathan Periam, The Groundswell (Cincinnati: Hannaford and Thompson, 1874), 196-204; Earle D. Ross, "The Role of the Farmer in American Life," Current History, XXXI (September, 1956), 130-131; John L. Coulter, "Organization Among the Farmers of the United States," Yale Review, XVIII (November, 1909), 278.

¹¹Richard Hofstadter, "The Tariff Issue and The Civil War," American Historical Review, XLIV (October, 1938), 50-55; Howard K. Beale, "The Tariff and Reconstruction," American Historical Review, XXXV (January, 1930), 276; William McDonald, "Tariff Laws in American History," Current History, XXXII (September, 1930), 1097-1098.

Originally the war duties were to be only temporary. The increased rates were to pay the cost of military operations. Justin Morrill stressed in his argument on behalf of the bill of 1864 its temporary nature. Nevertheless, new forces acted in the post-war period to thwart reduction. The industrial order had expanded and profited under wartime tariffs and feared a return to the ante-bellum system. This new politico-industrial alliance cemented during the conflict sought to prevent the removal of compensatory duties, and if possible, extend them.¹²

Businessmen hastened to establish special pressure and lobby groups with the aim of insuring protection. Exemplary were the American Iron and Steel Association and the Industrial League. The former was organized in 1864, and headquartered in Philadelphia. James M. Swank ultimately came to head the organization and, under his leadership, it played a role of inestimable importance in shaping tariff policy. The Industrial League was also organized to promote and protect tariff interests. It was begun in Pennsylvania under the direction of Daniel J. Morrell, Henry C. Lea, Joseph Wharton, and James M. Swank. The League became the leading spokesman

¹²Congressional Globe, 38th Cong., 1st Sess., 1864, 2675; Stanley Coben, "Northeastern Business and Radical Reconstruction: A Re-Examination," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVI (June, 1959), 71.

for the protective interests. Its paid membership allowed the League to distribute free its monthly Bulletin, pro-tariff literature, and petitions. The petitions were circulated in various communities and then forwarded to Congressmen who were believed "weak" on the tariff. That the signatures did not represent members of the Congressmen's district was of no concern to the League. College libraries were also given free books for teaching the "American science of political economy."¹³

Because the votes of farm representatives in Congress were essential to passage of protective legislation, great effort was expended to convince the agricultural community of its necessity. Just prior to the introduction of the 1867 measure, the Industrial League distributed widely a pamphlet entitled: Protection vs Free Trade, National Wealth vs National Poverty: to the farmers, mechanics, laborers, and all voters of the Western and Northwestern States. Other titles appeared which carried the familiar home market argument, Protection not British Free Trade: to farmers, mechanics, and others in the Northwest, and The American Policy - Its Benefits to the West.¹⁴

¹³A. T. Volwiler, "Tariff Strategy and Propaganda in the United States, 1887-1888," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXI (October, 1930), 76-77; Ida M. Tarbell, The Tariff in Our Times (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911), 87.

¹⁴Clarence Miller, The States of the Old Northwest and the Tariff, 1865-1888 (Emporia: Emporia Gazette Press, 1929), 24.

In June, 1865, a small pamphlet authored by Dr. William Elder entitled, How the Western States Can Become the Imperial Power in the Union appeared. Elder warned the western states to diversify their economies and provide a home market for farm products, lest they remain subjected to the whim of "contemptible European markets."¹⁵ Failure to do so would result in burning surplus crops. Speaking in foreboding tones Elder concluded:

The time has come, the necessity is upon us, our security and prosperity demand the extension of the Monroe Doctrine to the commerce of the continent. The Western states are already the heart of the nation. They keep the gate of the future. They are much more than the balance of power now. The Empire of Union is possible to them. But they must take care of themselves. They must meet their responsibilities to the nation.¹⁶

The answer for agriculture was to establish and enlarge the domestic market.

E. B. Ward, a Detroit iron master speaking before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society in 1868, hammered on the same theme. He declared "diversified industry is the manifest destiny of the Northwest, and thus the farmers will partake of the common prosperity."¹⁷ Ward warned that with

¹⁵William Elder, How the Western States Can Become the Imperial Power in the Union (Philadelphia: Ringwolt and Brown, 1865), 17.

¹⁶Ibid., 18, 24.

¹⁷E. B. Ward, The Farmer and the Manufacturer (Detroit: Daily Post Book Job Printing, 1868), 3-4.

the growing surplus, farmers could no longer expect to export at a profit. The only answer, he said, was the home market. As for a tariff on farm products such as wheat, this was unnecessary. The freight alone from Europe served to protect agricultural commodities.¹⁸ Warming to his topic Ward advised:

Let me put it fairly to you, farmers of Wisconsin. Do you want to banish these woolen manufactures? Would you think it a benefit to be compelled to see all your wool in the distance and buy a half million dollars worth of shoddy clothes from over the ocean in place of the honest goods they make for you? Would you not be glad to have scores of woolen mills to each one now running? The man who supports free trade is an enemy to the country, and to the good of the Northwest.¹⁹

Equally energetic on behalf of the tariff was the National Association of Wool Growers organized in 1865 by John L. Hayes. The Association was a powerful lobby, and Hayes became an articulate spokesman for woolen interests. Hayes became one of the most powerful men in Washington with regard to the tariff. Even as an avowed protectionist he chairmanned the Tariff Commission appointed by President Arthur in 1882.

Other segments of the business community as well were interested in the tariff and especially those with

¹⁸Ibid., 4.

¹⁹Ibid., 11, 16.

investment resources. The inefficient manufacturer, too, feared a reduction in protection when the war ended and it seems likely that some industries may have over-expanded beyond peacetime needs. But entrepreneurial forces recognized the benefits of a protectionist policy and generally sought to perpetuate the home market and the protection ideal. As a group they had little genuine interest in the farmer who produced a surplus and needed the foreign market. Consequently, political persuasion and collusion held the best chance of stability and profit for business.²⁰

The post-war trend toward higher duties did not go unopposed. Throughout the war, western agricultural interests were less than enthusiastic in their support of the tariff. This remained true even when the strength of those forces usually in opposition, appeared to be waning. Before the war ended a few western Congressmen had begun to show alarm at the upward trend of the tariff. S. S. Cox of Ohio declared that the bill of 1864 was designed to insure eastern manufacturers' profits, while it sacrificed western interests.

²⁰Tarbell, 41; Thomas Cochran, "Did the Civil War Retard Industrialization?" Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVIII (September, 1961), 208-209; Jacob Elon Conner, "Industrial Causes Effecting American Commercial Policy Since the Civil War," The Annals of American Political and Social Science, XXIII (January, 1904), 43-48; Albert S. Bolles, The Financial History of the United States, 1861-1885 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1895), 448.

The measure, as passed, could only bring increased prices. The House vote revealed the skepticism of agriculture as twenty of the twenty-six nays came from farm states.²¹

The introduction of the first post-war measure in June, 1866, crystallized interests on both sides of the tariff question. The protectionist forces, cognizant of the increasing opposition in the West, hoped to gain the growing area as an ally. John L. Hayes, speaking before the National Association of Wool Growers the year before, had warned of the growing dissatisfaction of western farmers with current tariff policy. Hayes wanted to woo all agricultural interests into the protectionist fold. Seeking unification he stated, "Our object is not to reach Congress, but to convince the farmers of the West who will inevitably control the legislation of this country, of the absolute identity of our interests."²²

The Commercial and Financial Chronicle of New York editorialized similarly in July, 1866. The Chronicle feared the development of a southern and western coalition against

²¹J. A. Woodburn, "Party Politics in Indiana During the Civil War," American Historical Association Annual Report, 1902, 238; Taussig, 166; Congressional Globe, 38th Cong., 1st Sess., 1864, 748.

²²Beale, "The Tariff and Reconstruction," 238.

the tariff at the expense of manufacturing interests. Harmony must be achieved to forestall the inevitable political control by the agrarian West. Consequently, the farmer must be converted to the tariff cause.²³ Representative Justin Morrill in his opening speech on the 1867 measure, enumerated the proposed increases which he believed would be most favorable to agriculture. Higher rates were promised on salt, wool, and lumber. His plea evoked little positive response from agrarians who could see themselves paying higher prices for lumber and salt. Farmers, and much of the nation as a whole had grown restless under the war duties. It was not increased rates they desired, but lower ones.

The greatest resistance to a tariff increase came from the farm community and its leadership in Washington. Although by no means unanimous, agricultural spokesmen in the 39th Congress generally believed higher duties would be burdensome and unfair. As debate progressed on the bill, the split between agricultural and industrial America widened. Men such as John A. Kasson and James W. Grimes of Iowa, and John Wentworth and Samuel Marshall of Illinois denounced the flagrant disregard of farm interests. Even avowed tariff advocates spoke out against a policy inimical to farmers.²⁴

²³Ibid.

²⁴Congressional Globe, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., 1866, 3466-3467, 3604, 3753.

Speaking in July, 1866, Kasson, a moderate protectionist, bitterly summarized the current bill's detrimental effect on farming.

It raises the tariff on lumber, which is so necessary to the Western prairie farmer, on nails, without which he cannot drive his boards on his house or build his fence, on salt, which he cannot preserve his beef and pork. There is hardly a thing he consumes which this bill forgets to raise the duty upon. Every prominent necessity of life, food, fuel, shelter and clothing, is embraced and made more expensive to the consumer throughout the country.²⁵

The attempt to raise lumber rates was particularly irksome to the prairie farmer. Lumber was scarce on the western prairies and Great Plains and dearly needed for housing and farm buildings. When Representative Burton Cook of Illinois questioned the wisdom of a tariff on lumber, he was told that it was needed to prevent the ruin of the industry. John Driggs of Michigan argued that the cheap labor of Canada, and high taxation by the United States worked great hardship on lumbering interests. Cook challenged this contention. He denied that a great disparity in labor costs existed between the United States and Canada. To him, as to Senator Grimes of Iowa, it appeared that the "lumber men of the country are to be protected at the expense of agriculturalists."²⁶

²⁵Ibid., 3719.

²⁶Ibid., 3659, 3756.

John Sherman, Republican Senator from Ohio, along with other tariff proponents ridiculed the idea that the farmer who produced raw materials was at a disadvantage in the world market. Sherman held that wheat, wool and barley were not raw materials as far as the farmer was concerned, as they constituted his finished product. Sherman concluded that industry had no special advantage, "the manufacturer generally looks upon everything he has to buy as a raw material, and everything he has to sell as a finished product."²⁷ The Senator denied that the protective duties then levied on some farm produce was not high enough. Tariffs were lower on those agricultural products imported and justly so, because the immense supply of such commodities within the United States was protection in itself. Furthermore, because of the large amount of cheap land available to the American farmer, he had a special advantage over European agriculture.²⁸ The Ohio Republican overlooked the fact that these crops may have represented a finished farm product, but they still sold in the world market at raw material prices.

What perplexed many farmers was the seeming injustice that surrounded the entire tariff question. If farmers were, as the nation continually told them, "the bone and

²⁷Congressional Globe, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1867, Appendix, 73.

²⁸Ibid., 74.

sineu of the country," why did Congressmen listen to rich men in Washington who lobbied against their interests? Why was not the economic well-being of the farmer considered when passing tariff legislation?²⁹

The western leaders of the 1860's who defied protectionists drew support from a part of the national press. A number of newspapers had become highly critical of Congressional action in regard to the tariff. E. L. Godkin writing in the July, 1866, issue of The Nation ridiculed Congress for its blatant cupidity in handling the tariff. He pled for a "steady policy" in establishing rates rather than bills pressured through by lobbyists.³⁰ The Chicago Tribune edited by Horace White took an ever stronger position. White heaped disdain upon tariffs designed for the greedy businessman. In admonishing tones the Tribune warned: "We tell these gentlemen, the manufacturers of the East, that they are traveling to destruction as fast as they can go. They are legislating government funds into their pockets too rapidly for the permanence of the system."³¹

²⁹Congressional Globe, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., 1866, 3604.

³⁰The Nation, III (July 5, 1866), 10.

³¹The Chicago Tribune, June 22, 1866.

A week later White denounced the "new tariff as an economic blunder and a moral outrage."

The New York Herald flooded its subscribers with literature that cautioned them against succumbing to protectionist arguments. The Herald lashed at the "bloated monopoly" which gained higher profits at the expense of the farmers of the West and North.³² Farm journals, too, showed a reluctance to accept the high tariffs proposed by Congress. The Prairie Farmer declared that the manufacturers had "bamboozled" wool growers, as they had proposed a tariff in which the latter failed to get the "big bite."³³ The influential Western Rural also furnished its readers with information on the tariff. Its columns carried letters from rural readers who frequently criticized protection. A letter from Batavia, Illinois, complained that protection made the few rich at the expense of the many. The writer believed that protection for wool growers was unfair, he wanted them to have to "stand alone" like other interests.³⁴

³²The New York Herald, July 3, 1866.

³³The Prairie Farmer, XXXVIII (August 11, 1866), 117.

³⁴The Western Rural, V (January 12, 1867), 16; Ibid., V (July 20, 1867), 229; Ibid., VIII (February 10, 1870), 16.

Opposition to the tariff in the West manifested itself in other ways. Early in 1866 Johnson Clubs were organized in an effort to prevent the passage of further protective legislation. The organizations took the name of the President because of his hostility to the tariff. In June of the same year, the club of Nevada, Missouri, forwarded to the President a resolution that expressed the sentiments of many. It read, "that the tariff was unjust - oppressive to the West, and the South, and to the poor man."³⁵

Farmers had long maintained that high tariffs increased prices of goods they had to purchase. Although this was denounced as "British Free Trade Talk" by tariff supporters, the belief persisted among many agrarians. An article that appeared in the Chicago Tribune in July, 1866, could have only confirmed their suspicions. The following conversation allegedly took place between a New York drummer and a Chicago merchant:

Drummer: Your true policy is to purchase at once, all the goods your house can carry, because there will be a large advance very soon.

Merchant: What makes you think so? I look for a fall in gold, and with it a decline in prices.

³⁵Howard K. Beale, The Critical Year (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1930), 289; Charles and Mary Beard, The Rise of Civilization, I (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), 76-77.

Drummer: But the Colwell high tariff bill when it passes will cause an immediate rise in prices of all kinds of goods, and the House that has a big stock on hand will realize a fortune by the advance. It will beat old war times.

Merchant: Yes, but will the Colwell bill pass?

Drummer: I tell you the bill is going through congress "kiting." Before I left a million greenbacks had been raised by importers and sent down to Washington to grease the wheels of legislation and make the bill move along slick.

Merchant: . . . and stop creaking, ha, ha.

Drummer: Yes to stop any noise . . . and to "slide her through" smoothly.

Merchant: I don't believe a million would begin to go around. I doubt whether money could be raised to pass the bill.

Drummer: Easy enough. Why just consider that the passage of the bill would put 50 millions of dollars into the pockets of the importers and jobbers of New York alone, and ten millions more into the pockets of the holders of goods in Boston, Philadelphia, and other large cities. I tell you any amount of money can be raised. The bill is bound to pass Your Chicago merchants ought to buy all the goods they can get, and then use their influence with their representatives to have them vote for the bill. Thats the way to make money. Your folks "aint up to snuff out West".³⁶

Charges such as this only gave greater credence to rumors that circulated in the anti-tariff ranks; that manufacturers wilfully withheld the sale of goods produced, and did so in the expectation of greater profits when the tariff was raised.

The bill introduced by Morrill was debated for only two weeks. It was approved by a vote of 194 yeas to 53 nays

³⁶The Chicago Tribune, July 9, 1866; Miller, States of the Old Northwest, 22.

in the House. The farm states of Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, and Kansas contributed 24 of the 53 negative votes. Only Michigan failed to register a yeas while Ohio cast 16 yeas and but 2 nays.³⁷ Michigan's and Ohio's growing sympathy for protection resulted from a changing economy. Ohio had expanded her sheep and woolen production during the Civil War, and feared a drop in prices. When Ohio voted on the 1866 measure, both the sheep and woolen industry were depressed. Michigan lumbermen also wanted protection. The production and sale of raw lumber and wood materials had become a vital part of the state's economy. The value of lumber produced each year had risen from \$6,891,769 in 1860 to \$33,356,986 by 1870, an increase of 348 per cent. Moreover, both states had developed industrially to the point where they now benefitted from the tariff.

Wisconsin, too, had warmed to the idea of protection. The state had established some manufacturing and desired more. Consequently, protective interests sought to convince Wisconsin Congressional leaders that both farmers and manufacturers would benefit from the tariff. Their failure to do so at this point, only brought renewed efforts in the coming presidential election. At this date, farm states

³⁷U. S. House Journal, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., 1866, 996.

farther west such as Minnesota and Iowa showed little interest in the protectionist cause.³⁸

The bill of 1866 moved to the Senate on July 12, where it was promptly tabled until the following session. The solons were preoccupied with the coming presidential election, and had no desire to dust off their old tariff speeches. Moreover, the opposition to higher duties was strong and passage held the possibility of reprisals at the polls. When the measure was reported by the Finance Committee in January, 1867, it had been altered slightly toward moderate protectionism. David Ames Wells, Special Commissioner of Revenue, was responsible for the revision. Wells had been appointed Special Commissioner in July, 1866, after having headed the Revenue Commission established by President Lincoln. The revised version of the measure did not differ materially from the tariff acts of the pre-war period. Reductions were proposed on some raw materials, with almost no change on manufactured goods.³⁹

³⁸Beale, 282-287; Helen J. and Harry Williams, "Wisconsin Republicans Reconstruction, 1865-1870," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XXIII (September, 1939), 26-27; For a more detailed account see: Frederick Merk, Economic History of Wisconsin During the Civil War Decade.

³⁹Tarbell, 38; Fred B. Joyner, David Ames Wells, Champion of Free Trade (Cedar Rapids: The Torch Press, 1939), 31, 39, 52-53.

Heated Senate debate accompanied passage of the bill. James Grimes of Iowa, speaking in January, 1867, declared that the Senate was no longer a chamber where honest discussion was possible. Powerful protectionists through methods of intimidation and combination threatened political extinction for those who dared to speak against them. Honest dissent was impossible. Yet, he declared, "vested interests" readily sent copies of the protectionist New York Tribune into Iowa and the Northwest. They hoped to sway tariff sentiment and undermine Congressmen who voted against excessive rates. How, demanded Grimes, could this piece of legislation aid the farmer when it increased the duties on such necessities as salt by 160 per cent? Business had asked for the bill - not farmers, he concluded. The measure passed by a margin of 27 to 10. Generally, the western farm states voted in the negative. Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, and Indiana were unanimous in their opposition.⁴⁰

The bill returned to the House where Justin Morrill demanded its immediate enactment. His enthusiasm led him to declare "that it is reasonable at this time to have an unreasonable tariff." Despite amendments favorable to the West, the bill did not pass. The failure resulted from a

⁴⁰ Congressional Globe, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1867, 696-698; U. S. Senate Journal, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1867, 191.

combination of circumstances - western opposition and a rules technicality. A two-thirds majority was needed to suspend the rules and bring the bill before the House. A vote of 102 to 69 killed the measure.⁴¹

Some tariff historians have viewed the defeat of the Senate bill of 1867 as a setback for tariff reform. F. W. Taussig believed that had the modified measure become law, the move toward excessive rates "might have been checked." With its defeat, no precedent for restraint existed, and the enactment of exorbitant tariffs became part of national economic thinking. To others, the measure's failure was a sign of hope in that some men seemed to favor moderation and perhaps even reform.⁴²

The agricultural community had remained divided over the bill for a number of reasons. Many farmers did not know in their own mind what to believe, as they were besieged with propaganda on both sides of the question. They understood little about the intricacies of tariff policy. The question was complex and they lacked schooling in the subtleties of foreign trade and exchange. Their ignorance cannot be scorned, as few people, Congressmen and presidents

⁴¹Congressional Globe, 39th Con., 2nd Sess., 1867, 154, 1659.

⁴²Taussig, Tariff History, 176-178; Joyner, 54; Stanwood, 153.

included, were knowledgeable on the issue. Furthermore, the tariff debate seemed to offer no clear-cut choice, as neither party clearly enunciated its position.⁴³

Many farmers had been convinced that higher tariffs were needed to pay off the War debt. With a choice between greater internal taxation and the tariff, the agrarian preferred the latter. The Canadian Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 may have caused some distrust among western farmers. Canada learned of the possible abrogation of the treaty in 1865, and sharply increased her exports to the United States. As these exports were largely agricultural products, this might have caused alarm in the West. Actually, the commercial advantage to Canada was slight, if any. Still, to some farmers, this represented infringement on a market which they believed to be rightfully their's. Many agrarians admitted that they were intuitively opposed to the tariff, but unable to resolve the question to their own satisfaction. Although in the succeeding decades farmers did help to swell the anti-tariff ranks, the division remained.⁴⁴

David Ames Wells made the most penetrating examination of agriculture and its relation to the tariff in 1869. As

⁴³The Nation, X (April 21, 1870), 247; Davis R. Dewey, Financial History of the United States (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924), 396-398.

⁴⁴J. Laurence Laughlin and H. Parker Willis, Reciprocity (New York: Baker and Taylor Co., 1903), 57, 63-65.

Special Commissioner of Revenue, Wells had come to distrust haphazardly formulated tariffs. In a letter of July, 1866, he related the following: "I have changed my ideas respecting tariffs and protection since I came to Washington. I am utterly disgusted with the rapacity and selfishness which I have seen displayed by Pennsylvania people, and some from other sections on this subject" ⁴⁵

Commissioner Wells was irritated with those who advocated a tariff for "the good of the farmer." As a political economist he believed "there could be no practical protection of the farmer except that which he received from the existence and extension of American manufactures." Duties on products such as beef, pork, corn, and lumber were unimportant. He rejected the theory that a ten per cent levy on Indian corn was of any value, when America exported over 1,000,000 bushels and imported less than 4,000. ⁴⁶

Wells' report of 1869 was a strong attack on the theory of protection. He acknowledged that because of his findings both he and the report would be castigated and held up to

⁴⁵U. S. Congress, House, Report of the Special Commissioner of Revenue, Report No. 27, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1870, 71; Joyner, 44.

⁴⁶Ibid., 49-50.

ridicule. The report stated emphatically that the present average duty of 47 per cent was excessive and unnecessary. Under no circumstances, except for purposes of revenue, should any increase in rates be permitted. American agriculture operating under the protective system, he said, was at a disadvantage.

Wells argued that the value farmers received for their surplus was lower than necessary because currency had no specie standard and the system of taxation was unjust. Exporters would not pay the farmer currency equivalent to the gold prices in Europe, "less commission, transportation, and profits," because they feared that gold value might drop in the ensuing weeks. This meant the possibility of a loss for the exporter. But by paying the farmer two to three per cent less than he deserved, the exporter passed both the expenses and any loss on to the producer. The crucial point for the farmer was, that the loss not only effected the surplus sold abroad, but also the domestic price.⁴⁷

Wells advised farmers against trying to raise prices by holding back crops. The immense surplus precluded the success of such a plan. American grain had to go abroad. Yet the nearness of the European wheat growing regions to the

⁴⁷U. S. Congress, House, Report of the Special Commissioner of Revenue, Report No. 27, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1870, 71, 49.

London market reduced the advantage which American agriculture might have otherwise enjoyed. Wells stated, "The American agriculturalist does not, therefore, command his own price, but the price commands him; and what wheat is worth in Mark Lane London, the central market of the world, is what the United States must sell it for if it sells at all."⁴⁸ Surplus, predicted Wells, will be sold abroad for whatever it will bring. The state of Illinois if as intensively cultivated as some European nations, could produce enough food for all the people living "upon the territory of the United States." The home market could never absorb the farm surplus.⁴⁹

The Commissioner revealed how unnecessary duties on other products adversely effected agriculture. Salt was a case in point. Wells admitted that profits on salt were not great, but he denied that producers needed a tariff of between 80 and 130 per cent, particularly when the government received little return from a duty which was ostensibly for revenue. Wells used as supporting evidence a letter from the president of the Saginaw Michigan Salt Association. The president said that salt could be manufactured cheaply enough to furnish all the western states at low cost. He concluded by stating that "one thing is certain, no higher tariff is

⁴⁸Ibid., 47.

⁴⁹Ibid., 47-48.

needed for the protection of Saginaw salt than is now in force and it should be cut down one-half"50

Excessive rates on lumber, pig iron, and leather were also injurious to the farmer. These materials were widely used in other products and the tariff increased the cost of these goods. Wells charged that for every \$2.50 the government received as revenue from the tariff on leather, "it directly imposed \$7.50 more upon the consumers of an indispensable article"51

The Wells' report was extremely important for agriculture as it was the first careful analysis of the relationship between farm products and the tariff. Here a government expert, appointed by the President, testified that the tariff injured farm interests. Reaction came immediately. Wells was viciously vilified by the protectionist press. The New York Tribune claimed the Commissioner had been bribed by "British gold." Henry C. Carey, arch defender of protection, accused Wells of being in league with the English capitalists. Daniel J. Morrell of Pennsylvania made one of the most cutting attacks on the Commissioner. The Pennsylvanian rejected the entire report as "full of errors" and cast aspersions on Wells' integrity. James A Garfield, moderate protectionist of

⁵⁰Ibid., 49, 86-88.

⁵¹Ibid., 81, 89, 75-76.

Ohio, defended Wells against his attackers. The Commissioner's data was sound, stated Garfield, and those who opposed him on the ground of inaccuracies feared only that the truth might reach the public.⁵²

Despite pleas on behalf of Wells's integrity, Congressional leaders such as William Kelley of Pennsylvania were determined to prevent the publication of the report. When this failed, The Committee on Manufactures was appointed to determine the accuracy of the Commissioner's research. Committee members included seven Republicans: Oakes Ames of Massachusetts, Daniel J. Morrell, Pennsylvania, Samuel P. Morrill, Maine, Stephen Sanford, New York, Philetus Sawyer, Wisconsin, Worthington Smith, Vermont, and William H. Upson of Ohio. Democratic members were Orestes Cleveland of New Jersey and John M. Rice, Kentucky. The majority report stated that Wells had wrongfully promulgated "certain theories" with regard to the collection of revenue, and, by doing so, had failed to carry out his assigned duties. The report further declared that the Commissioner had misinformed agriculture on farm prices when he used wheat as the basis

⁵²The New York Tribune, June 8, 1869; Ibid., May 23, 1869; Daniel J. Morrell, Protection and Free Trade, Position of the Parties (Johnstown: George T. Swank Publisher, 1870), 2, 6, 13; Congressional Globe, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1870, 625.

for his comparison. The majority of the members argued that this was unfair, as wheat was now low in price. The seven Republican members reported that the Commissioner's recommendations were unfit to use as a legislative guideline because of errors.

The minority report differed sharply with that of the majority. Rice and Cleveland contended that Wells had not exceeded his designated assignment, but had merely followed instructions and reported methods of collecting revenue that were "conducive to the public interest." Furthermore, challenged Cleveland, how could the majority repudiate the validity of the Wells' findings when the Republican party had relied so heavily upon data furnished by the Commissioner in the last election. The minority report declared that Wells had not misled farmers on the question of agricultural prices. Cleveland explained that wheat was the natural basis from which to figure farm prices. Wheat exports were large, and although the price was low, it remained the main cash crop for farmers, concluded Cleveland. Despite the vigorous defense of Wells, and a personal appeal to President Grant, he was eased out on August 1, 1870.⁵³

⁵³U. S. Congress, House, Reports of Committees, Report No. 72, 14th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2, 5, 64-65, 66, 68, 109.

Wells had hoped that his report might arouse the dormant sympathy for tariff reform which he was certain existed. Fortunately, a number of forces were underway to give impetus to a reform movement. The sudden drop in grain prices in 1868 increased the alarm of the already worried wheat farmer. The western press, too, had stepped up its criticism of tariff making. The Chicago Tribune, The Portland Advertiser, and the St. Louis Democrat led the West in a critical evaluation of protective legislation. Congressmen were ridiculed for their failure to speak out against influential protectionist newspapers.⁵⁴ Some farm journals agreed with these urban papers. The Rural World of St. Louis, Missouri, castigated the Ohio Farmer for its outspoken stand on behalf of the tariff.⁵⁵ The Prairie Farmer urged its readers to familiarize themselves with business procedures. This journal declared that agrarians were victimized because of their lack of commercial knowledge. Merchants make a study of those things farmers ignore, the editor concluded.⁵⁶ Free Trade Leagues helped to distribute anti-tariff literature

⁵⁴The Nation, X (March 3, 1870), 247; E. L. Bogart and C. M. Thompson, The Industrial State, III (Springfield: Centennial History of Illinois, 1918-20), 384-385.

⁵⁵Quoted in The Western Rural, VIII (March 17, 1870), 86.

⁵⁶The Prairie Farmer, XLII (October 22, 1870), 329.

and provided speakers throughout the West. Their effectiveness was acknowledged by the New York Tribune which credited them with the defeat of a dozen Republican Congressmen in 1870.⁵⁷

Congress again took up the tariff question in 1870, but those who favored lower rates did not achieve much success. Many people expected some relief under a new bill, and Congressional speeches were voiced with a fervency seldom reached in tariff debate. Samuel Marshall of Illinois raked the protectionists in an unprecedented manner. The pretense that the tariff helps the farmer must stop, exclaimed Marshall. He demanded to know what right allowed protectionists

to force the Western farmer every time he buys a plow, hoe, ax, wagon harrow, log chain, or trace-chain to pay 40 per cent thereon to the iron lords of Pennsylvania? Or every time he buys a hat, coat, or shirt, to pay 50 or 100 per cent to the manufacturers of Massachusetts or Rhode Island?

Marshall concluded that the protective system was

a bold and unblushing scheme of plunder and robbery. It is the most specious and dangerous device by which the cunning few enrich themselves at the expense of the toiling millions, by which capital preys upon labor and cunning absorbs the earnings of the credulous. I

⁵⁷The New York Tribune, December 13, 1870.

denounce the whole system as one of cruel, heartless plunder, and inexcusable, unauthorized robbery⁵⁸

In more ponderous tones William Allison of Iowa said that it was impossible for a high tariff to help the farmer. Agricultural production increased more rapidly than population, consequently farm commodities had to be sold abroad. The problem was, concluded Allison, that foreign nations will buy where they can get manufactured goods the cheapest, and with high tariffs, both agricultural and industrial exports were lessened.⁵⁹

Despite pleas to the contrary, the measure was enacted on July 14, 1870. Some rates were reduced, but almost exclusively on articles producing a revenue, such as coffee, sugar, wine and tea. The reduction of \$2 a ton on pig iron was helpful to the farmer. However, duties on lumber, leather, and salt remained the same. The free list was lengthened, but to farmers the free admission of ivory, fresh fish and rags was little compensation.⁶⁰ Duties on some manufactured goods were quietly raised. Steel rates

⁵⁸Congressional Globe, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1870, Appendix, 243.

⁵⁹Ibid., 190.

⁶⁰U. S. Statutes at Large, XIII, 202-218.

were increased to \$28 a ton. Steel producers had complained that a 45 per cent duty was not sufficiently protective.⁶¹ Nickel duties jumped 50 per cent. The fact that there was only one nickel mine in the country, owned by a single family, was overlooked. Despite the silent increases, most tariff reformers voted for the measure, possibly with the conviction that any reduction was something of a triumph.⁶²

Tariff reformers gained an important ally with the formation of the Liberal Republican movement in 1870. The movement arose from a group of Republican editors and scholars who had become alarmed at the party's internal dissension and faltering idealism. Western leaders were Horace White of The Chicago Tribune, Murat Halstead, Cincinnati Inquirer, Carl Schurz, Westliche Post, and W. M. Grosvenor of The Missouri Democrat. These papers were critical of exorbitant rates and called for a sensible approach to the formation of tariffs. How much impact this movement had upon farm thinking is difficult to assess. At any rate, it is safe to assume that some agrarians were influenced by its anti-tariff stand.⁶³

⁶¹Jay Gould to Abraham Hewitt, January 26, 1870, and William D. Kelley to James M. Swank, March 1, 1888, James M. Swank Collection, Cambria, Pennsylvania.

⁶²Oscar W. Underwood, Drifting Sands of Party Politics (New York: The Century Co., 1928), 142-143.

⁶³Tarbell, 69-70; Eugene H. Roseboom, A History of Presidential Elections (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957), 224-226; Taussig, 180-181; Earle D. Ross, The Liberal Republican Movement (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1919), 3-4, 14.

Republicans and other protectionists were alert to the challenge that confronted them. To combat reform sympathy, speeches and pamphlets by leading protectionists were distributed throughout the West. They usually reiterated the home market theory. In 1870 William Kelley authored a pamphlet entitled, Reasons for Abandoning the Theory of Free Trade and Adopting the Principle of Protection to American Industry: Addressed to the Farmers and Working Men of the United States. Kelley argued that farmers were not the only ones that suffered. Merchants in Iowa and Minnesota, as well as other agricultural states were "suffering financial embarrassment" because the farmer had no market. Farm prosperity depended not on foreign trade, but on "the steady employment of the American miner, artisan, and laborer." The fallacious charge that the farmer was taxed for the benefit of the manufacturer was the cry of free traders, Kelley wrote.⁶⁴

Dr. William Elder offered a strong defense of the present tariff in his work, The Farmers Market at Home and Abroad, With a Supplement Showing How Protection, Under the Present Tariff, is Distributed Between Agriculture and

⁶⁴William D. Kelley, Reasons for Abandoning the Theory of Free Trade and Adopting the Principle of Protection to American Industry, Addressed to the Farmers and Working Men of the United States (Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird, Industrial Publishers, 1872), 11-22.

Manufactures. The author claimed that the farmer was actually hurt when American exports increased. "The rule being that, when the rates are anything like remunerative, Europe buys but little of our farm products, say 3/8ths of the total exports; when rates are ruinous to the cultivator, they rise to something approaching 3/5ths."⁶⁵ American agriculture could not accept European prices and market fluctuations because of its high labor costs. The real problem, declared Elder, was that the United States was blinded by "a mis-called principle of international commerce." Europe did not actually provide a great outlet for farm commodities. Only beef, pork, wheat, wheat flour, meal and Indian corn, he said, could usually find a market. No sale of vegetables or perishable goods such as milk and butter were possible. These, "the most valuable and remunerative of all agricultural products must be sold on the spot" This was what made land values high near the city and cheap in the Far West.⁶⁶

Essentially, Elder was arguing for the home market. As mentioned earlier, the farmer was receptive to this argument, yet there were many unanswered questions in his mind

⁶⁵William Elder, The Farmers Markets at Home and Abroad; With a Supplement Showing How Protection, Under the Present Tariff is Distributed Between Agriculture and Manufactures (Philadelphia: Ringwalt and Brown, 1870), 3.

⁶⁶Ibid., 5-7.

about the whole tariff issue. Why, he asked in 1873, did corn sell for between 25 and 30 cents a bushel in Nebraska and Iowa, while it sold in Michigan for 60 cents a bushel. The Iowa farmer received around 90 cents a bushel for his wheat, while it sold for \$1.32 a bushel farther East.⁶⁷ This was what caused the farmer's indecision on the tariff question. Could the home market take all of American production or were large exports absolutely necessary? Could protection raise the price of his commodities and yet still force him to pay higher prices for goods he purchased?

The elections of 1870 had increased the number of tariff reformers in Congress, but the reductions gained were slight. Charles Dawes of Massachusetts made another attempt at reform in 1872. Prior to the introduction of the Dawes bill, the Committee on Finance in the Senate had drawn up legislation that proposed a 10 per cent reduction. Although the Senate bill was less drastic than the House measure, to many Senators a 10 per cent reduction was too severe. The two bills resulted in a Congressional imbroglio. At the heart of the conflict was the fear that too great a reduction might take place. John L. Hayes was the arbiter among the feuding protectionists. He advised thwarting reform by moderate

⁶⁷ Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927), 163.

concessions. According to Hayes, he personally persuaded all tariff interests to follow this policy. He was supported by John Sherman who "favored slight modification of duties" rather than to "endanger the whole protective system."⁶⁸

The bill as it finally passed carried a 10 per cent horizontal reduction. Duties on iron, cotton, wool, glass and lumber were reduced. The tariff on salt was cut 50 per cent, and coal dropped 50 cents a ton. The free list added raw hides, jute, tea and coffee. Protectionists said they added tea and coffee to the free list to give working men and farmers a "free breakfast table." Actually these two products were great revenue raisers, and without the revenue they provided, chances were enhanced for keeping higher duties on domestically produced goods. The ruse was simple. When high duties prevented the importation of cheaper foreign goods, the consumer was forced to pay a higher price or profit to the producer. Yet this profit was not offset by a like amount being paid to government as was the case when there was duty on tea and coffee.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Congressional Globe, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1872, 2018; Ross, 66.

⁶⁹U. S., Statutes at Large, XVIII, 230-258; Taussig, Tariff History, 185-186.

Proponents of tariff reduction were generally satisfied with the law of 1872. They acknowledged that the reform was slight, but a little reform was better than none. Michael Kerr of Indiana best summarized the attitude of those who led the fight for reform.

It is not thorough; it is not all things faithful to correct principles; it does not reduce the tariff enough . . . But in the main, what it proposes is in the right direction. Its face is turned toward the people, not monopoly. It strikes for revenue, not for protection. It rebukes selfishness and cupidity mildly, but frankly. It mitigates a little the exactions of class legislation.⁷⁰

At the same time, "high tariff men" were not chagrined over the bill. Many believed as did Senator George Wright of Iowa, that a 10 per cent reduction was possible without injury to protection.⁷¹ Indeed, John L. Hayes viewed the measure as a victory, "the grand result of a tariff bill reducing duties 50 millions of dollars, and yet leaving the great industries almost intact. The present tariff of 1872 was made by our friends in the interest of protection."⁷²

⁷⁰Congressional Globe, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1870, Appendix, 312.

⁷¹George G. Wright to James M. Clarkson, March 2, 1872, James M. Clarkson Papers, Library of Congress, Box 1.

⁷²Quoted in Taussig, Tariff History, 189.

The election of 1872 was a debacle for advocates of tariff revision. The Liberal Republican Party's choice of Horace Greeley for president defied explanation. This little genius with his cherub face was infamous for his hostility to anything but extreme protectionism. Although a number of states joined the Liberal Party cause, its low tariff plank was ignored. The re-election of Grant held nothing for farmers. Three years earlier he had advised them to forget about European sales and look to the domestic market.⁷³

The farm revolt of the 1870's had taken root 20 years earlier. Only the steady erosion of prosperity ignited the rebellion that had threatened in the 1850's. Suddenly the agrarian was confronted with an economic order that seemed determined to crush him. In search of a remedy farmers sought strength in organization. The Patrons of Husbandry, or Grange, founded in 1867 by Oliver H. Kelley was the first of such farm groups. As the depression deepened, the Grange membership increased. Although ostensibly a social order, it rapidly became the vanguard of the farmers' defensive movement.⁷⁴

⁷³Richardson, VI, 189.

⁷⁴Fred E. Haynes, Third Party Movements Since the Civil War (Iowa City: State Historical Society, 1916), 52-53.

To the farmers it seemed that every destructive force in America besieged them. They could not escape the worry of mortgages, low prices, railroads, banks and taxation. Many western farmers had launched their farming efforts on borrowed money. Consequently, when crop prices continued downward and loans were difficult to obtain - the agrarian was trapped. The Philadelphia Press of July 30, 1869, painted the grim picture.

High prices are not so much to be dreaded in themselves when everything else advances abreast, and the man who pays high for what he consumes can also sell high what he produces. When, however, prices have come honestly down, but, through the artificial structure of society, that decline inures only to the advantage of a small class of non-producers, it is dangerous and improper . . . Within two years the prices of staples, which sustain life and cover the ordinary table have fallen heavily and permanently, but the people have not yet got the benefit of it. The farmer gets one-half the price he received for his wheat two years ago, but he must pay nearly the same for what he buys.⁷⁵

Midwestern farmers did not suffer alone. Southern agriculture remained prostrate between 1870 and 1890. Buildings, land, and machinery had been devastated by the War. As her economy depended upon the sale of farm commodities, especially cotton, the tariff tended to hinder any chance for rapid recovery. Furthermore, the tariff forced the

⁷⁵The Philadelphia Press, July 30, 1869.

southern farmer to buy in a protected market while he sold in a free one. As the South had little industry, the home market theory had slight appeal to southern agrarians.⁷⁶

Agriculturalists stubbornly refused to believe that overproduction was the cause of their problems. When so much privation and misery existed in the world, how could there be overproduction? Moreover, agricultural expansion had not stopped as families continued to move west. Production continued to increase. The West and Northwest had to raise grain and livestock. What else could the farmers do? To hope that industry would absorb the surplus was "folly."⁷⁷ Edward Martin, writing in 1874, stated that "All the hands employed in the factories and shops of the United States, if added to the present population of Illinois, would consume less than half the surplus cereals now produced in that State."⁷⁸

⁷⁶James L. Sellers, "The Economic Incidence of the Civil War in the South," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XIV (September, 1927), 189; M. Ogden Phillips, "The Tariff and the South," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXII (October, 1933), 378-381.

⁷⁷Benton H. Wilcox, "An Historical Definition of Northwestern Radicalism," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXVI (December, 1939), 378-381; The Western Advance, Worthington, June 13, 1874; Charles B. Kuhlman, "The Influence of the Minneapolis Flour Mills Upon the Economic Development of Minnesota and the Northwest," Minnesota History, VI (March, 1925), 143-147.

⁷⁸Edward W. Martin, History of the Grange Movement (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1874), 310-311.

When farm prices dropped there was no way of cutting back on production in order to raise prices. In regions where a single commodity was the main cash crop, the situation was critical. Wisconsin farmers were especially hard hit as the state's greatest industry was the raising and milling of wheat. Agrarians also were convinced that manufacturers charged exorbitant prices for implements. Farmers were certain that McCormick manufactured reapers for \$45, but sold them for \$200. Furthermore, they believed that the industrialists sold machinery abroad for a fraction of that charged in America. United States firms did sell large quantities in foreign markets. Russia, for example, bought 10,000 plows in 1877. One American firm sold \$1,000,000 worth of farm and associated implements abroad in 1875. A branch catalogue of a United States company in England contained 59 pages devoted to tools and hardware. British retailers stated that American spades, axes and forks were cheaper than their own. Whether or not the tariff allowed manufacturers to do this the farmer did not know, but he believed he was being cheated.⁷⁹

⁷⁹Fredrick Merk, Economic History of Wisconsin During the Civil War Decade (Madison: State Historical Society, 1916), 16, 19, 129; Arthur H. Hirsch, "Efforts of the Grange in the Middle West to Control the Price of Machinery, 1870-1880," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XV (March, 1929), 478; Victor S. Clark, History of Manufactures in the United States, 1860-1914 (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1928), 361, 173.

The railroads more than any other single factor stirred the farmers to action in the 1870's. Agrarians, to their despair, learned that a drop in freight rates did not necessarily aid them. As early as 1868 Iowa farmers expressed the exaggerated complaint that it cost ten times more to ship their corn to Liverpool than for what they could sell it. Many rural families had purchased rail stocks by mortgaging their farms and were unaware that the mortgage was resold in eastern money markets. Much of the time, the stock failed to pay dividends and the railroad rates were high, thus foreclosure was always imminent.⁸⁰

Farmers often associated the high tariff rates with increased railroad costs. Why did steel rails sell in England for \$30 a ton and in America for \$60. Two papers in Illinois, The Chicago Tribune and The Prairie Farmer, encouraged agrarians in their stand against the tariff. The Illinois State Farmers Association, organized in the 1870's, complained of high costs created by the tariff, and demanded the removal of duties on iron, steel, and lumber. The Prairie Farmer argued that high tariff men had pushed markets eastward, while farmers had moved West. The journal contended that protection had increased the cost of farm machinery and transportation.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Solon J. Buck, The Granger Movement (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 9-12.

⁸¹ Underwood, 143; Carl C. Taylor, The Farmers' Movement, 1620-1640 (New York: American Book Co., 1953), 103; The Prairie Farmer, XLV (August 23, 1873), 250.

The Kansas Farmers Co-operative Association went on record against the tariff early in 1873. The Association passed the following resolution that instructed: ". . . Senators and members of Congress to vote for and secure an amendment to the tariff laws of the United States, so that salt and lumber shall be placed on the free list, and, that there shall be made a material reduction in the duty on iron, and, that such articles as do not pay the cost of collection be also placed on the free list."⁸² The Association also urged the election of men whose interests were not inimical to agriculture.

Farmers who attended the Nebraska State Agricultural Society meeting in 1874 heard a bitter indictment of the tariff. The speaker declared that even the word "protection" was a hoax as the tariff had failed to protect the farmer. Agrarians were told they suffered a double loss under the tariff. First, they were not only forced to pay more for the necessities of life, but also lost money on the sale of farm commodities. The speaker concluded that a protective tariff lessened exports, and as the farmer furnished the bulk of exportable products, he suffered the greatest losses under the protective system.⁸³

⁸²E. G. Cutler (ed.), History of the State of Kansas (New York: Appleton Century Croft, 1873), 396-397.

⁸³The Prairie Farmer, XLVI (October 10, 1874), 223.

Other farm states also revealed little sympathy for protective tariff movement. Ignatius Donnelly led Minnesota's attack on protection. Donnelly, a one-time protectionist, explained his views on the tariff to a rural audience at a Dakota County fair in 1869.

The Republican party was committed to a policy of protective tariff, and as a representative of that party, I voted and advocated it; and when the South went out we passed the laws. The war broke out and we needed the tariff. But the war is ended, and the necessity is passed. I am a farmer myself, and dependent upon the products of my farm for support, and reflection has taught me the injustice done to the producer of the West by the present tariff system.⁸⁴

Donnelly continued to hammer at the inequity of the tariff, and quickly gained a large following among the Minnesota farmers. The western agrarian, declared Donnelly, was plundered "in order that the manufacturers of the East may amass fortunes." Donnelly's words took deep root in Minnesota, as the Gopher State remained strongly anti-tariff throughout much of the 19th century.⁸⁵

Tariff supporters lost no time in rallying to the cause. In an unsigned pamphlet entitled The Case Plainly Stated, interested protectionists were warned that the farm

⁸⁴Quoted in Martin Ridge, Ignatius Donnelly, The Portrait of A Politician (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 126-127.

⁸⁵Ibid., 132; Sidney Warren, "Ignatius Donnelly and the Populists," Current History, XVIII (June, 1958), 337-338.

uprising in Illinois, Minnesota, Kansas, Iowa, and Wisconsin was serious. The pamphlet stated that the movement must "be met and rightly directed. Farmers were the most phlegmatic and the last to yield to public excitement." When an uprising such as the one that has occurred takes place, "it will be safe to say that something is wrong - that a screw is loose in the body politic somewhere." The pamphlet flatly denied that the current unrest among farmers stemmed from the debate on free trade or tariffs. Five fundamental truths were listed in the work, four of which were directed to the farmer: (1) The farmers are not at war with railroads, as such, but with the manner in which they are conducted; (2) That a diversity of industries is most conducive to the prosperity of the country and to the welfare of the people; (3) That a home market for products of industry, whether the produce of the soil or manufactured articles, is better and more reliable than a foreign market; and, (4) That a diversified industry is the only way to create a home market. If everybody raises grain, there will be no home market for grain. The author admonished the farmers that the increased value of their lands was directly related to the railroad. It was said that "demagogues and time-servers" often distorted the true picture of railroads to confuse the farmer.⁸⁶

⁸⁶The Case Plainly Stated, The Relation of the Farmers of the Northwest, Tariff Tracts, II, 1884, James M. Swank Collection, 5-8.

Despite the demand for lower duties, tariff rates moved upward in 1875. The 1872 measure was repealed under the guise of necessity. The panic had curtailed trade and government revenues fell short of need. Charles Dawes introduced the bill on February 10, 1875, and it became law on March 3. The House vote was 123 to 114. The farm states of Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio cast 45 negative votes. Under the 1872 law, the average dutiable rate was 39 per cent, the new measure jumped it to 43 per cent.⁸⁷

The tariff stirred little real interest in the election of 1876. Although the Democratic platform contained a strong denunciation of the high duties, few westerners could work up any great enthusiasm for Samuel J. Tilden. The Greenback Party meeting in Indianapolis remained vague on the tariff. The Republicans quietly advocated a tariff to promote the welfare of the entire country. President Hayes' first message to Congress made plain that no vigorous action was planned in regard to the tariff. Matthew Quay had warned the president-elect during the campaign that tariff tinkering was dangerous. Nothing should jeopardize protection. Power must not be given to the free trade South, or the War would then have been fought in vain, stated Quay.⁸⁸

⁸⁷U. S. House Journal, 43rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1875, 528-529.

⁸⁸Richardson, VI, 4422-4423; Stanwood, 367, 371, 376, 383; Matthew Quay to Rutherford B. Hayes, August 22, 1876, Matthew Quay Papers, Library of Congress.

No tariff bill was passed between 1875 and 1880. One measure was given serious consideration, but failed to reach the Senate. In 1878 Fernando Wood of New York introduced a bill that asked for reductions on behalf of farmers. Wood claimed, as had many others, that industry no longer needed heavy protection. Just three years earlier William Morrison had argued along a similar line. Through a statistical analysis he showed that between 1860 and 1875 industrial production had doubled, but less was sold abroad. Agricultural productivity too had increased, but the proportion exported exceeded the increased production. Where was the home market? Reformers failed to push the Wood bill through the House, and it died by a vote of 134 to 121. Ten states, Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, Nebraska, Michigan, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Indiana cast 53 ayes. Three states, Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska were unanimous in their approval, while Iowa cast only one nay.⁸⁹

Many factors contributed to the repeated failure of tariff reform. In the late years of the decade the Industrial League and the American Iron and Steel Association had worked tirelessly to check any reduction of duties. The farmer was blanketed with tracts which explained the many benefits of protection. Joseph Wharton warned agriculture

⁸⁹U. S. Congressional Record, 45th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1878, 2395; Ibid., 44th Cong., 1st Sess., 1876, 3314-3320.

against flirting with dangerous trade theories when he wrote:

Countries are no longer invaded, and population carried off. The new style is by winning the wealth of neighbors through industrial assaults and trade invasions. The most important peaceful means by which a modern nation protects itself is tariff legislation.⁹⁰

Another tract, entitled The West Favors Protection, was published in 1878. It declared that the Wood bill damaged agricultural and labor interests. This measure struck at the "inventive genius" of the United States. The South, it was said, had to learn that a high tariff was necessary.⁹¹ James G. Blaine, speaking in Des Moines, Iowa, in October, 1878, drove home the protectionist creed in pungent tones. Farmers, you are better off than ever before - "If you struck down the vast accumulative wealth here in the East what would you do? Manufacturers are large patrons of the agricultural interests of this country." In other words, no one would profit without the tariff.⁹²

The protectionist lobby left nothing to chance. In 1879 the American Iron and Steel Association published an

⁹⁰Joseph Wharton, The Patriotism of Tariff Protection (Philadelphia: American Iron and Steel Association, 1878), 3-4.

⁹¹Tariff Tracts, II, The West Favors the Protective Policy, 1878, 14-15, James M. Swank Collection.

⁹²Tariff Tracts, II, Speech by James G. Blaine, Des Moines, Iowa, October 3, 1878, 10, James M. Swank Collection.

address to Congress titled The Causes of Our National Prosperity. Congressional leaders were reminded that farmers produced "bountiful crops" and sold the surplus abroad. Most important was that Europe had to send us her gold because the tariff prevented payment in goods. This increased the needed supply of precious metals. Furthermore, the tariff had greatly eased the panic of 1873 and the home market once again belonged to the United States.⁹³

Farmers must shoulder a portion of the blame for the failure of reform legislation in the late 1870's. The issue was under constant debate, but agriculture refused to close ranks. The decline of the Grange hurt the movement, but even worse was the failure of the National Grange not to go on record against the tariff. Only the Illinois Grange managed to pass a resolution in opposition to the tariff in 1873. The state Granges in the South wanted to make a determined stand, but Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio refused to give up the duty on wool.

Perhaps, if the farmer had possessed a better understanding of finance and business, he could have comprehended the tariff manipulation. Yet, it cannot be denied that agrarians were often unwilling to stick by a cause if there

⁹³Tariff Tracts, II, The Causes of Our National Prosperity, Addressed to Congress by the American Iron and Steel Association, December 2, 1879, James Swank Collection, 3-4.

was no immediate benefit forthcoming. Thus when wheat prices rose in 1878, some farmers forgot about tariff grievances. It is not inconceivable that the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives might have passed a reform bill if the farmers had continued, or intensified, the pressure to do so.⁹⁴

The 1870's ended with the midwestern farm interests indifferent to and divided on the tariff issue. Industry was, as of yet, triumphant when it came to organizing political power to achieve its objective. Nothing better illustrated the protectionists self-satisfaction than the Industrial League's message to its constituents:

The Industrial League congratulates the nation upon the failure of all attempts to overthrow our tariff system; it reminds its constituents that similar attempts are sure to be made in the future, and that constant vigilance and mutual support are necessary to the common defence; . . . finally it repeats its often expressed conviction that the revision of our tariff should be committed to a small and carefully chosen commission of legislators and laymen, who alone should be empowered to submit to Congress projects of change in the tariff laws.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Buck, 115; Wisconsin State Grange, Proceedings, 1878, 11; Earle D. Ross, Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey (Iowa City: State Historical Society, 1951), 104.

⁹⁵Tariff Tracts, II, The Industrial League to Its Constituents, Philadelphia, March 1, 1879, James Swank Collection, 12.

CHAPTER III

THE TARIFF COMMISSION AND THE DEFEAT OF REFORM

The political horizon in 1880 was a clouded one for the two national parties as they both searched for suitable presidential candidates. The Grand Old Party assembled in Chicago on June 2, 1880, and when a convention deadlock arose, James A. Garfield was put forth as a compromise candidate. Garfield's followers rallied to his cause on the 34th ballot, and on the 36th polling of the delegation, he received the nomination. The handsome Ohioan with his unblemished background and reputation as a progressive Congressman appeared a perfect candidate for the Republicans.¹

The Republican platform drafted at Chicago scarcely touched on the problem of the tariff. In a vague statement, the party declared that the "duties levied for the purpose of revenue should so discriminate as to favor American labor" Agriculture, the occupation of vast numbers of

¹George F. Howe, Chester A. Arthur (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1934), 100-101, 104; Roseboom, 253; The Belleville Weekly Advocate, Belleville, Illinois, January 2, 1880, hereinafter cited as the Belleville Advocate.

Americans, was not mentioned.² Garfield's acceptance message was as great a disappointment as the Republican platform for those who favored tariff reform. The document merely reiterated the cliches of the platform - capital and labor must be protected and America must remain economically independent. As usual, farmers were told that their toil was the basis of all material prosperity, but nothing was said of the farm-tariff problem. In fact, the word "tariff" did not appear in the entire document.

The Democratic party which met in Cincinnati, Ohio, in June, 1880, was desperate. Democrats had been shut out of the White House for twenty years and their opponents had nominated an attractive candidate - a handsome military hero, and an experienced office holder. Moreover, Democratic presidential timber was in short supply. The aging Tilden was unable to make the race, and Samuel Randall, leader of the protectionist wing of the Democratic party, was unacceptable to reformers. The ultimate choice fell on 56-year old General Winfield Scott Hancock of Pennsylvania.

Party leaders believed that the General might serve as all things to all men. He had few enemies and had an outstanding military record. It was hoped that his distinguished appearance and demeanor could lessen the carpetbag image of

²Proceedings of the Republican National Convention
(Chicago: John B. Jeffery Printing, 1881), 181-182.

the party, and destroy the cry of the bloody shirt. The Democratic platform was as innocuous as that of their Republican opponents. Five words sufficed to handle the dominant question of the day, "a tariff for revenue only."³

The Greenback party had met earlier in Chicago and nominated James B. Weaver of Iowa. The Greenback platform stood in sharp contrast with that of the major parties. Demands were made for a graduated income tax, railroad regulation, and the issuance of paper money. However, no mention was made of the tariff. The Greenbackers, buoyed by their success in 1878, believed that other parties could no longer dismiss them as a political nuisance.⁴

Despite repeated urgings by the agricultural press, farm interest in the election appeared slight. Undoubtedly, much of the apathy stemmed from the brief economic recovery. Higher prices and better times resulted from the larger volume of agricultural exports which were associated with crop failures in Britain and Europe. In 1878, 1879, and 1880, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands were heavy purchasers of wheat, corn and other small grains. Wheat exported in 1879 sold at \$1.06 per bushel and in 1880 at \$1.24 per bushel.

³Roseboom, 256-257; Thomas H. McKee, The National Conventions and Platforms and All Parties, 1789-1905 (Baltimore: Friedenwald Co., 1906), 182-185; The Nation, XXXI (July 15, 1880), 40; Ibid., XXXI (July 22, 1880), 60.

⁴McKee, 180-181.

Corn brought a little over 47 cents in 1879 and 54 cents per bushel by 1880. Fortunately, beef and pork prices followed the rise in small grain prices. Thus in 1880, many farmers enjoyed a brief respite from the depression and were less dissatisfied than they had been three years earlier.⁵

The campaign itself lacked the drama usually associated with the fight for the presidency. The cautious candidates carefully ignored the most pressing problems facing the nation. Entries in Garfield's diary reveal his unwillingness to take a stand on any national issue. Seldom after a day's speaking did he fail to record, "I think no harm has been done."⁶ The extreme timidity exercised by both standard-bearers led many people to conclude that there was no difference in the parties.

The tariff remained in the background during the early months of the campaign. Many state conventions omitted the question from their platforms. Also, the spirited leadership of the tariff reform forces was missing. Reformers such as William Graham Sumner of Yale, Richard R. Bowker and

⁵The Western Rural, XVII (April 19, 1879), 124; Report of Commissioner of Agriculture, 1880 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880), 208-211; U.S. House, Executive Document, Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., Report No. 109, 342; William G. Carleton, "Why Was the Democratic Party in Indiana a Radical Party," Indiana Magazine of History, XLII (September, 1946), 213.

⁶Robert G. Caldwell, James A. Garfield (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1931), 296.

George Harvey Putnam, publishers, and David Ames Wells were in the process of re-orienting their approach to the question of protection. Their lack of success in the late 1870's convinced them that a fight on the tariff in 1880 was hopeless. Furthermore, liberal Republicans believed that the election of Garfield might result in the reduction of duties.⁷

Although farm newspapers carried articles on the tariff throughout the campaign, editors generally avoided taking a decisive stand. The editorials and letters which did appear revealed a wide range of opinions. The Farmers Review, published in Chicago, held that no other country in the world could produce foodstuffs as cheaply as America. It concluded that few people really believed that western farmers were in danger from foreign competition. The Prairie Farmer, in September, 1880, editorialized that the shop and farm complimented one another, and counseled agrarians not to encourage others to enter farming. Farmers, stated the editor, should be willing to help commerce and manufacturing so as to create markets for their products. Many papers in Kansas chose to evade the tariff issue completely. An exception to

⁷E. McClung Fleming, R. R. Bowker, Militant Liberal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 93-96, 199; Appletons Annual Cyclopedia (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1880), 419, 525-526; "The Political Situation," The Atlantic Monthly, LIX (May, 1882), 393-396.

the cautious approach in the rural press was the Worthington Advance, Worthington, Minnesota. It wanted manufactured materials that were used in the construction of farm tools to enter the country free. The editor asked other journals to join him in calling to task representatives for "dilly-dallying in the interest of a few manufacturers at the expense of the people at large."⁸

The tranquility of the campaign was suddenly broken in October when the tariff erupted as a national issue. At a glance the tariff furor appeared to have arisen spontaneously, particularly because of General Hancock's ignorance on the question. There is some basis to doubt this widely-held theory. The Republicans had at no time felt confident of victory, and as the contest wore on, succeeding events did not foster optimism. Moreover, it became clear that the states of New York and Indiana were essential for victory. Thus when Republican managers demanded that Garfield journey to New York to assure the co-operation of the Conkling machine, he could hardly refuse. The Ohioan made the pilgrimage with great reluctance. At New York he met not only with party leaders, but with men of high finance such as Chauncey DePew, Vice President of the New York

⁸The Farmers Review, IV-V (December 9, 1880), 882; The Prairie Farmer, II (September 18, 1880), 300; The Manhattan Nationalist (Kansas), November 4, 1880; Worthington Advance (Minnesota), May 6, 1880.

Central Railroad, Jay Gould, controller of the Union Pacific, and Levi Morton of the New York banking firm of Morton, Rose and Company. On the afternoon of August 6, Garfield held a private meeting with Thomas Platt, Levi Morton, Chester A. Arthur and Richard Crawley. There is reason to believe that besides the formulation of strategy and patronage, a decision was made to deal openly with the tariff question.⁹

Whether the idea of raising the tariff question was carefully discussed, or was a spur of the moment decision, the historian can only speculate. Garfield tactfully forgot to include the details of the meeting in his journal. But it is a fact that up to that time the Republican campaign had languished and lacked a dominant question. A notable increase in the discussion of the tariff occurred after the meeting in August. Thomas Platt in his Autobiography recalled the vigorous organization that moved into operation after the d'entente in New York. "Manufacturers were enlisted into a separate organization, and a list of manufacturing firms, corporations and organizations with the name of every operative, was obtained, and the shops were flooded with every

⁹T. C. Smith, The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield, II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), 1010-1012; David S. Muzzey, James G. Blaine (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1935), 175; Charles E. Russell, Blaine of Maine (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1931), 370; Caldwell, 300-302.

manner of argument to persuade the laboring man."¹⁰

On September 2, in a letter to Whitelaw Reid, editor of the powerful protectionist New York Tribune, Garfield explained his desire to focus on issues of importance to the businessman. He emphasized to Reid the need for "our papers and speakers" to follow this line rather than becoming embroiled in personal issues. Nothing revealed the new strategy more emphatically than Roscoe Conkling's three hour speech in New York on September 17. Conkling declared that the very "commercial and industrial fabric" was at stake. "Tariffs, tax laws, finance, currency, banks, courts, appropriations, . . . these are things upon which prosperity depends, and these are the things at stake in this election."¹¹ At this same moment, other influential Republicans were starting to raise a \$150,000 campaign fund from banking and corporate interests. Interestingly enough, the day before, The Nation had complained that the two parties offered virtually no choice in regard to the tariff.¹²

The farmer played an ambivalent role in the "11th hour" campaign of the Republican party. Although agriculturalists

¹⁰Louis J. Lang (ed.), The Autobiography of Thomas Collier Platt (New York: B. W. Dodge and Co., 1919), 133.

¹¹Smith, 1028; The New York Tribune, September 18, 1880.

¹²The Nation, XXXI (September 16, 1880), 196; Herbert J. Clancy, The Presidential Election of 1880 (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1958), 196.

were warned of impending disaster should Hancock be elected, editorials were not specifically directed to the vote of the farmer.¹³ Even in his home state, one of sizeable agricultural interests, Garfield appeared willing to gamble on the agrarian vote. An anxious letter to John Sherman on September 25 failed to mention the importance of farm ballots.

I think our friends should push the business aspect of the campaign with greater vigor than they are doing, especially the tariff question which so deeply affects the interests of manufacturers and laborers. The argument of the 'solid South' is well enough on its way, . . . but we should also press those questions which lie close to the homes and interests of our own people.¹⁴

By October, prior to Hancock's famous interview, the tariff was a full-blown issue. Even Grant was now praising tariff policy and promised that it "fosters the production of field and farm."¹⁵ A New York Tribune correspondent reported overhearing English free-trade agents plotting to get the tariff removed. Stories were circulated that "the Cobden Club has sent over \$5,000,000 in gold, in five bags, to be used in promoting Hancock's election"¹⁶ Although not designed especially for agrarian readers, this type of

¹³The New York Tribune, October 1, 1880.

¹⁴Letter quoted in John Sherman, Recollections of Forty Years (New York: Weimer Co., 1895), 787.

¹⁵Alfred R. Conkling, Life and Letters of Roscoe Conkling (New York: Charles Webster and Co., 1889), 619, 787.

¹⁶The Nation, XXXI (October 7, 1880), 246; Ibid., (October 14, 1880), 267.

accusation elicited their sympathy, since a part of farm allegiance to the tariff was patriotic. The October 1 issue of the New York Tribune stated the papers editorial policy for the remainder of the battle, "A Democratic victory this year means the destruction of the protective tariff system."¹⁷

The Republican party's rigid stand on the tariff in October was not without purpose. The state elections in Maine had gone against them. Consequently, a victory by the state ticket in Indiana was crucial. Even before the defeat in Maine, Garfield had stressed the importance of an Indiana victory. Writing to his running mate, Chester Arthur, the nominee came directly to the point, "If we carry Indiana in October, the rest is comparatively easy. We shall make a very serious, perhaps fatal mistake if we do not throw all our available strength into the state."¹⁸

Ironically, at almost the precise moment that General Hancock in an interview had dismissed the tariff as unimportant, the New York Tribune had begun receiving dispatches from Indiana concerning the intense interest in the tariff question there. A wire from New Albany, Indiana, stated that Republican editors and orators "were a little slow in

¹⁷The New York Tribune, October 1, 1880.

¹⁸Smith, 1024.

perceiving the importance of the tariff question in this campaign." The writer argued that many Indianans believed that the Democratic party threatened prosperity. In a month of intensive campaigning the state was flooded with tracts and political documents that carried the policies of Republicanism. Even Conkling carried the gospel to the Hoosiers in a series of speeches. Despite the propaganda and blatant vote-buying, there was reason for Indiana's sympathy toward protection. The state in 1880 was in transition from a predominantly agricultural to industrial economy, and because of this, economic interests listened closely to the possible benefits of protection.¹⁹

Consequently, Hancock's woeful ignorance on the tariff was revealed at a damaging time. In an interview with a New Jersey reporter he shocked both parties. He confused and stunned the public when he told them that his election "could make no difference either one way or another" to industry. "The tariff is a local question. It is a matter that general government seldom can interfere with, and nothing is likely ever to be done that will interfere with the industries of the country." His answer on raising

¹⁹The New York Tribune, October 8, 1880; Caldwell, 304-305; Conkling, 626; William G. Carleton, "Why Was the Democratic Party in Indiana a Radical Party?" 228.

revenue provided further turmoil. The way "is largely by the tariff, we must raise revenue in some way or another." Yet he concluded, a tariff for "revenue only" such as his party desired, was not a "tariff for protection" like the Republicans wanted.

The General's shallow knowledge was immediately attacked by the national press. E. L. Godkin, long a tariff reformer, heaped disdain on the Democratic party. He rebuked its leadership for putting Hancock on the "stump" when the general was ignorant of finance and government. The public needed enlightening on the tariff, not further confusion. After twenty years of criticizing the Republican tariff policy, Hancock's candidacy constituted a "betrayal" on the part of the Democrats and Godkin wanted him defeated. The Republican opposition challenged the General to explain the phrase "a tariff for revenue only," when he failed to do so, the Republicans charged it actually meant free trade.²⁰

The last minute fight on the tariff aroused farm interest and the Republican press cleverly associated the idea of revenue reform with British free trade. This worried many agrarians. Here their distaste for the policy of protection gave way to emotion. Although the individual

²⁰The New York Tribune, October 8, 1880; The Nation, XXXI (October 14, 1880), 267; Ibid., (October 21, 1880), 284.

farmer may have wanted changes in the tariff structure, the idea of free trade smacked of things foreign and British. Reform yes, British free trade no.

This helps to explain in part the failure of a pamphlet distributed in 1880 entitled, The Western Farmer of America. Augustas Mongredien, an Englishman, wrote the essay which carried the stamp of the Cobden Club. The author reiterated the disadvantages of agriculture under excessive duties. He urged remedying the situation by use of the ballot, and declared that no farmer should vote for a representative who refused "to propose, or at least vote for, a reduction of 5 per cent every successive year on import duties, till the whole are abolished." Mongredien asked his readers to pass his essay on to their friends. He believed many farmers failed to understand the evils of the protective tariff.²¹

At the moment, however, most midwestern agriculturalists were not interested in Mongredien's message. This was clear by the election vote. Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Iowa - all went for Garfield. Only the quasi-southern state of Missouri voted for Hancock.

²¹The Belleville Advocate, October 29, 1880; Roy V. Scott, The Agrarian Movement in Illinois, 1880-1896 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 18; Augustas Mongredien, The Western Farmer of America (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Co., 1880), 25-26.

Shortly after the election the influential Prairie Farmer sharply repudiated free trade. If the farmers of the Mississippi Valley were to skin the land for a few crops of wheat, pork, and cotton and send them around the world for a market, "it is because man is stupid and not because nature is unkind." Commerce and farming, the editor declared, must compliment one another. Without protection, raw materials would be shipped abroad and come back as finished products with profits reaped by foreigners. The nation must diversify its interests. The arguments of free traders, if followed, would "relegate the people of the country to the business of hunting and fishing."²²

The new administration had scarcely settled in the White House when the question of the tariff arose. Surplus revenue for the year 1880 was \$68,000,000 and promised to go higher. In light of this situation, Secretary of the Treasury Charles Folger in December recommended a tariff revision. The retention of high duties that increased the surplus made little sense, he said. Folger's Report stated that the surplus was not the only problem as schedule inconsistencies also needed correction. President Arthur

²²McKee, 198; The Prairie Farmer, LI (March 13, 1880), 364.

reiterated the Secretary's plea in his first message to Congress. Arthur declared that revision was a necessity, but that it should be done carefully and deliberately.²³

Once the decision for reduction was made, the question arose as to whether tariff revision was truly possible. By the 'eighties, protection had lost its Hamiltonian idealism. The dream of a nation bound together by a tariff with equity for all had long faded. Huge interests nurtured and reared on protectionist profits fought the slightest reduction. Their immense power extended to the ballot box, and many a Congressman remained slumped in his chair rather than incur the wrath of the Industrial League. One avowed reformer when asked how he could support the "bald-headed fraud of Judge Kelley" answered abjectly, "To tell you the plain truth, . . . it is because I am a coward."²⁴

The question of the method of revision was equally crucial. The President and Secretary of the Treasury recommended the use of a specially selected commission. Representatives from the fields of agriculture, manufacturing and commerce would serve as experts in deciding upon recommendations for reduction. This idea had not originated with the

²³U. S. House Executive Document, Report of the Secretary of Treasury, 47th Cong., 1st Sess., Report No. 2, 1881, 16-17; Richardson, VII, 4636.

²⁴General Roeliff Brinkerhoff, Recollections of A Life Time (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Co., 1900), 212.

Arthur Administration. In 1879, in a letter to its constituents, the Industrial League declared that any revision should be done by a "small and carefully chosen commission of legislators and laymen, who alone should be empowered to submit to Congress projects of change in tariff laws."²⁵

While much of the public favored the appointment of an "impartial" commission, farm interests and ardent revisionists fought the plan. Many agricultural representatives believed that the selection of a commission was a move to stall any action by Congress in hopes that the demand for reform would lessen. The farm spokesmen were justified in this criticism. In a speech before the New York Tariff Convention in November, 1881, William Kelley, the "high priest" of protectionists, had outlined the attack against revision. He advocated that the entire internal tax structure be abolished, and import duties alone should pay for government expenses. A short time later Justin Morrill was even more specific - do away with internal taxes and the tariff would go untouched.²⁶ In other words, eliminate other federal taxes

²⁵Richardson, VII, 4636; Tariff Tracts, II, The Industrial League to Its Constituents, Philadelphia, March 1, 1879, 17.

²⁶Martin County Sentinel, (Fairmont, Minnesota), April 28, 1882, hereinafter cited as Martin County Sentinel; U.S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 1st Sess., 1882, 2283; Address by Honorable William Kelley, "Reduction of Internal Taxes," November 29, 1881, Tariff Pamphlets, 1884, James Swank Collection, 17; The Nation, XXXIII (December 8, 1881), 442-443.

and Congress would be forced to rely on the tariff.

Richard Bland of Missouri feared agriculture would not get due recognition on the commission and he wanted six men appointed representing farm interests. John Carlisle of Kentucky argued in a similar vein. They agreed that farm representatives were better suited to speak for their constituents than any commission. Members of Congress already knew rates were excessive, they said, and the need was for immediate reform.²⁷

The commission plan was approved on May 15, 1881. When President Arthur announced the members' names, it was evident that agriculture had received little consideration. John L. Hayes, Secretary and lobbyist for the National Association of Wool Manufacturers, was made chairman. When questioned as to his position on the tariff, Hayes blithely replied that he did not favor a "high tariff," just "barely high enough to equalize the conditions of labor and capital here with those of our foreign competitors." Nevertheless, the fact remained that Hayes was a strong protectionist and he influenced the President in his remaining choices. He kept in close touch with protectionists Morrill and Sherman so that no mistakes in selection might occur.

²⁷U. S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 1st Sess., 1882, 3675; James Barnes, John Carlisle, Financial Statesman (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1931), 132.

Iron and steel was represented by Henry W. Oliver, Pittsburgh, sugar by Duncan Kenner of Louisiana, and wool growers by Austin Garland of Illinois. Other members were Robert Porter, a statistician sympathetic to higher rates, and William H. McMahon, an impartial expert from the Customs Commission. Jacob Ambler of Ohio, John W. H. Underwood of Georgia, and Alexander R. Boetler of West Virginia completed the membership. Nelson Aldrich best summarized the philosophy of the Commission when he explained that iron, wool, and sugar representatives were present and their interests "carefully looked out for."²⁸

Editorials in farm papers spoke in bewilderment and disgust on the President's appointments. Farmers Review declared that it was strange the the Commission should consist of only men who favored protection. Nobody, stated the editor, was more interested in reform than the farmer, yet he was not even represented. The paper asked agrarians to demand the immediate appointment of an agricultural representative. The Farmers Review, as did a number of other papers, reiterated the earlier charge that the commission was a trick to thwart reduction. The Prairie Farmer also

²⁸Howe, 220-221; Matthew Josephson, The Politicos (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1938), 326; Tarbell, 101-102; U. S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1883, 2149.

discounted the usefulness of the Commission. The editor doubted that any equitable revision would result from the Commission's work.²⁹

The conservative Belleville Advocate made no comment on the appointments, but admitted that the "controlling interest of the Republican party" favored reduction. Yet the editor still demanded protection for farmers. As precedent for any revision, "the Democrats must be swept out of Congress as far as practicable" More in line with rural thinking was the Omaha Bee. In a succinct phrase it summarized the conviction of many, "the tariff commission is a packed jury."³⁰

The Commission assembled to perform its duties on July 6, 1882, in Washington, D. C. Here plans were initiated for a tour of the country in order to gain a better perspective of tariff attitudes. Such major cities as New York, Rochester, Boston, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville, Chicago, Des Moines, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Chattanooga, Philadelphia, and Detroit were on the itinerary. The Commission traveled six thousand miles and heard testimony from 604 witnesses. For reasons beyond the Commission's control,

²⁹Farmers Review, VIII (May 18, 1882), 312; Martin County Sentinel, April 28, 1882; The Prairie Farmer, LIV (July 15, 1882), 220.

³⁰The Belleville Advocate, June 16, 1882; Ibid., September 22, 1882; Omaha Bee, June 13, 1882.

neither the Gulf nor the Pacific states were visited. The investigation ended on October 16, in Philadelphia.³¹

The men who appeared before the Commission represented a wide range of beliefs and interests, from protectionists to free traders, and spoke for a wide variety of industries from pig iron to quinine. The vast majority of those who testified, spoke on behalf of industry. With few exceptions, they overwhelmingly advocated the maintenance of a tariff, and if possible, its increase.

The agricultural community failed to present its case in as effective a manner as business. No doubt this resulted from the fact that farmers did not have an organized voice. The Grange, although recognized nationally, was declining and was divided within itself on the tariff question. Although the bulk of the testimony from rural representatives asked for lower duties, and was backed by sufficient fact for such a policy, often their most able spokesmen were not farmers. Those who did pretend to speak for agriculture were farm editors such as Benjamin Gue of the Iowa Homestead, local businessmen, and on occasion a representative from a county farm organization. A part of this resulted from a lack of detailed tariff knowledge by agrarians, but nonetheless it

³¹U.S. House, Misc. Document, Report of the Tariff Commission, Report No. 6, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1882-83, 2-3.

hurt the effectiveness of the farm argument. Free traders such as Henry J. Philpott, Des Moines, Iowa, and Everett P. Wheeler of New York spoke on behalf of farmers, but their testimony was limited in its effectiveness. A reading of the testimony quickly reveals that the Commission suspected that these men were insincere when they presented arguments on behalf of agriculture.³²

The position of western farmers in relation to the tariff can be deduced from the evidence compiled by the Commission. It clearly revealed that agriculturalists did not favor free trade in the true meaning of that term. The position of most agrarians was given by a farm spokesman H. Eshbaugh in St. Louis. In answer to the question he stated, "What I understand free trade to mean is, that we shall have a tariff sufficient to raise a revenue to defray the expenses of government, and everything shall be free so far as protecting interested classes is concerned." Yet, at the same time testimony was presented which illustrated a strong growth of interest in free trade and the entire tariff question. Farmers were willing to encourage manufacturing, but not at the expense of agriculture. They demanded some type of equality between the two basic industries.³³

³²Ibid., 779, 1234, 235, 1108, 1118-1119.

³³Ibid., 1237, 1140, 1112, 1226.

One of the most frequent complaints made by farm representatives was that the tariff increased prices. They argued that originally it was only to raise revenue, but the main object had become protection. Consequently, the farmer paid higher prices for clothing, housewares, and farm machinery. Benjamin F. Gue, editor of the Iowa Homestead, the only farm weekly in Iowa, gave strong evidence to support these claims. He presented a series of statements from large farm machinery manufacturers on the consequences of the tariff. D. Buford, President of the Buford Plow Company of Rock Island, Illinois, stated that the tariff increased the price of everything its customers bought from them. Lucius Wells, former manager of Deere and Company, Moline, Illinois, claimed implements produced for the farmer were increased in price from 15 to 25 per cent. Gue testified that manufacturers of barbed wire in Des Moines also declared that their prices were enhanced by the tariff.³⁴

The editors' arguments were substantiated in independent testimony by a number of hardware dealers and representatives of similar concerns which handled farm machinery and tools. Many of these firms believed that they could cope with European competition if raw materials were admitted free. Others concluded that they were now at a point where a lowering

³⁴Ibid., 1152, 1161, 1259, 1175, 1108, 1076.

of the tariff would no longer injure them. Barbed wire producers also promised cheaper prices if the tariff was lowered. Even some lumbermen advocated free admission of Canadian timber.³⁵

The Commission also heard testimony critical of the home market theory. Farm spokesmen held that small duties on agricultural commodities were of little value. A 20 cent duty on wheat was nonsense when only 10,000 bushels were imported in 1881. Furthermore, they held that no country in the world could compete with the American farmer in the domestic market. It was access to foreign markets which brought prosperity, they argued, not the tariff. Short of the Northeast and the growing cities in the Midwest which could not take all of the production at profitable prices, the western farmer had no other major market but Europe. Thus the loss of any sales abroad was serious. However, agrarians along the Canadian border were in a dilemma. They informed the Commission that they favored lower rates, yet these same farmers wanted to stop the importation of Canadian wheat. They argued that if duties were to exist, they should provide effective protection. Equally distressing to the entire farm community was the growth of retaliatory tariffs against American products which were often stimulated

³⁵Ibid., 669, 1005-1006, 1599.

by American protectionist policies. Canada had already instituted such legislation, and Germany and France were preparing to do so. The consequences of such actions were alarming.³⁶

While the Commission junketed about the country, farm interest in the tariff continued to mount. Rural debating societies and local school teachers were called upon to explain the complexities of trade to enthusiastic farm audiences. Rumors spread that a great third party movement might develop unless politicians dealt with this matter. The Farmers Review established a symposium on the tariff question, and urged its readers to express their views through its columns. Each week the journal printed letters from Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Kansas, and Missouri. The paper also encouraged other farm journals to discuss the tariff. It carefully reported to its readers on the movements of the Commission, and urged them to make certain that agricultural demands were heard. The editors warned farmers to find out how their candidates stood on protection before voting in the fall elections.³⁷

Although a majority of the letters that appeared in the Farmers Review were strongly in favor of a lower tariff,

³⁶Ibid., 1161, 1259-1260, 1432-1433, 1093-1094.

³⁷Farmers Review, VIII (June 8, 1882), 360; Ibid., (July 6, 1882), 426; Ibid., IX (October 26, 1882), 266; Ibid., (September 28, 1882), 200.

a diversity of opinion was presented. Some farmers dropped the paper, because they believed it had become a free trade journal. It was not unusual for a correspondent to admit he was ill-informed on the question, but still in favor of protection. A letter from a farmer near Guthrie Center, Iowa, undoubtedly spoke for many in this category. He was afraid that free trade would "put gold in English coffers." Other letters conceded that perhaps a tariff on some goods was necessary, but counselled moderation in application of duties - "a safe tariff for revenue purposes with just discrimination for protection."³⁸

The correspondence that appeared in the Farmers Review justifies careful analysis. While certainly not representing general farm thinking, numerous letters were received from agricultural states where the tariff was an important issue. Also, the charges registered against protection were nearly the same regardless of the state from which they originated. Many of the complaints were markedly similar to those being heard by the Tariff Commission.

A dominant theme of a growing class consciousness among farmers tended to run throughout the discussion. Many had come to believe that agriculture suffered at the expense of

³⁸Ibid., IX (July 20, 1882), 42; Ibid., (September 7, 1882), 154; Ibid., VIII (June 8, 1882), 360.

industry, and that the tariff worked to its disadvantage. The old cliches of protectionism, the home market, steady demand, and higher prices were no longer blindly accepted. Agrarians argued that farming, by its very nature, was much more of a gamble than industry. Farmers were forced to go it alone against the elements of nature. Yet, the manufacturers assured themselves of a profit, by getting tariff legislation passed which enhanced the price of goods to the great body of farm consumers.³⁹

Moreover, it was charged that the tariff had not only failed to increase domestic competition, but actually fostered monopoly. Thus industry gained a trio of advantages. It escaped foreign competition, forced the consumer to pay the price increase caused by the tariff, and gained opportunities for additional profits made possible by monopoly. A Davenport, Iowa, correspondent claimed that high tariff men did want equal protection. The writer stated that this would cause a universal rise in prices, and destroy the entire purpose of protection - benefitting the few at the expense of the many. A letter from Michigan was equally critical. It declared that the farmer received nothing from the tariff, and that monopolies were ultimately created which burdened agrarians. Farmers submitted, said the writer,

³⁹Farmers Review, VIII (May 18, 1882), 314; Ibid., (June 22, 1882), 394; Ibid., IX (July 27, 1882), 58.

because they were "wedded to party" and their leaders had been bought, "body and boots" by monopoly. "Gabriel's trumpet" he warned, would blow before party leaders moved toward reform.⁴⁰

Other events of the summer and fall kept the tariff issue before farmers. Their Congressional leaders, even when protectionist, acknowledged the need for a general reduction of rates. John Kasson of Iowa, a mild protectionist, called for a "thorough and general reduction" of the tariff. Agriculture was also frustrated in its desire to meet foreign demands for beef and pork. British purchases of beef dropped \$6,000,000 below that of 1881. The reason stemmed from a regulation passed by the Privy Council in 1879, after discovering some American cattle were infected with pleuropneumonia. The ruling required that United States beef be slaughtered ten days after arrival in England. A British report that appeared in 1881 was equally damaging to pork exports. The report stated that American hogs were infected with trichinae, and their consumption endangered human life. The story was given wide coverage in the European press, with the result that Germany, France, Italy, and other smaller nations refused to import American pork.⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid., VIII (June 15, 1882), 378; Ibid., IX (October 12, 1882), 234; Ibid., (October 5, 1882), 216-217.

⁴¹Edward Younger, John A. Kasson, Politics and Diplomacy from Lincoln to McKinley (Iowa City: Iowa State Historical Society, 1955), 317, 320; U. S. House, Executive Document, Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., Report No. 2, 1882, 37-38.

Agrarians were continually reminded of their grievances by a militant new farm organization - The Northern Alliance. Organized by Milton George in 1880, it took up the reins of leadership from the floundering Patrons of Husbandry. Beginning in Chicago it spread rapidly throughout the states of Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska. Branches were established with less success in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Missouri.⁴² The Alliance believed that farmers were prevented from enjoying the fruits of American life, and stated the reason for this condition in its constitution. "The object of the organization shall be to unite the farmers of the United States for their protection against class legislation, and the encroachments of concentrated capital and the tyranny of monopoly"⁴³

Through his influential paper, The Western Rural, George placed much of the blame for farm distress on railroads, currency, and the tariff. The militancy of the Alliance came at a propitious time. A drought in the Upper Mississippi Valley in 1881 had destroyed much of the corn and wheat crop. Already reeling from the setback of the previous year, Kansas farmers were faced with increased transportation

⁴²Hicks, 97-100.

⁴³The Industrial Struggle (Chicago: Western Rural, 1893), 34.

costs in 1882. In July, The Kansas Farmer announced to its readers that all lines running east from Kansas City, Leavenworth, Atchison and St. Joseph were to advance freight rates on wheat August 1. The rail hike confounded farmers. Why were rates going up instead of down? The British in 1880 sold steel rails for \$36 a ton, and in 1881 for \$31 a ton. Yet for those years, American costs were \$67 and \$61 a ton. Something was wrong. Farmers were unaware that only five months before the announced rail hike Andrew Carnegie had secretly confided to Bessemer Steel that he was able to produce rails at \$9 a ton.⁴⁴

Both parties acknowledged the tariff as an important issue by the time of the midterm elections in 1882. The Republicans adhered to their established doctrine which held that a revision was needed but within the framework of protection. Throughout the farm states, Democratic statements were less restrained. The tariff was blamed for monopoly and labelled as unjust and oppressive. It is important to note, that at the time of the election, a depression was quietly settling over the country. Unlike earlier depressions, no extreme financial panic precipitated the downward

⁴⁴Scott, 24; The Kansas Farmer, July 26, 1882; Allan Nevins, Abram Hewitt, With Some Account of Peter Cooper (New York: Harper Brothers, 1935), 421; Burton J. Hendrick, Life of Andrew Carnegie, I (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1932), 212-213.

trend. Had this been the case, greater farm solidarity might have been achieved.⁴⁵

The farmers' growing dissatisfaction was carefully watched by protectionist and free trade interests. Free traders and revenue reformers were delighted over the attitude expressed in the agricultural sector, and they eagerly worked for Democratic victories in the fall. The American Free Trade League was resurrected and branches established throughout the country, and the American Free Trade Journal went to press just prior to the election and carried the gospel of reform. A projected campaign fund of \$20,000 was to provide funds to win support in critical areas. Reformers were confident that victory was imminent.

Protectionists were alarmed at this anti-tariff activity. If it were impossible to prevent revision, the tariff must be lowered without impairing its protective character. The backlash of western discontent brought rapid organization, as the eastern industrial interests wanted to remain impregnable against any such tariff heresies. New guardians of American industries were quickly formed. The Metropolitan Industrial League of New York organized to

⁴⁵Annual Cyclopedia (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1882), 385, 422, 432, 447, 555; Samuel Rezneck, "Patterns of Thought and Action in an American Depression, 1882-1886," American Historical Review, LXI (January, 1956), 284.

thwart free trade tendencies. General Grant headed the Association for the Protection of American Industries, and the American Protective Tariff League was founded in Pennsylvania. The western farmer was not forgotten. The American Iron and Steel which had watched the growing dissatisfaction among farmers with the tariff stepped up its efforts to keep farmers in the protectionist fold.⁴⁶

The Association had begun its campaign to stem the drive for lower rates in 1881. In this year the organization published one of its most successful tracts, entitled The Testimony of the Fathers. The essay included excerpts from the speeches of prominent American and foreign leaders in regard to the tariff. The idea was to associate protection with patriotism and wisdom. The tract quoted President James Monroe who stated on March 5, 1817, that it was important to "provide at home a market for our raw materials . . . it will enhance the price, and protect the cultivator against the casualties incident to foreign markets."⁴⁷ The words of industrialist Thomas Ewing were also included. In a Senate

⁴⁶Fleming, 199-200; Royal Cortisseez, The Life of Whitelaw Reid, II (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1921), 81-82; Wilford J. Eitman, "The Rise and Decline of Orthodox Tariff Propaganda," Quarterly Journal of Economics, XLV (November, 1930), 23-24.

⁴⁷Tariff Tracts, The Testimony of the Fathers, 1884, James Swank Collection, 5.

speech in February, 1832, Ewing had declared "a flourishing agricultural population is the very basis of prosperity of a nation . . . and it with a view to the advancement of that interest - especially of the interest of the western farmer - that I give to the protecting system my . . . unqualified support."⁴⁸ Even Napoleon Bonaparte was quoted as having said that free trade would "grind agriculture to powder."⁴⁹

In September, 1882, rural readers were provided with additional tariff information when printed copies of a speech by Thomas Dudley, given before the New Jersey State Agricultural Society and entitled, "How Protection Affects the Farmer," were given wide distribution. The facts were tightly organized, and offered a step-by-step defense of the protective system. The Association considered this one of its most effective publications, as it was impossible even for the ill-informed, not to have understood the tract.

Agriculture was, and ever would be, the leading industry of the world, but the farmer had to be guaranteed a home market through protection. Dudley argued that the Republican party was responsible for the protection which farm commodities received, and pointed to the duties on corn

⁴⁸Ibid., 10.

⁴⁹Ibid., 22.

of 10 cents, wheat 20 cents, oats and rye 10 cents and barley 15 cents. The protection provided labor also benefited agriculture. A tariff allowed manufacturers greater profits, which they passed on in the form of higher wages. Unlike the pauper laborers of Europe, the well-paid American artisan was a better customer of the farmer. Dudley also insisted that the tariff allowed industry to sell goods cheaper to agriculturalists. The argument further held that the British wanted to destroy American manufacturers, and hoped to start class warfare in the United States by setting farmers against industrialists. Free trade destroyed manufacturing centers, and without these the western farmer would have no market. Furthermore, the unemployed would go into agriculture, and, since prices depended upon supply and demand, farmers faced tremendous losses if this should occur. Worse yet, with fewer manufacturers the western farmers would pay increased prices for goods purchased. The moral was that, "Enlightened selfishness should teach us to suspect any policy our enemy advocates."⁵⁰ The distribution of such tracts undoubtedly helped to sway rural thinking, and helps to explain why the tariff remained a quasi-patriotic-economic question to a great many farmers in the Midwest and Far West.

⁵⁰Address before New Jersey State Agricultural Society, September 22, 1882, by Honorable Thomas Dudley, "How Protection Affects the Farmer," Pamphlets, 1884, James Swank Collection, 1-15.

The League left no stone unturned in its effort to safeguard the tariff and keep the farmer in protectionist ranks. Just six days before the Tariff Commission was to finish its investigations, James M. Swank appeared before the body. Reading a paper entitled "British Attacks on the American Protective Policy" and subtitled "The United States a Slaughter House Market," he denounced the perfidity of the English. Swank was careful to explain why the Commission may have detected free trade sympathy among farmers.

He claimed the Cobden Club had sent large quantities of "false free trade literature" into the country during the campaign of 1880, but had failed to influence the election. Now the Cobdenites had enlisted the aid of the New York Free Trade Club. Together they had systematically scattered free trade propaganda among western farmers. Swank contended that western newspapers had been purchased by free traders and these same interests provided lecturers to convince farmers of the false doctrine. This blatant interference on the part of the English had to stop. Western farmers, he charged, were the unwilling victims of a carefully perpetrated attack.⁵¹

Tariff reformers and free traders were delighted at the outcome of the fall elections. The Democrats won a large

⁵¹Paper by James M. Swank, "British Attacks on the American Protective Tariff Policy," October 10, 1882, before the Tariff Commission, James Swank Collection.

majority in the House, and made gains in Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas where farmers had abandoned the weakening Greenback party. Democrats declared that Republican defeat stemmed from the party's failure to reduce the tariff. Some months later Senator Sherman admitted that taxes - internal and tariff - had helped to defeat the Republicans.

Cheered by their victory at the polls, reformers were equally gratified by the report of the Tariff Commission. Despite its make-up, the Commission surprisingly recommended a reduction in duties of from 20 to 25 per cent and an extension of the free list. President Arthur seconded the suggestions of the Commission and urged quick action because the present tariff was in some ways unfair. Secretary Folger reiterated his earlier complaints of a treasury surplus, and asked for reductions on wool, woolen goods, steel, iron, sugar and molasses.⁵² Would the protectionists be able to defeat such formidable support for reduction? Revision seemed a certainty.

The gloom of recent events weighed heavy on the Republican Congress that assembled in December, 1882, Tension

⁵²C. E. Russell, Bare Hands and Stone Walls (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1933), 38-41; Martin County Sentinel, November 17, 1882; U. S. Congress, House Misc. Document, Report of the Tariff Commission, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1882, Report No. 6, 6; U. S. Congress, House Exec. Document, Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1882, Report No. 2, 21.

prevailed, and everywhere men talked of getting the legislative machinery underway. A sense of urgency gripped even the affable President who quietly backed the rumor of a special session unless the tariff was handled with dispatch. There was reason for alarm. The present Republican majority was small, and the party had been repudiated at the polls. There were only three months to frame an acceptable bill, and rumors filled the halls and hotels that the Democrats planned to stall, and that no bill would be passed. Furthermore, the indomitable leadership of protectionists Morrill and Kelley had weakened. The Senate was restless under the aging Morrill, and Kelley, though still proudly bearing his sobriquet "Pig Iron", had failed in health and was in search of an able lieutenant. Such unfavorable circumstances demanded great caution and wisdom. The 72-year old Morrill, still keen of mind, might have reflected on a letter he had received some 20 years earlier. "Nothing less than a dictator is required for making a really good tariff. Would to heaven you or I could fill the place for a week." The occasion was at hand.⁵³

The two houses, both eager to legislate, immediately undertook to write separate measures. The Senate Finance Committee was chaired by Morrill, and he was ably assisted

⁵³Tarbell, 114, 120-122; Barnes, 57; Stanwood, 209; Justin S. Morrill, "Notable Letters From My Political Friends," The Forum, XXIV (October, 1897), 147.

by John Sherman, William Allison, and Nelson Aldrich. The most prominent Democrat and reformer was James Beck of Kentucky. The Ways and Means Committee of the House was equally fortified by high tariff men. Kelley, weakened but determined, remained chairman; sitting next to him was his new understudy, Dudley C. Haskell of Kansas. William McKinley and John Kasson of Iowa completed the Republican membership. Democratic members were John Carlisle of Kentucky, William Morrison of Illinois, John Tucker of Virginia, and Samuel Randall of Pennsylvania. With the exception of the latter, all sought to lower duties.

What agriculture wanted in the way of tariff reform was well known to the 47th Congress. Farmers had expressed their wishes in the national press, in farm journals, before the Tariff Commission, and in petitions addressed to Congress. Kansas, Iowa, and other Midwestern states were principally interested in cheaper rates on barbed wire, sugar, woolens, lumber, and household goods. Yet despite the fact that 44 per cent of the total population was engaged in agriculture, Congress ignored these demands.⁵⁴

Farmers were not without champions for their cause. James Beck of Kentucky, Preston Plumb of Kansas, Richard Bland

⁵⁴Tarbell, 110-113; U. S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1883, 2760; 1397, 1380, 1830; Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1883), 290.

of Missouri, William Morrison of Illinois and Charles Van Wyck of Nebraska labored diligently, if unsuccessfully, on their behalf. Petitions from farm states such as Iowa, Illinois and Indiana arrived regularly which requested lower duties on lumber. But the Commission, in this case had not recommended lower rates, and Congress, at least on this occasion, was determined to abide by the Commission's findings.

The argument of lumbermen was a familiar one to Congressional veterans. If the tariff were removed, the pauper labor of Canada would destroy American producers. No evidence, humanitarian or logical, was presented. When Van Wyck argued that the cost of lumber had increased steadily for the past five years, and blamed a part of the rise on the tariff, this was denounced as ridiculous. Lumber representatives said that the tariff had increased competition and reduced prices. A pledge to retain all the duties with the exception of rough lumber used for fencing, housing, and building was also rejected. Philetus Sawyer, lumber baron of Wisconsin, and Senator Conger of Michigan were immovable. The census of 1880 which had graphically illustrated the rapid depletion of American timber was dismissed as nonsense. Timber from lands gained for a mere \$1.25 an acre still needed protection. Sawyer, already a millionaire, and his fortune doubling every five years, was a small operator when compared

with Frederick Weyerhaeuser, Isaac Stephenson, and Cadwallder Washburn. Yet the industry remained infant.⁵⁵

Agriculture, Conger stated, was better protected than any other industry. Lumbering camps purchased \$5,000,000 worth of farm commodities all of which were available in Canada at lower prices. If the tariff should fall, the western farmers would lose even more of their markets, because the lumbering states would be forced to turn to the cheaper Canadian commodities. Plumb, who favored the principle of protection, succinctly stated the position of some agrarians in rejecting Conger's argument:

Practically speaking, the tariff is put upon wheat, upon corn, and upon various other agricultural products simply as a disguise, simply to make the agricultural people of the United States believe that the tariff protects them The tariff upon wheat and various other agricultural products is not protection. No farmer ever asked for it; no farmer ever received one single dime on account of it.⁵⁶

Farmers were perfectly willing to allow Michigan to buy free potatoes, corn, cabbage, and horses, if only she would forego the tariff on lumber, but the Michigan Senator refused to yield.⁵⁷

⁵⁵U. S., Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1883, 1330, 410, 307, 1830, 2263, 3148; The Nation, XXXVI (January 4, 1883), 6-7; Richard N. Current, Pine Logs and Politics, A Life of Philletus Sawyer (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1950), 105.

⁵⁶U. S., Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1883, 1396, 1444.

⁵⁷Ibid., 1444.

Similar pleas were also rejected. When agricultural representatives declared that they needed no protection, just access to open markets, they were ignored. Beck, in a moment of frustration attempted an appeal to morality. "Now, tell the people the truth," he pleaded, the tariff protects no farmer, except perhaps a few along the Canadian border. Even this was small compensation for the 40, 50, or 60 per cent additional that he had to pay for fencing, clothing, and tools. But Morrill still refused to listen. He quietly ignored the fact that America had exported 75.31 per cent of its agricultural commodities the year before. He insisted that too many peas had been imported, the home market had to be guarded, and peas kept out.⁵⁸

Time and again farm spokesmen denounced the powerful lobby that had descended upon Washington. Even the press complained of the lobbyists who filled the Capitol chambers and jostled visitors while in search of a Congressman. Why, demanded Bland, were there no farmers among them? They had no money to hire paid lobbyists, Bland concluded, and, furthermore, they had not asked for such a bill, at least not one written by "vested interests." The cupidity of the entire procedure was best revealed in the actions of the

⁵⁸Ibid., 1909-1910; Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, 1883 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1883), 352.

Chairman of the Tariff Commission, John L. Hayes. The Commission had hardly reported its findings, when Hayes set up an office and lobbied for higher duties than had been recommended in his own report.⁵⁹

Spurred by the press, the public had become increasingly annoyed with the Congressional deadlock. The Nation blamed the legislative paralysis on the fact that revenue reform had become associated with British free trade ideas, and that, while both parties wanted revision, they were uncertain about the political repercussions if it should be achieved. Writing in the Farmers Review, an Iowa agrarian warned his fellow farmers to beware of the tariff. It was simply a tax, he wrote, which they ultimately paid. The Belleville Advocate charged that the farmer was not a victim of class legislation when protective duties were levied. The writer declared that New Jersey paid a dollar bounty for every ton of sorghum its farmers produced. This was truly class legislation, he concluded.⁶⁰

Some Republicans sensed the disadvantage of their party's stand on the tariff. James G. Blaine stated the

⁵⁹U. S., Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1883, 1678, 3576, 2582-2583; Howe, 223.

⁶⁰The Nation, XXXVI (February 8, 1883), 118; Ibid., XXXVI, (February 22, 1883), 164; Farmers Review, IX (December 14, 1882), 368; The Belleville Advocate, February 9, 1883.

predicament in a letter to Whitelaw Reid in February, 1883.

The attitude into which tariff legislation is drifting promises the most serious discomfiture to the Republicans and immense advantage to the Democrats. We need one of your old fashioned bugle blasts in the Tribune, for protection interest, strong, aggressive, cogent, such as you know how to write. Otherwise we are drifting, first to defense, then to destruction.⁶¹

As the debate dragged on, it was clear that neither the House nor the Senate measures could gain enactment as they stood. The House bill had lowered duties only ten per cent, and Democrats, along with reform Republicans, amended and delayed the measure until its passage was impossible. The bill approved by the Senate followed the Commission's recommendations more closely, and reached the House on February 20. This measure might have passed had Kelley given his approval, but this he was unwilling to do. Unable to force higher duties through debate, his only recourse was to somehow get the bill into a conference committee where the members would be friendly to increased rates. This, too, seemed impossible because there had been no disagreement on the Senate measure. Consequently, it appeared that no bill would pass.

The answer to his problem finally came from Thomas B. Reed of Maine. Reed proposed a bill that allowed the tariff

⁶¹Cortisseez, 81-82.

to be taken from the Speaker's table at any time, but only for the purpose of disagreeing, not adopting it. The latter might have proved fatal because if Reed's plan failed to get adoption, the bill was to remain on the Speaker's table. "A majority could declare disagreement, but not agreement." Despite objections, Reed's plan was adopted. The House conferees were William McKinley, Dudley Haskell, William Kelley, Emory Spear, and John Carlisle. The Senate was represented by Sherman, Aldrich, Morrill, James McDill of Iowa and William Mahone of West Virginia. James Beck and Thomas Bayard refused to serve on the committee because it was not "full and free."⁶²

Twenty-four hours later and just two days before the arrival of a new Congress, a revised bill was reported. It passed the Senate by the narrow margin of 32-30, with the vote divided along party lines. Out of eight states comprised of Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, Kansas, Ohio, Missouri and Minnesota, five votes were cast against its passage and eight for it. In the House the measure passed by a vote of 152-116, while the same states answered with 34 ayes and 20 nays.⁶³

⁶²Barnes, 59-60; William A. Robinson, Thomas B. Reed, Parliamentarian (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1930), 94-96; U. S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1883, 3454, 3466-3467.

⁶³U. S. Senate Journal, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1882-1883, 516-517; U. S. House Journal, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1882-1883, 612-613.

The duties on farm products remained essentially the same as the Commission had recommended. Beef and pork one cent a pound, hams and bacon two cents per pound, wheat 20 cents a bushel, and corn 10 cents per bushel. Largely because of the request of brewers, the duty on barley was lowered from 15 cents to 10 cents. The desired reduction on clothing was not made. Dress goods made from wool were raised from 8 cents a yard and 35 per cent ad valorem to 9 cents a yard and 40 per cent ad valorem, although the Commission had recommended an even greater increase.

With regard to steel, revisions were made that gave the appearance of reductions, but actually often resulted in increased rates. This was done by specifically enumerating certain items. Although rates were dropped on steel bars and sheet metal, other materials which heretofore had remained "unspecified" were now placed under the same schedule as sheet steel, iron bars, and rods. Action such as this helped to conceal increases. Steel rails were lowered from \$28 a ton to \$17 a ton. This pleased farmers, but was of little real value to them. The duty still remained protective enough to prevent foreign competition. The free list was equally meaningless for agriculture. Divi-divi, fish skins, nutmegs or cudbear were of little use to farmers.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Taussig, Tariff History, 234, 237, 242, 245; U. S., Statutes at Large, XXII, 488-526.

Mark Dannel of Minnesota offered one possible defense of the "mongrel bill." Dannel explained that from the beginning he had opposed the Commission, and disagreed with the measure which had passed. It did not represent the wishes of the people, he said, and farmers had received less consideration than any other interest. Yet, under protest he would vote for the bill, because slight reductions were better than none at all.⁶⁵

Others were less compromising in their attitude than Dannel. The Farmers Review rejected the bill in its entirety, and the editor claimed that the new legislation had failed to quiet the tariff debate. Interest remained high because the issue was one of vitality in "local and town discussion." Farm letters continued to appear in the paper condemning the tariff. One such letter stated that protection had failed to provide farmers with a market for all they raised. This writer declared that agrarians now saw that protection was of no value to them. He contended that it was nothing but a system of taxation that forced farmers to pay more for everything they bought, and added nothing to the price of the commodities which they sold.

The Martin County Sentinel (Minnesota) also showed little enthusiasm for the new bill. The editor declared that

⁶⁵U. S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1883, 3734-3735.

the job of tariff revision was left half finished. The outspoken Omaha Bee called it a "bogus reform measure,"⁶⁶ while the Topeka Daily Capital (Kansas) expressed disappointment over the bill's failure to provide real reform.⁶⁷

Protectionist papers believed that the measure was worthy of great praise. The New York Tribune argued that the farm and labor interests had been preserved, while the Belleville Advocate (Illinois) stated that no bill received "greater thought in preliminary preparations, or more exact and careful method in adoption"⁶⁸ The Kansas Chief announced that it was pleased that the wishes of free trade professors had met defeat.⁶⁹

The high tariff press was not alone in its dissatisfaction with the measure. The Industrial League, too, was chagrined over the passage of a bill which carried such low duties. It lamented on the ignorance of those who favored reduction, and blamed influential New York and Chicago newspapers, along with the free trade colleges of New England.

⁶⁶Farmers Review, X (April 12, 1883), 238; Ibid., (March 15, 1883), 174; The Martin County Sentinel, March 9, 1883; Omaha Bee, March 6, 1883.

⁶⁷Norbert R. Mahnken, "The Congressmen of the Grain Belt States and Tariff Legislation, 1860-1890," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1941), 153.

⁶⁸The Belleville Advocate, March 16, 1883; New York Tribune, March 26, 1883.

⁶⁹Mahnken, "The Congressmen of the Grain Belt States and Tariff Legislation, 1860-1890," 154.

believed that a new generation of voters was responsible for the demand for lower duties, as these people knew nothing of the suffering which had existed under the revenue tariff prior to the Civil War. Henry Carey Baird dismissed the measure as "a surrender on the part of men professing to be protectionists."⁷⁰

The years between 1880 and 1884 were frustrating ones for agriculture. The farmer had enjoyed a brief economic upturn when the decade opened, but it quickly disappeared. Try as he might, he could not locate the specific cause of his problems. Everything seemed to be against him - low prices, high taxes, tariffs, and exorbitant rail rates. Confused and leaderless, his demands commanded little attention on the national scene. While farm testimony before the Tariff Commission had almost unanimously asked for lower rates, these wishes appeared to have influenced final policy very little.

His indecision on the tariff is understandable. While he had grown to distrust the tariff, no national or midwestern farm organizations had taken a strong stand against protection. Thus while more farmers had moved into the anti-tariff ranks, large numbers still remained undecided. As yet, no bold leadership had appeared to articulate the hardships which protection worked on agriculture.

⁷⁰The Nation, XXXVI (April 19, 1883), 334; Ibid., (March 8, 1883), 334.

Senator John Sherman, in a moment of reflection, gave a concise analysis of the "mongrel bill's" legacy to tariff history. If the measure had embodied the recommendations of the Tariff Commission, the issue would have been settled for many years. "I have always regretted that I did not defeat the bill," mused Sherman. The Senator did not know the truth for which he spoke. The next seven years of American political life were dominated by the tariff issue. No other question consumed so much of the nation's political energies. The prelude was over, the battle was on.⁷¹

⁷¹Sherman, 851-853.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1884

The "mongrel bill" that had passed in March, 1883, failed to quiet the tariff controversy which had been agitating the country. Both the farm and national press had reflected the nation's disappointment with the measure. The recommendations of the Tariff Commission had been ignored, and the act which finally passed was the work of a Congressional coterie known to favor higher duties. The actions of the Republicans in 1883 confirmed what many tariff reformers had long believed, "that there was no hope of reform from the Republican party."¹

Thus, by the 'eighties the Democratic party carried the hopes of those who favored tariff reform. Yet the Democrats faced great obstacles. They opposed the Republicans on an issue in which that party was closely united, and even the voices of its members who wanted reduction had been largely stilled. Moreover, Democrats themselves were split over the tariff question. Samuel Randall, for example, one of the party's most able and influential leaders headed the

¹Brinkerhoff, 215.

protectionist wing. Even more frustrating was the fact that the western farm states, where reform sympathy was strong, were staunchly Republican. Western farmers continually demanded lower duties, but faithfully returned Republican majorities. One of the main problems facing western agricultural tariff reformers was the lack of leadership. Western farmers possessed no spokesman of national prominence to lend stature and importance to their demands for lower duties. Not until the election of Grover Cleveland in 1884 was the question of the farmer and the tariff pointed up as a national problem.²

The reform movement in the eastern industrial states had continued at a steady pace. In April, 1884, the Massachusetts Tariff Reform League was organized, and just two months later, the New York State Revenue Reform League was born. The New York Free Trade Club had also remained active, and prominent Congressional leaders appeared at its meetings to discuss the tariff. Meanwhile, however, strong but disorganized agitation for lower rates continued in the Midwest. One group of energetic reformers was the Iriquois Club of Chicago. This club provided an articulate voice

²Stanwood, 211; H. Wayne Morgan, William McKinley and His America (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 57; The Martin County Sentinel, April 18, 1884; Richardson, VII, 5095-5096.

in the West for tariff reform, and demanded lower duties on agricultural commodities. The Iriquois Club had presented testimony before the Tariff Commission in 1882 on behalf of farmers.³ In March, 1884, a free trade newspaper, The Million, was begun in Des Moines, Iowa, under the editorship of Henry J. Philpott. The Million was a weekly devoted exclusively to the tariff question. The paper possessed an impressive list of contributors which included David A. Wells, Professors William G. Sumner of Yale, Arthur L. Perry, Williams College, J. M. Sturtevant, Illinois, James Canfield, Kansas, A. L. Chapin, President of Beloit College, editor William Henry Watterson of Kentucky, lecturer Thomas G. Shearman of New York, and J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska.

The Million's circulation was never large, and its financial support came from eastern interests,⁴ but it made an important contribution to the tariff discussion in the western farm states. It provided well-written articles directed to the farmer, and willingly printed any correspondence from its rural readers. If not large, the paper's circulation was wide as indicated by the letters in its

³Everett P. Wheeler, Sixty Years of American Life (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1917), 157, 160; U. S. House Executive Document, Report of the Tariff Commission, 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., Report No. 6, 1882-1883, 1030-1031.

⁴Fleming, 221.

columns. The editor encouraged his readers to pass the paper on to their friends, and if necessary, to write for more. The Million also reprinted full page editorials from other newspapers, and gave the farmer a different point of view from that found in most newspapers. Furthermore, it encouraged the formation of free trade clubs, and carried a free trade directory for the states of Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, and Kansas. While the paper probably did not convert many agrarians to free trade, it could not have failed to stimulate discussion, and, as its columns revealed, it planted doubt in the most ardent protectionist mind.⁵

The journal often printed hypothetical discussions, or short rhymes which tended to entertain the reader, while, at the same time, illustrate the folly of protection. One such discussion was entitled:

The Little Protectionist Catechism

- Q. What is thy name, age, and occupation?
- A. My name is infant industry; my age is one hundred and fifty years; occupation, subsidy beggar.
- Q. Who gave thee this name?
- A. I gave it to myself, when I had grown old.
- Q. Rehearse the Articles of thy belief.

⁵The Million, I (April 12, 1884), 46-47; Ibid., (March 8, 1884), 4; Ibid., (March 22, 1884), 23; Ibid., (April 5, 1884), 33.

- A. I believe in taking care of number one. I believe in high taxes on other people, in high prices for myself and low wages for my workmen.
- Q. How wilt thou maintain a protective tariff?
- A. By votes of American farmers, manufacturers, and mechanics.
- Q. How wilt thou gain the votes of the western farmers?
- A. By telling them that a few eastern manufacturers buy all their grain, and that if there were no protective tariff, eastern mechanics would be all thrown out of work and driven to compete with farmers, instead of buying from them.
- Q. How wilt thou gain the votes of manufacturers?
- A. By telling them that the tariff is their only source of prosperity.
- Q. How wilt thou gain the votes of mechanics and working men?
- A. By telling them that the tariff increases their wages, and that, without protection, "hollow-eyed want would crouch in the homes of American labor."
- Q. How wilt thou gain the vote of American sailors?
- A. There are none. I have protected them out of existence.⁶

An indication of interest in the tariff was the fact that The Million received numerous letters of earnest inquiry about protection. The nature of the correspondence sheds light on the predicament of many people in the farm states. Such a letter came from N. J. Burger of Donaphen, Nebraska, in April, 1884. Burger sent \$12.50 to pay for 25 subscriptions

⁶Ibid., (March 15, 1884), 13; (the author has shortened this somewhat.)

and then explained his problem to the editor. He related that, "your paper takes well with masses of people here but there is one lamentable fact and that is that the people at large know nothing about the tariff question."⁷ He provided the editor with a list of questions he wanted answered, and requested answers that could be understood by the "most illiterate." Heading the list of his questions was, "how would free trade benefit the farmer?"⁸ A Kansas correspondent echoed the sympathies of Burger when he stated that "the tariff question is very little understood here."⁹

H. C. Burton of the Leavenworth Standard (Kansas) was pleased about The Million's advocacy of reform. He declared: "the time is ripe, and the cause is just"¹⁰ The year 1884 had opened with what some newspapers believed was a good chance for tariff reduction. The Fergus Falls Democrat of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, stated that there was a great deal of interest in the revision of the tariff. The editor believed that with so much interest at local level in the fall election, that a Democratic victory was "better assured" in the West and Northwest. The same issue of the

⁷Ibid., (April 12, 1884), 48.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., (June 28, 1884), 131.

¹⁰Ibid., (March 22, 1884), 23.

paper carried a devastating attack on Republican Senator Dwight Sabin of Minnesota. Sabin had refused to discuss protection with the paper by saying that "the tariff is too weighty and too broad a subject to discuss in the limits of an interview."¹¹

The editor ripped at Sabin for his evasiveness, and declared that it was the "inequitious Republican tariff" and the monopolies they fostered which robbed the people. He accused the Senator of being a manufacturer and state prison contractor "who a few years ago was a poor boy with his pants tucked in his boots, but had become a millionaire, boss of the Republican politics in Minnesota, and chairman of the National Republican Committee."¹²

The Daily Times of Wahpeton, Dakota Territory, also believed that the "Democrats have the good sense and courage" to revise the tariff. The editor held that the party had nothing to lose, and the make-up of the committees in Congress gave reason to expect that "perhaps finally relief would be forthcoming." That the American paid 80, 90, 100, or 200 per cent to the eastern merchants was a disgrace and an insult to their intelligence, the editor concluded.¹³

¹¹The Fergus Falls Democrat, Fergus Falls, Minnesota, January 1, 1884.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Quoted in ibid.

The optimism for reform was based on the Democratic majority in Congress, as it numbered 198 against 126 Republicans and Independents. Moreover, John G. Carlisle of Kentucky had been chosen Speaker of the House. Although an honorary member of free trade clubs, Carlisle was no free trader, but he was an earnest tariff reformer. His appointment of William Morrison of Illinois as chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means indicated his sympathy for downward revision of duties. Under Morrison's guidance a bill was drafted and reported on March 11, 1884. The measure was by no means radical but called for reductions of 20 per cent, with no duty lower than those of the Morrill bill of 1861.

Despite the cautious approach by Morrison, he was forced to lower the average reduction rate to 17 per cent and cut back the extended free list to coal, lumber, and salt.¹⁴ Morrison opened general debate on the bill with a speech that refuted the entire protective philosophy. With regard to agriculture, Morrison argued that the home market theory was a "fallacy" because farmers exported double that which they consumed at home. Roger Q. Mills of Texas seconded the claims of Morrison. "After twenty years of high protective tariffs,"

¹⁴Barnes, 72, 78; Stanwood, 220; O. H. Perry, "Proposed Tariff Legislation Since 1883," Quarterly Journal of Economics, II (October, 1887), 69.

he contended, "the farmers of Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska and the rest still had to go to Europe to find consumers." It made no difference, Mills claimed, if industry did move to the West, consumption would remain at the same level. To consume the farm commodities produced, the labor force would have to triple. Furthermore, Mills declared, the talk of diversification of industry, and the creation of other means of employment was of no avail to agriculture. No farmer could change occupations readily because his initial investment was too large, and he was losing money, not making it.¹⁵

Throughout the debate Richard Townshend of Illinois and Milo White of Minnesota struck at what western farmers found so disgusting and inequitable about the entire tariff question. Townshend, quoted from an address given before the American Agricultural Association by Joseph Medill, editor of the Chicago Tribune:

It is quite clear that of every \$4 "protection" adds to the price of goods three goes into the pockets of the employing capitalists And this accounts for the phenomena that the hotels of Washington and the Halls of Congress are filled to overflowing with a hired lobby not only clamoring against any reduction of the present war tariff, but actually hounding and bulldozing the members of Congress to raise it still higher on the people.¹⁶

¹⁵U. S., Congressional Record, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 1884, 2977; Ibid., 2988.

¹⁶Ibid., 3878.

Townshend went on to say that:

Nobody protects or helps to protect the ordinary farmer, but he is forced by the tariff to aid in the protection of the manufacturing classes It is true that in framing the tariff law for the purpose of humbugging the farmer, they did go through the farce of putting some duty on these articles, but all know that no amount of duty can raise the price of these articles or protect them from foreign competition¹⁷

Speaking in the closing hours of debate, White revealed the frustration of the western farm representatives. In strident tones White asked for an end to the perpetuation of the myth that a tariff helped farmers. The Minnesotan disgustedly stated:

It has been urged here over and over again that our protective policy was the greatest aid to the agriculturalist, the farmer. Now let us see how it works We put a duty of 20 cents per bushel on wheat. Now bless your innocent souls, every farmer among us knows that we get just what dealers can pay for wheat basing the price on Liverpool, deducting freight, elevator charge, interest, insurance, commission, a fair margin, and etc. You from the East come to Chicago and buy what you want in the open market, and pay no more than the relative Liverpool value. The same is true of pork, beef, and corn So we who do the hardest work get the least pay, wear the poorest clothes, and pay the greatest price for all we buy.¹⁸

The debate on the measure had aroused the interests of the western states. The Republican St. Paul Pioneer Press warned Congress that it was absolutely essential to pass the

¹⁷Ibid., 3877-3878.

¹⁸Ibid., Appendix, 373-374.

Morrison bill.¹⁹ The measure must pass, said the Sioux City, Iowa, Tribune, "or the democracy will be run over and trodden in the dirt so deep that Sam Randall with the observatory telescope cannot find it."²⁰

Behind the fervent Philippics that demanded passage of the Morrison bill lay the harsh political realities of tariff legislation. The Democratic majority in the House was strong in numbers, but weak in unity. For the veteran tariff reformers from the farm states, the last hectic days of debate must have been like viewing a tragic comedy all over again. Once more lobbyists, attorneys, and politicians appeared in the halls of Congress to cajole, praise, and threaten the "voice of the people" - the United States Congress.²¹

Iron, steel and wool were all represented, but once again the farmers had no organized power to speak for them. No branch of the "third house" worked more effectively to prevent reform than the combined efforts of the American Iron and Steel Association and the Industrial League. In a letter just prior to the vote on the Morrison bill, James Swank, Secretary of the Association, revealed the extensive network of alliances that he operated to thwart reform. In

¹⁹Quoted in The Million, I (March 29, 1884), 1.

²⁰Quoted in ibid., (April 12, 1884), 46.

²¹Barnes, 78-79; The Million, I (March 8, 1884), 7.

answer to a letter from Justin Morrill, Swank replied:

I have just received your letter of the 3d. inst. I have also received a copy of your speech on the tariff. This Association cannot directly engage in the distribution of your speech, as we have many Democratic members, but we occasionally "whip the devil around the stump." On Saturday 1st I gave Mr. McPherson \$2,000 which our Democratic members will know nothing about. This money is to be used for the distribution of just such speeches as yours If we had not placed the above mentioned in the hands of Mr. McPherson last Friday, we would have been glad to make a liberal subscription towards the distribution of your speech; but now we presume that General Hawley and Mr. McPherson will see this attended to.²²

The House defeated the Morrison bill on May 6, 1884.

George Converse, an Ohio Democrat, moved that the enacting clause of the bill be struck out and on a roll call vote, the House accepted the motion by the close margin of 159-155. One-hundred-and-eighteen Republicans and Independents along with forty-one Democrats killed the measure. Democrats who voted to kill the bill were ten from Ohio, twelve from Pennsylvania, four from California, six from New York, three from New Jersey, and one from Virginia, West Virginia, Illinois, Maryland, Connecticut, and Louisiana. Out of the eight farm states comprised of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and Ohio, 39 ayes

²²Quoted in Barnes, 79.

were cast for the bill. Four Republicans voted with the Democrats, all from Minnesota.²³

The actions of the Minnesota Republicans illustrated the dilemma of tariff reform in the western farm states. Several of the strongly Republican farm newspapers of the state praised Representatives Nelson, White, Strait, and Wakefield for their support of lower duties. The Martin County Sentinel congratulated the Congressmen on their vote with the "Democratic free traders," and declared that their desertion of the Republican party was justifiable.²⁴ The editor of the Sentinel chided the protectionist Minneapolis Tribune for its attacks on the state delegation. The people, contended the Sentinel, were "eminently satisfied" with their representatives' vote. The Tribune's high tariff attitude and "skim milk editorials" drew little attention, declared the editor.²⁵ Yet a few weeks later, these same newspapers and others supported James G. Blaine in his campaign for the presidency.

Republicans who had hoped to utilize protection as a key issue in the forthcoming presidential battle, were

²³U. S. Congressional Record, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 1884, 3908; O. H. Perry, "Proposed Tariff Legislation Since 1883," 70-71; U. S. House Journal, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 1186-1188.

²⁴Martin County Sentinel, May 9, 1884; The Fergus Falls Democrat, April 24, 1884; Martin County Sentinel, June 20, 1884, et passim.

²⁵Ibid., May 16, 1884.

disappointed that the question failed to capture the public's mind as it did four years later. In a letter to a Vermont editor in November, 1883, Senator Morrill voiced the desires of the party. The Senator stated that the tariff "helped us largely in 1880 and I hope it may do so in 1884."²⁶ The platform framed by the Republicans in June, 1884, illustrated their determination to "stand fast" on the policy of protection. The tariff plank repudiated the Democratic plan of a tariff for "revenue only," and accused the Democrats of following a policy designed to degrade American labor. With regard to farmers, the platform explained that the "important agricultural interest" of wool growing was in serious decline, and would receive adequate protection. Furthermore, the Republicans promised to revise the existing inequalities of the tariff without injury to the country.²⁷

In a letter of July 15, 1884, accepting the Republican nomination, James G. Blaine revealed his strategy for the entire campaign. Well over half of the document was devoted to the tariff question. "The pending election," Blaine stated, "may determine the fate of protection for a generation." Turning to agriculture he declared, "the agricultural

²⁶Quoted in Ellis P. Oberholtzer, A History of the United States Since the Civil War, IV (New York: Macmillan Co., 1931), 143.

²⁷Proceedings of the Eighth Republican National Convention (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Co., 1884), 91-92.

interest" was the largest of the nation and "entitled to the first consideration." Blaine claimed the Democrats had lied to farmers when they told them that the tariff robbed agriculture. Fortunately, he said, agrarians were not fooled; "they see plainly that, during the past twenty-four years, wealth has not been acquired in one section or by one interest at the expense of another section or interest."²⁸

He explained that agricultural states had progressed farther than manufacturing ones, and that southern farmers had shared in the prosperity of the West. The Republican party, continued Blaine, was ever mindful of the farmers' need for a home market, and worked unceasingly to enlarge it.

The Democratic party which met in Chicago a month later was less emphatic in its tariff policy, although the platform denounced the Republicans for their cunning methods in regard to tariff reduction. Democrats charged that even the Tariff Commission, a child of the Republicans, was unable to bring true revision. The Democratic plank stated that the protective policy had actually "depleted the returns of American agriculture and industry"²⁹

Cleveland's letter of acceptance was in sharp contrast to that of Blaine's. The word "tariff" did not appear in

²⁸ Ibid., 187-188.

²⁹ McKee, 204.

his message and agriculture was not given its usual eulogistic praise. Cleveland knew little about farming, and had admitted his lack of knowledge before a New York farm organization in 1883. He seemed to be hesitant to commit himself on the matter of protection, partly no doubt because he was as of yet unschooled in the intricacies of the tariff. Perhaps his innate cautiousness also prevented him from dealing with this dangerous issue.³⁰

More important than any speech or statement made by Cleveland throughout the campaign was the group of men who were drawn to his banner. Many of the mugwump reformers who supported Cleveland were low tariff advocates and in some cases free traders. David Ames Wells, Carl Schurz, E. L. Godkin, James Freeman Clarke, Henry Ward Beecher, Everett P. Wheeler, and R. R. Bowker all made their views known to the candidate. Wells was undoubtedly the most important of the group, and he lectured and wrote prolifically on the need for lower duties throughout the entire campaign. Cleveland, however, never endorsed any of the free trade activity during the race, but may not have escaped its influence.³¹

³⁰George F. Parker (ed.), The Writings and Speeches of Grover Cleveland (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1892), 9-13, 134.

³¹Joyner, 146; Roseboom, 269; Fleming, 211-214.

The Greenback platform of 1884 reiterated its earlier position on the tariff. Greenbackers believed that the tariff was only a convenient issue, raised to distract the public from a much more vital question, inflation. Party backers favored a revision of the tariff, but the demand was vague and unimportant when compared with other financial questions of the day.³²

Through the long summer of 1884 Blaine stumped the country and time and again returned to his favorite theme. The tariff was symbolic of American prosperity and patriotism, he said, and it must be preserved.³³ Ignoring the falling prices of agricultural commodities, Blaine told a farm audience in September that "there is no year in the history of the United States in which, through all its borders, the agriculturalist has rejoiced as he does this year."³⁴

The thoroughness which Blaine and the party intended to carry the tariff issue to western farmers was reflected in a June 16 letter to The Million from Burrton, Kansas. The writer said he wanted to mention a large advertisement of the New York Tribune that had been placed in the post office. It was a "nice ad," with pictures of Blaine and

³²McKee, 216.

³³Muzzey, 313.

³⁴The Nation, XLI (October 2, 1884), 274.

Logan. The caption read: "American Labor and Agriculture are interested in the campaign. Free trade would crush them both. Republicans must strike a decisive blow."³⁵

Despite the flagging interest in the tariff, the Republican party never wavered in its effort to make protection a major issue. Criticizing the Republican tactics, the Philadelphia Times, a high tariff paper, cautioned the Blaine press not to drive the free trade Republicans out of the party. The editor claimed that many independents in New England were anti-Blaine, and that if free traders were read out of the party, the "Plumed Knight" could be beaten in every state of that section. The editorial stated that it was imperative to keep men such as Henry Ward Beecher and William Curtis in the Republican ranks. The editor, although overly pessimistic in his prognostications, wrote perceptively of the situation in the West. He cautioned:

In the Republican states of Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, from one-fourth to two-thirds of the Republicans are such revenue reformers as are called free traders by party organs. They are not inclined to break on the tariff issue, but they won't stand indefinite kicking on the free trade issue without sloughing off enough to lose several congressmen. If free trade Republicans of the western Republican states were driven out of the party by the lash that is applied to New York and New England Republican bolters, there would not be a Blaine state west of Indiana and east of the Rocky Mountains.³⁶

³⁵Quoted in The Million, I (April 5, 1884), 40.

³⁶Quoted in ibid., (May 2, 1884), 12.

The election of Congressmen favorable to lower tariffs in Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, was proof of the paper's editorial insight.

The Democratic St. Paul Globe stated simply: "There is an attempt to force the tariff issue on the country. The people as a whole are not moved by the effort." The Nation carried a similar editorial in September, 1884. Godkin contended "that all the efforts of Mr. Blaine and Blaine newspapers and orators to force the question as a vital issue into campaign have failed."³⁷ The editor held that the Republicans had been lucky in 1880 with tariff and hoped to have the same good fortune again.

One distinct advantage held by Blaine was that the party organization which had functioned so effectively in 1880, had remained in tact and was operational. As early as October, 1883, The Bulletin, published by the American Iron and Steel Association, announced that since November, 1882, it had printed and distributed 108,700 tracts and 31,500 broadsides on the tariff. It promised quick and efficient service upon materials requested. Basking in the defeat of the Tariff Commission, the editor commented, "our tariff publications go where they are needed, and their distribution has been reduced to a system that is nearly perfect."³⁸

³⁷The Nation, XLI (September 4, 1884), 192.

³⁸The Bulletin, XVII (October 10, 1883), 284.

Later in the same year the editor explained the benefits of protection to farmers; "All that the tariff has done and is doing for manufacturers is a very trifle compared with what our government has done and is doing for the enlargement and extension of agriculture."³⁹

The editor believed that 5.25 million farmers had been added to the population because of the great inducements given to agriculture. "Immense premiums," he wrote, were offered to the western farmer at the expense of the eastern agriculturalist. The benefits which farmers received, he continued, were so great that other sections of the economy were discouraged. In February, 1884, agrarians were again told that the prosperity of manufacturing and farming were inseparable.⁴⁰ The Bulletin released new figures in March, 1884, which indicated its zeal in spreading the tariff gospel. In the six month period from October, 1883, to April, 1884, 213,725 tracts were distributed.⁴¹ The importance of these figures lie in the fact that the majority of the tracts were sent into western farm states.

Early in 1884, John Kasson of Iowa addressed the Brooklyn Revenue Reform Club in a speech entitled "Free Trade

³⁹Ibid., (December 19, 1883), 345.

⁴⁰The Bulletin, XVIII (February 6, 1884), 33.

⁴¹Ibid., (March 26, 1884), 91.

Not the International Law of the Almighty." This speech was widely distributed among farmers and in the text of the speech Kasson warned farmers against flirtations with free trade. English farmers, he stated, were envious of American agricultural prosperity. The point was clear, England had free trade, America did not.⁴²

Another tract especially designed to appeal to farmers was entitled, "Farmers and Manufacturers: directed to the farmers of the Northwest." This protectionist pamphlet appealed to the farmer's common sense, and explained that economic diversification was important to farm interests. In the five states of Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York where only one-fifth of the people were engaged in farming, prices were high. But in the eight western states of Minnesota, Kansas, Illinois, Nebraska, Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin and Iowa, one-half of the population were farmers and commodity prices lower. The illustration was emphasized through the use of a graph.

	<u>Prices Per Bushel</u>				
	Corn	Wheat	Rye	Oats	Hay
In manufacturing states	\$.92	\$1.57	\$1.01	\$.59	\$27.00
In agricultural states	\$.36	1.09	.60	.30	9.00

⁴²Pamphlets, 1884, James Swank Collection, 28.

The tract pointed to the graph as indisputable evidence that farmers in the eastern industrial states were not "burdened by the protective tariff." Free traders wanted to deceive the farmers "with the hope that it may be turned to their account in the next election."⁴³ Moreover, agrarians were told not to believe the Chicago Tribune or Times because they drew their "inspiration" from foreign interests. In other words, lower tariffs were pictured as foreign and un-American.

The usual charges of Cobden Club interference also arose in the campaign. The Indianapolis Sentinel made the ridiculous claim that Cobdenites had forwarded \$1,250,000 to America to promote the election of Cleveland. Upon hearing this, The Belleville Weekly warned that Cobden Club ideas had nothing to offer the farmer. In his Memories of a Publisher, George Harvey Putnam related that the charges against Cobden Club interference in American elections were false. Putnam explained that the Club was far "too wise" to attempt influencing an American election. Furthermore, it did not have the funds available to spend on American voters. Putnam claimed that E. H. Van Ingen, a prominent free trader of New York City, challenged the papers that made the accusations and won verdicts against "one or two hundred Republican papers."

⁴³Ibid., 12-16.

Putnam does not mention, however, the specific election year in which libel charges were filed.⁴⁴

The New York Tribune faithfully defended protection and Blaine throughout 1884. Numerous editorials were devoted exclusively to the problem of the farmer and the tariff where the editor lectured agrarians on the "direct and indirect benefits" of protection. The tariff not only kept out foreign produce, but it increased domestic demand as well. Farmers were cautioned against accepting the false statements of the Democrats. The Tribune argued that the agriculturalist must realize that the industrial development of America was responsible for farm progress.⁴⁵

Grover Cleveland's victory in November, 1884, was a narrow one. The farm states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Kansas and Nebraska and Ohio all voted for James G. Blaine. Missouri, Indiana, and Wisconsin, states of major agricultural interests, cast their ballots for the Democratic candidate. However, even in the farm states which voted Republican, Cleveland's margin of defeat was not great. Undoubtedly, the skidding farm prices hurt the Republicans,

⁴⁴The Belleville Advocate, August 29, 1884; The Nation, XLI (November 27, 1884), 448; George Harvey Putnam, Memories of a Publisher, 1865-1915 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 41-42.

⁴⁵The New York Tribune, January 25, 1884, 5; Ibid., March 5, 1884, 4.

as The Tribune reported that wheat prices hit an all-time low in California in October, and two months later the Department of Agriculture reported farm prices on the decline. Wheat now brought 65 cents a bushel, whereas the year before it had sold for 91 cents a bushel. In December, number two red winter wheat sold in Chicago for about 72 cents a bushel, while the same year the farmer who shipped to Kansas City, received only 53 cents. Corn and oats also edged downward through the year. Nevertheless, despite sagging agricultural prices, it was the curcial vote of New York that provided the winning margin for Cleveland, not the distressed farm states of the West.⁴⁶

Henry Adams, in a moment of cynicism, wrote that the campaign of 1884 was "funnier than words can express." Adams' statement was superficial and untrue, and he acknowledged as much in the same letter when he concluded, "A step toward free trade is inevitable if the Democrats come in."⁴⁷ Few men knew how Cleveland stood on the tariff issue. He had ignored the issue during the campaign, and at the time he became President it is unlikely that the new executive himself was certain of his position on this question. Reformers and protectionists anxiously awaited their new President's tariff policy.

⁴⁶McKee, 229; The New York Tribune, October 10, 1884, 4; Ibid., December 11, 1884, 2; Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, 1884 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1884), 538-543.

⁴⁷Worthington C. Ford (ed.), Letters of Henry Adams, 1858-1891 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930), 360.

CHAPTER V

GROVER CLEVELAND AND THE FARM-TARIFF PROBLEM

If all the activity of free trade clubs and tariff reform measures failed in 1884, one trend was discernible. Many agrarians had taken one more step, if ever so cautiously toward rejection of the tariff. No western newspaper caught the drift more keenly, or expressed the situation more cogently than the Lincoln, Nebraska, Democrat. The editor stated:

The tariff reform sentiment is growing at a very rapid rate in the state of Nebraska; this is undeniable. And when we say at a very rapid rate we mean, that on a square vote for the issue we are very doubtful whether the protective tariff men could carry the state, and yet some two or three years ago, no Republican could be found who would reconcile himself to tariff reform. Today the beautiful prairies of Nebraska are full of men who are fully convinced that the protective tariff of the Republicans is a fraud, and most of the farmers are of the same opinion. And all that, too, despite the fact that nine-tenths of the papers of the state are clamoring for protection, and only a handful of Democratic and therr or four anti-monopoly sheets uphold tariff reform.¹

In the meantime, other attempts at tariff legislation failed. Yet, if the farmer wearied of the unceasing

¹Quoted in The Million, I (July 9, 1884), 158.

tariff harangues and tried to divorce himself from the complicated question, he soon found it impossible to do so. The falling prices of his commodities forced him to ask why his economic and social position steadily declined. Inevitably, the tariff arose as a possible answer. In October, 1884, the Martin County Sentinel complained that agrarians were told that other goods had fallen in price as much as those of agricultural commodities. However, the editor said this was not true, and stated that farmers were unable to buy as much then as they had with high priced crops of 1880. Debts and mortgages were no less, he argued, "and there is no reduction of these things."²

There were other factors that tended to alienate the farmer from the tariff. Somehow it seemed that inexorable forces were at work within the economic system which intended to destroy agricultural America. Much of the nation appeared prosperous, but the western farmer found himself struggling to avert bankruptcy. Agrarians were frightened by the creeping rise of farm tenancy and landlordism. The individual farmer worked just as hard, and in most cases harder, but continued to slip behind economically. Year after year he sold in a glutted market, and found it increasingly difficult to pay retail prices. Western farmers

²Martin County Sentinel, October 3, 1884.

worried about low prices, but with no spokesman, and little group loyalty to any set of economic principles, they lacked the means to better their situation.³

Another manifestation of this period of ferment was the intense antipathy that arose between agriculture and industry. Capitalism and agrarianism met head on. All those institutions so necessary for energetic capitalism seemed to threaten the farmers' very existence. Banks, tariffs, trusts, grain exchanges, and legislation by lobby were anathema to him. It was little wonder that the farmer felt that a giant conspiracy was at work against him.⁴

All of these factors quickened his interest in the tariff. It is unlikely that agrarians believed that protection was their sole problem, but the question confronted him every time he went to town to buy the goods he needed, or to sell his own commodities. Furthermore, he could not have failed to notice that more and more of his friends talked about the tariff issue and held it responsible for many of

³W. A. Peffer, "The Farmers Defensive Movement," The Forum, VIII (December, 1889), 466-467; Samuel Rezneck, "An American Depression, 1882-1886," 300-301; Ross, 102-104; C. W. Walker, "The Farmers Movement," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, IV (March, 1894), 790-798.

⁴Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 6; Charles M. Destler, "Agricultural Readjustment and Agrarian Unrest in Illinois, 1880-1896," Agricultural History, XXI (April, 1947), 114.

their problems. A letter to the New York Tribune in March, 1885, from Wahpeton, Dakota Territory, expressed this belief. The writer blamed the indebtedness, mortgages, and farm failures in the west on the tariff. The letter argued that protection compelled five-sixths of the population to exchange their goods with the other one-sixth. Equally damaging for the farmer, stated the writer, was the loss of the foreign market for his products.⁵

Consequently, the discussions on the tariff that constantly appeared in the local papers and farm journals were of interest to farmers. These articles often confused and irritated them but as prices inched downward even more in 1885 the low tariff argument gained a larger and larger following. Wheat had averaged 70 cents a bushel in 1883, but now sold for 50 cents a bushel. In Iowa the market had dropped from 80 cents to 67 cents a bushel. Other farm states also suffered from the price squeeze. Minnesota, despite the fact that her population had doubled in 10 years, and that Minneapolis and St. Paul had developed rapidly as manufacturing centers, did not escape the farm crisis. In many parts of the state wheat sold for as little as from 42 cents to 48 cents a bushel, while it cost 45 cents a bushel to raise. Government experts estimated the cost of

⁵Davis R. Dewey, National Problems 1885-1897 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1907), 174; The New York Tribune, March 14, 1885, 4.

raising wheat at from 50 to 67 cents a bushel. Yet, protection had promised increased prices for farm commodities, and nearby factories with "busy workers" were to pay these higher prices. Now it appeared that western farmers had been sold one thing and delivered another.⁶

Henry Watterson of the Louisville Courier-Journal blamed the farm depression on tariff advocates in the West and South. These protectionists, Watterson contended, had based their crusade "on the assumption that the farmers do not know enough to go in out of the wet." But Watterson held that agrarians were not afraid of foreign competition, and it no longer did any good to tell him that Russian wheat threatened his home market.⁷ Writing in 1885 the editor of the Chicago Times sympathized with agriculture and its dilemma on the tariff. The Times believed that the confusion stemmed from "every stump orator that upholds the great American system of spoliation." The editor reminded the farmer again that the surplus wheat, hogs, cattle and other commodities had to be sold abroad or not at all.⁸ A letter to The Million in

⁶Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, 1886 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1887), 397; John D. Hicks, "The Farmers Alliance in Minnesota," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, IX (December, 1922), 206; Henry M. Fletcher, "The Drift of Population to the Cities," The Forum, XIX (August, 1895), 742-745.

⁷Quoted in The Million, II (June 27, 1885), 131.

⁸Quoted in ibid., (November 14, 1885), 294.

September, 1885, asked Congressmen to realize that the tariff did not help agriculture. The writer felt that the government should pay the farmers a bonus for their wheat, beef, pork, and other products. Protectionists, declared the correspondent, "would be obliged to support it or expose their own hypocrisy." The writer believed that if such a measure became law, "it would only be a question of time till all the protection laws would be repealed by unanimous consent."⁹

Attempts to revise the tariff in 1886 were conspicuous failures. In February Morrison introduced a bill which would have reduced revenue some \$20,000,000. The measure as originally presented contained a long free list which included hemp, jute, coal, salt, oats, hay, potatoes and lumber. Under the proposed bill pig iron was reduced from \$6.50 to \$5.60 per ton, steel rails from \$17 to \$12.50 a ton, and window glass 20 per cent. The hearings on the measure forced Morrison to compromise on the iron and steel schedule, and remove coal from the free list. The bill was stalled until June 17 when Morrison asked for its consideration by the House. This request was defeated by a 157 to 140 vote. Four Republicans voted for the proposal, three from Minnesota, and one from New York. The thirty-five Democrats

⁹The Million, II (September 5, 1885), 211.

who voted against consideration came from New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, Maryland, California, Illinois, Louisiana, and Alabama.¹⁰

Morrison made another attempt to consider tariff legislation in August, 1886. This, too, met defeat by a vote of 154 to 149. Again the four Republicans from Minnesota, and two from Massachusetts voted for the measure. Twenty-six Democrats joined with one-hundred-thirty-four Republicans to prevent consideration. Democrats who voted against Morrison represented New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Louisiana and Alabama. The votes illustrated the inability of the Democratic majority to discipline the minority within its ranks. Important too, was the fact that the minority, although still present and divisive, was dwindling. Republican unity remained close knit. Later votes would show even clearer party division on protection.¹¹

While Congress remained paralyzed, farm journals continued to publish editorials regularly against protection. Many journals attempted to "educationalize," while pointing out the fallacies of high tariffs. The editor of The Dakota Farmer complained that the decline of pork exports to Germany and France was directly attributable to the tariff.

¹⁰O. H. Perry, "Proposed Tariff Legislation Since 1883," 74-75.

¹¹Ibid., 75-76.

He believed that wheat would be the next farm commodity to suffer if high levies continued, and the world would turn to Canada, India, and Australia for its food supply. "The farmer," declared the editor, "is the one who bears the brunt of this taxation . . . he therefore should be the one whose interests it is of greatest importance to take into consideration."¹²

One of the most militant voices against the tariff throughout 1884 was The Northwestern Farmer published at Fargo, North Dakota. This journal continually hammered away at what it called "Tariff Tyranny." The editor stated that he did not believe in free trade, but was convinced that a revenue tariff would pay government expenses. The journal argued that no one was more vitally interested in the tariff than farmers. Both manufacturing and agriculture would ultimately suffer from a policy favoring a protected class. The editor declared that "the last man in the world to favor a protective tariff should be a farmer. Most western farmers understand this as well as anybody. The tariff cuts the farmer on both sides and does not do him the slightest benefit imaginable."¹³ Protection not only increased prices but lessened demand abroad.

¹²The Dakota Farmer, V (July, 1886), 1-2.

¹³The Northwestern Farmer (Fargo, North Dakota) I (June 10, 1886), 68; Ibid., (May 13, 1886), 4-5; A. K. McClure, Recollections of a Half Century (Salem: Salem Press Co., 1902), 128.

In September, 1886, this same journal argued that farmers were not "so insensible to their own interests as to favor legislation which favors a few at the expense of the many, especially when they form a part of the many." The editor complained that agriculture was not allowed to "feed at the public crib."¹⁴ Many rural papers agreed with the Northwestern Farmer's stand. The Martin County Sentinel wanted a "complete and thorough tariff revision." Agriculture, the editor exclaimed, was depressed, and no longer wanted to pay tribute to the East.¹⁵ The Worthington Advance blamed the Republicans for low prices and hard times in Minnesota. The party could not avoid the blame, stated the editor, because it controlled the state.¹⁶

The Jackson, Michigan, Patriot in an editorial entitled, "How Tariff War Hurts the Farmers," said that science and technology had made nations more interdependent, but that tariffs divided them. The Patriot worried about the retaliatory action taken by European nations against agricultural products, as the farmer already suffered with low prices, glutted markets, and heavy mortgages. The editor concluded that, "for farmers the tariff was suicidal."¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., (September 26, 1886), 260.

¹⁵The Martin County Sentinel, September 24, 1886.

¹⁶The Worthington, Minnesota, Advance, March 4, 1886.

¹⁷Quoted in The Million, II (January 23, 1886), 374.

The message southern Illinois farmers received from The Belleville Weekly differed sharply from the others cited. The paper admitted that the great issue was the tariff, but admonished agriculture not to reject protection. The "Morrison-Carlisle free trade schemes" would ruin ~~farming~~ and destroy the home market. The editor believed that the tariff had saved the home market from inundation by Indian, Canadian, and British grain.¹⁸ The New York Tribune reiterated the claims of the Illinois paper. Farmers were not deceived, said the editor, they wanted to maintain protection.¹⁹

The failure of tariff reform in 1885 and 1886 had discouraged some of its most ardent champions. Even David Ames Wells was disgruntled by the lack of success. The disappointment was capstoned in the fall election of 1886. William Morrison of Illinois and Frank Hurd of Ohio, were both defeated, and John Carlisle of Kentucky escaped the same fate by a narrow margin. The defeat of Morrison resulted from an extensive newspaper campaign and the actions of the efforts of American Tin Plate Association. The Belleville Advocate worked unceasingly to silence Morrison's "free trade" voice in Congress. The paper charged that the question of free trade threatened farmers because of Morrison's work in Congress.

¹⁸The Belleville Advocate, November 7, 1884; Ibid., September 10, 1886.

¹⁹The New York Tribune, September 1, 1886, 2.

By threats of boycott and wide use of money the industries of Belleville, Alton, and East St. Louis martialed the votes which defeated the veteran reformer. Despite the loss of Morrison and Hurd, inroads were made in New England and the West. Three of the five Congressional seats in Minnesota were won by Democrats, and gains were registered in Colorado and California.²⁰

Elements of the western farm community and tariff reformers were not alone in their disappointment over the Democratic failure to lower duties, they enjoyed the company of the President. Throughout the summer of 1886, Cleveland had held private talks with Congressional members, and informed them of the necessity of reduction. The defeat of the Morrison bill angered the President and when he met one Congressman who had voted against consideration of the measures, he snapped, "do you call yourself a Democrat?"²¹

Frustrated, mad, and disappointed, Cleveland suddenly shifted his strategy on the question of the tariff. He decided to take the issue to the people. So, it was this hulking New Yorker, without firsthand agricultural experience, who finally emphasized how protection worked gross inequities

²⁰Joyner, 169; Allan Nevins, Grover Cleveland, A Study in Courage (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1932), 296; The Belleville Advocate, October 15, 1886; Ibid., November 12, 1886.

²¹Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 287-288.

upon American farmers. Prior to his election Cleveland had made only one statement which indicated his position on the tariff as it related to agriculture. Speaking in characteristic frankness, in September, 1883, he told a New York farm audience:

I have not come heret^o please you with cheap and fulsome praise, nor magnify your worth and importance; but I have come as the Chief Executive of the State to acknowledge on its own behalf that our farmers yield a full return for the benefits they receive from State government. It is the farmers right and duty to demand that all unjust and inequitable burdens upon agriculture and its products, however caused, should be removed, and that, while the furtherance of other interests of State have due regard, this important one should not be neglected.²²

But even this was not a strong statement.

The manner in which Cleveland gained his "tariff education" has been a subject of debate among historians. Carl Schurz stated that after his election, Cleveland confessed his ignorance on the subject and that Schurz obtained books and materials for the President which he later eagerly read and studied.²³ Cleveland's statements on the tariff during his first year in office were representative of a man who was feeling his way on a politically explosive issue. His inaugural address contained nothing to startle the public.

²²Parker, 138.

²³Robert McElroy, Grover Cleveland, The Man and Statesman, I (New York: Harper Brothers, 1923), 266.

He alluded to the tariff only once when he declared, "that our system of revenue shall be so adjusted as to relieve the people of unnecessary taxation."²⁴ His first annual message also made no dramatic pronouncement regarding the tariff. However, the message made one point that remained a basic part of Cleveland's tariff philosophy. In regard to revenue reduction the President stated: "The question of free trade is not involved"²⁵ Cleveland believed that import taxes on the necessities of life needed revision, and that such action would provide a better standard of living for many Americans.

Many historians have wrongly argued that Cleveland grasped at protection solely as an issue upon which to unite the Democratic party.²⁶ An examination of the facts hardly warrants such a superficial conclusion. The writer does not mean to conclude that Cleveland suddenly considered himself the champion of tariff reform for agriculture. The President had simply grown to believe that the tariff was an unfair system, which worked its greatest hardships upon the farm community. Yet, by the very nature of the office he held, and his willingness to enunciate the problem, he did awaken the country to the farm-tariff problem.

²⁴Richardson, VII, 887.

²⁵Ibid., 4926.

²⁶Josephson, 397.

The formation and evolution of the President's thinking prior to his 1886 message can be explained. It hardly seems possible that Cleveland could have escaped the influence of the men who surrounded him during his Presidency. Although not a free trader himself, Cleveland listened to the counsel of men such as Bowker, Wells, Everett P. Wheeler, and Thomas G. Shearman. Furthermore, these men had a wide acquaintance with the President's confidants such as Colonel Daniel Lamont, Cleveland's personal secretary, and Daniel Manning, Secretary of the Treasury.²⁷ In a letter to Bowker in October, 1885, Wells told of a visit with the Chief Executive.

The first pleasant thing I cannot write on paper, but it is sufficient to say that I had a long interview with the President. And at a meeting of his cabinet and at a dinner that newsmen did not hear about we talked tariff and silver. And I think I am going to be very close to the President in all that he does and I shall have more influence with him than any other man in these matters. And the same with Manning. In fact they treat me just as if I was one of the Cabinet.²⁸

The President evidently did not worry about the repercussions of his associations with Wells. Only a month after Wells had mailed the above letter, the latter attended a meeting of the American Free Trade League held in Chicago.

²⁷Joyner, 166, 164; Wheeler, 131.

²⁸Quoted in Joyner, 167-168.

Here Wells was elected President of the National League that was formed. Yet, if the President drew advice from his "ad hoc" advisors, he must have also discussed the tariff with Daniel Manning, his Secretary of the Treasury. Manning had favored tariff reduction from the moment of his appointment, and before he ever gave his first report the Secretary mailed circulars to 2,000 manufacturers asking for data on the differences between the cost of production in the United States and abroad.

Manning's strongly worded report in 1885 had none of the reserve of Cleveland's message in the same year. He declared that the existing tariff laws were a "chaos rather than a system." The actions of Arthur's Tariff Commission, he said, had been unjust. While the commission recommended lower rates, some were actually raised. Despite the argumentative tone of Manning's report, Cleveland made no effort to dissuade the Secretary from presenting it.²⁹

Cleveland, like a great many other politicians, undoubtedly learned a great deal by "ear." It is not unreasonable to assume that he acquired some familiarity with the tariff while Governor, and added to that knowledge throughout the 1884 campaign and after he entered the White House.

²⁹Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 285; Annual Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, I (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1885), 35-36.

One tariff expert believed that the President was knowledgeable on protection while he was Governor. Professor Arthur L. Perry of Williams College was already a famous tariff reformer when he met Cleveland in 1881. Perry had made Cleveland's acquaintance while in Albany on a lecture tour, and recalled in his reminiscences that the Governor was very conversant on the tariff problem.³⁰ It is highly probable that after meeting Perry, Cleveland later used the professor's writings to educate himself on the tariff question. Perry had gained wide attention from his remarks on farmers and the tariff in the Journal of the American Agricultural Association in 1881. He argued then, as he did later.

That it was well understood in 1789 that this system would be hostile to the interests of farmers as such; the fallacy that a home market in some mysterious way compensates the farmers was not then invented, and can now be exploded by a few words. These words are: Unless it can be shown that protection, that is to say restriction increases the numbers of births or diminishes the number of deaths, it is in vain to claim there are any more mouths to be fed by farmers than there would be under freedom Protection assumed at the outset, and has maintained to this day, an attitude, of unceasing hostility to the tillers of the soil.³¹

The President's third message in December, 1886, provided the farmers with a national spokesman in their fight

³⁰Tarbell, 140-141.

³¹Pamphlets, 1884, James Swank Collection, 1-2.

for lower tariffs. Cleveland declared that there is a "suspicion abroad" that excessive revenue that filled the treasury resulted from an inequitious system that failed to benefit a majority of the people. Our farmers, contended the President, see:

That day by day, and as often as the daily wants recur, they are forced to pay excessive and needless taxation, while their products struggle in foreign markets with the competition of nations, which, by allowing a freer exchange of productions than we permit, enable their people to sell for prices which distress the American farmer.³²

The farmers, continued the President, were more concerned with this inequality of taxation than others because agriculture provided employment for "nearly one-half of our population." Cleveland believed that:

No enactments . . . of the government enhances to any great extent the value of their products. And yet for many of the necessities and comforts of life, which the most scrupulous economy enable them to bring into their homes, and for their implements of husbandry, they are obliged to pay a price largely increased by unnatural profit, which by the action of the government is given to the more favored manufacturer.³³

Protectionists had distrusted Cleveland from the moment of his election, and the growing sentiment for lower duties caused frantic action on the part of high tariff interests. In 1885 active steps were taken by the Industrial

³²Richardson, VI, 5095.

³³Ibid., 5096.

League to prevent the growth of the anti-tariff movement. The League met twice during the year, and published the results of these meetings in a tract entitled, "The Industrial League, Beginning of a New Campaign in Support of the Protective Policy." Every important industry with the exception of agriculture was present: The National Association of Wool Manufacturers, United States Pottery Association, Manufacturing Chemists Association, the American Iron and Steel Association, National Association of Wool Growers, Builders of American Textile Machinery, Louisiana Sugar Planters Association, The Michigan Industrial League, the Book Trade Association, and the Silk Association of America. Some manufacturers could not attend the meeting, but sent their regrets. These included the American Paper Manufacturers Association, the Association of Bolt, Nut, and Washer Manufacturers, and the Producers of Bituminous Coal. Prominent tariff leaders who attended were James M. Swank, John L. Hayes, Joseph Wharton, Cyrus Elder and Thomas Dudley.

The League stressed the need to take the "proper steps" to thwart the concerted efforts of free traders, and encouraged the formation of new tariff associations to counteract free trade pressure. The League advised against "tinkering with the tariff," and warned that the current business depression would deepen if duties were lowered.³⁴

³⁴Tariff Tracts, II, James Swank Collection, 1-8.

The League campaigned vigorously and worked against any program of tariff reform attempted by the Cleveland Administration. Two tracts were given wide circulation by the League in 1886, one entitled "Proofs of British Influence in American Tariff Legislation," and another by Albert S. Bolles, Has the British Lion Worn Out His Paws? These essays aimed at the provincialism and prejudice so prevalent in America during the late 19th century. The first tract reiterated the claims of English interference in America and even suggested the use of "British gold" to obtain lower tariffs. If this failed to convince the reader, he could turn to a full page listing of free traders in America, which was supposed to prove that the movement was extensive and dangerous. The Bolles' essay noted the great migration from Britain to America. Bolles asked his readers to reflect on why they should come to protected America from free trade England. He stated that this emigration alone justified the continuance of the protective policy.³⁵

Thomas H. Dudley of New Jersey was chosen by the Industrial League to answer the charges made by the President and Congressional reformers that farmers suffered under a protective tariff. Dudley gave the rebuttal on February 7, 1887, before the Lancaster County Agricultural Society,

³⁵Ibid., 1-10.

Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The speech was entitled "Which is Best for Farmers, Protection or Free Trade?" His response took the form of a major address and ranged over the entire farm-tariff question.

Dudley rejected the President's assertion that agrarians were taxed at an excessive rate. He hinted that Cleveland's claim bordered on demagoguery, and threatened to set class against class. Speaking with intense conviction, Dudley explained that everything the farmer used was more expensive abroad than at home. He cited watches, clocks, pottery, glassware, cotton goods, woolens and farm machinery as examples. There was not in foreign countries, exclaimed the speaker, "a hoe, fork, shovel, spade, or rake . . . but was dearer in price and inferior to ours in quality."³⁶

Protection, argued Dudley had other advantages of great benefit. Tariff walls prevented England from dumping an unlimited amount of goods on the American market which would dislocate industry and create unemployment. Dudley warned that if protection were abandoned, and industries were forced to shutter their windows and doors, the laborers would turn to the soil for their livelihood. This would mean more outputs and still lower farm prices. The speaker concluded that the depression of the western farmer stemmed from foreign

³⁶Ibid., I, 12.

competition. India, explained Dudley, had flooded the European wheat market and pushed western wheat prices below the cost of production. This was an object lesson of the undependability of the European market, and the folly of a low tariff. There was only one way which the farmer could be assured of a demand for his commodities, expand industrial pursuits at home to such an "extent as to consume all our surplus agricultural products. This is the way to benefit farmers."³⁷

The speech was printed in tract form and mailed out to the western states. The address, although repeating the standard high tariff argument, revealed a new tactic on the part of protectionists. Through careful phraseology, Dudley made the Democratic tariff plank a "tariff for revenue only," appear synonymous with things English and foreign. The tactic was obvious, the charge of free traders against the Democrats had lessened in effectiveness, so it was hoped that low tariffs might be made to appear as un-American.

Despite the protectionist claims made by Dudley and others that prices were low and within the reach of all, many farm journals disagreed. Farm Stock and Home took a militant stand on prices and the tariff in 1887. The editor said the tariff was one of the worst modes of taxation and

³⁷Ibid., 12-23.

the most unequal and unjust. Furthermore, farm implements, varnish, paint and other materials used by farmers had inched upward, while farm prices remained low.³⁸ This journal blamed the tariff and monopolies for the plight of the farmer. In an October editorial of the same year, the editor voiced similar sympathies. He advised five million farmers to shout "hooray for the tariff . . . as their mortgage fluttered from every corn stalk."³⁹

These editorials struck a responsive note in the West, where the farmers had suffered through the bitterly cold winter of 1886, only to face a burning drought the following summer.⁴⁰ By June, Democratic conventions in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas all had drawn platforms that demanded a reduction in tariff duties. At almost the same moment, the President had decided to devote his December message to a discussion of the tariff. Cleveland pondered over the idea for some time, and had even discussed the possibility of a special message on the revenue question. When his mind was made up, he invited John Carlisle of Kentucky, Roger Q. Mills of Texas, William Scott of Pennsylvania and his new Secretary of the Treasury, Charles Fairchild, to his

³⁸Farm, Stock, and Home, II (January 1, 1887), 50-51.

³⁹Ibid., (October 15, 1887), 253.

⁴⁰Hicks, 31-32.

summer residence at Oak View. Here the strategy for the new Congressional session was planned. How much discussion of the tariff actually took place has remained a mystery, but it is known that Mills and Carlisle started work on a bill to introduce in the next session.⁴¹

The President busied himself in November with the drafting of the forthcoming message. The confidence Cleveland placed in the revenue reformers and free traders was evident as he prepared the document. R. R. Bowker, long a leader in the reform and free trade movement, provided the Chief Executive with statistical material and edited the President's entire message.⁴²

Cleveland received conflicting advice on the course he had chosen to follow. A. K. McClure told him not to deliver the message and warned him that the document would insure his defeat in 1888. McClure later related that the President would not listen to him, that his mind was made up. Cleveland said he was determined to present the message, "regardless of the personal consequences to myself."⁴³ Yet if caution was the watchword of some of the President's followers, ebullient optimism was voiced by others. Many

⁴¹Nevins, 372.

⁴²Fleming, 217.

⁴³McClure, 128.

reformers believed that then was the time to act, and that the masses were ready to repudiate protectionism. They warned the Chief Executive that the "public pulse" demanded action.⁴⁴

In his third annual message the President firmly committed himself and the Democratic party to tariff reform. He dramatized the whole question by devoting his entire message to it on December 6, 1887. In an extended discussion of the issue, Cleveland pointed to the hardships that protection worked on agriculture and contended that farmers had been the victim of a cruel hoax.⁴⁵ He stated that:

The farmer and the agriculturist, who manufacture nothing, but who pay the increased price which the tariff imposes upon every agricultural implement, upon all he wears, and upon all he uses and owns, except the increase of his flocks and herds and such things as his husbandry produces from the soil, is invited to aid in maintaining the present situation; and he is told that a high duty on imported wool is necessary for the benefit of those who have sheep to shear, in order that the price of their wool may be increased. They, of course, are not reminded that the farmer who has no sheep is by this scheme obliged, in his purchases of clothing and woollen goods, to pay a tribute to his fellow-farmer as well as to the manufacturer and merchant. . . .⁴⁶

The President also argued that the tariff had not increased competition, but actually lessened it by stimulating the formation of trusts and preventing any real price competition

⁴⁴John P. Townsend to Cleveland, November 28, 1887, Cleveland Papers.

⁴⁵Richardson, VII, 5169-5170.

⁴⁶Ibid., 5171-5172.

in the domestic market. Under such circumstances, both farmer and city dweller were forced to pay higher prices. Cleveland stated that "the people can hardly hope for any consideration in the operation of these selfish schemes."⁴⁷

The Cleveland message of 1887 placed the farmer even more firmly in the middle of the campaign for the Presidency the following year. Actually, the struggle for the precious farm vote had begun long before the December message, but the President's words greatly intensified the drive. Protection could not be maintained without the help of the farmer, and all eyes now turned westward. In essence, Cleveland's statements merely brought into the open what both parties had already known, that the farm - tariff question was the central issue of the coming campaign.

The Bulletin, a high tariff organ of the protectionists met the gauntlet thrown down by Cleveland in quiet and confident tones. The editor declared, "we have accepted President Cleveland's challenge for a general discussion of the merits of protection and free trade policies, and we shall see which policy will have the most friends at the polls next fall."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid., 5173.

⁴⁸The Bulletin, XXII (February 15, 1888), 52.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIGHT FOR THE FARM VOTE 1887-1888

Grover Cleveland was immensely pleased with the message he delivered to the nation on December 6, 1887.¹ His elation took the form of simple self-satisfaction, the pride of meeting a problem head on, and disposing of that problem to the best of one's ability. To those who had shaken their heads in dismay when he hinted at the document's contents, the President had snapped, "what is the use of being elected or re-elected unless you stand for something?"² The reverberations of his message still echoed across the country when the first flood of mail was piled in neat stacks on the President's desk.

Generally, the content was laudatory and favorable to the President's position. Some partisan Democrats believed the message had placed Republicans squarely on the defensive. One letter from Indianapolis, Indiana, declared that, "you have knocked the bloody shirt higher than a kite.

¹Grover Cleveland to Wilson S. Bissell, December 1, 1887, Cleveland Papers.

²McElroy, 271.

The Republicans have to face the music on the question of tariff reforms and they will have all they can do to defend protection."³ If optimism prevailed in the majority of the letters, caution was the watchword in others. A. K. McClure warned the President to act wisely when he pushed for new legislation. McClure advised Cleveland that if internal taxes were reduced on whiskey, brandy, and tobacco, the President could pass a bill; otherwise, in one stroke he could fail, and even worse, split the Democratic party.⁴

The Chief Executive was undoubtedly pleased with the response he received from farmers. His messages of the last two years had concerned themselves in part with the farm-tariff problem, and his statements on the question in 1887 had been particularly strong. The farm letters were brief, and thanked the President for his strong statements on the tariff. A letter from Cantonville, Maryland, expressed the sentiments of those who responded to the White House message: "As a farmer I specially [sic] appreciate the stand you have taken, and hope that Congress will give heed to your suggestions and not require another message to the same effect."⁵ If the farm response disappointed the President at all, it probably stemmed from the lack of mail

³Lewis Jordon to Cleveland, December 9, 1887, Cleveland Papers.

⁴A. K. McClure to Cleveland, December 13, 1887, ibid.

⁵A. L. Crosby to Cleveland, December 10, 1887, ibid.

from the western agricultural states. Although to him all farmers were hurt by the tariff, he knew it was in the western farm states - a Republican stronghold - where discontent with high duties was greatest.⁶ Democratic politicians, too, were aware of their party's weakness in the West, but they, like Cleveland, hoped to make inroads on the farm vote. Consequently, they immediately urged that the President's speech be distributed in Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and other Republican states believed made doubtful by the message.⁷

Yet, if the President was disappointed because western farmers failed to respond individually to his tariff message, he could take heart from events happening in the West. Particularly pleasing was the reaction of the Chicago Tribune, a powerful paper, that reached a large farm audience. The Tribune informed Cleveland that it agreed with his message, believed it "able and statesmanlike," and would tell its readers the same.⁸ Just five days later the Tribune emphatically stated that the tariff worked undue hardship on western farmers, and failed to give them cheaper housing, clothing, or tableware. None of the necessities

⁶Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 421.

⁷F. M. Thorn to Cleveland, December 8, 1887, Cleveland Papers; W. C. Cuxbury to Cleveland, December 7, 1887, ibid.

⁸Charles M. Pepper to Cleveland, December 6, 1887, ibid.

of life was lessened in price, declared the editor, except perhaps a "chaw" of tobacco. The independent stand of the Tribune riled Republicans. Joseph Manley, a supporter of James G. Blaine, threatened that another Republican newspaper would be established in Chicago within 60 days if the Tribune failed to support Blaine's candidacy in 1888. The Tribune refused to back down and the editor answered Manley with the curt retort:

Bring on your bears, Joe, but don't bluff on a pair of duces, the last national Republican platform pledged the party to correct the inequalities of the tariff and to reduce the surplus and that pledge cannot be violated without disloyalty to Republicanism. The monopoly trusts and rings which have combined to capture the Republican party have undertaken a bigger contract than they can reasonably hope to carry out.⁹

The Minnesota Press acknowledged the importance of the Cleveland message to the states of the West. The St. Paul Pioneer Press praised the President's statements, and endorsed his demand for tariff reform.¹⁰ The strongly Republican Martin County Sentinel of Fairmont, Minnesota, admitted that Cleveland's speech would make some of the western Republican states doubtful in the coming election. In a letter to the editor in this same issue, a Minnesota farmer reiterated a familiar plea. He stated that he was not a free trader but believed that the tariff needed reduction.¹¹

⁹Quoted in Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 384.

¹⁰Quoted in The Nation, XLV (December 22, 1887), 493.

¹¹Martin County Sentinel, December 16, 1887.

Some Nebraskans also indicated a willingness to follow the President in his drive for tariff reform. Representative James Laird in a Chicago Tribune interview explained that he believed Cleveland's message was appropriate and the views expressed by the President were "in accord" with his own. George Dorsey, the other Republican representative from Nebraska, also agreed with Cleveland.¹² Other events in the state also tended to reassure tariff reformers. At the Republican state convention, a third of the delegates endorsed what their party considered a free trade platform. Furthermore, the Omaha Bee, an influential Republican daily, carried frequent editorials on the injustice of the tariff and pointed to high duties on goods of daily use as being grossly unfair.¹³ To many observers, this illustrated the weakening hold of protection on western Republicans.

The reform sentiment in Iowa was voiced by its leading Senator, William B. Allison. In an interview at Dubuque, the Senator acknowledged the necessity of tariff revision and admitted that feeling in the West was such that the party which refused reform would invite defeat at the polls in the next election.¹⁴ Farmers in Kansas were

¹²Quoted in The Nation, XLV (December 27, 1887), 513.

¹³Ibid. (December 1, 1887), 426.

¹⁴Quoted in The Nation, XLVI (January 12, 1888), 21.

equally interested in the tariff problem. In a letter to the American Nonconformist at Winfield, Kansas, A. D. Hickok of Caldwell, Kansas, wrote that he wanted an equitable adjustment, not destruction of the tariff. Hickok believed the farmer deserved to be on the same level as the manufacturer.¹⁵

The American Nonconformist was a radical weekly which carried a great deal of news of interest to farmers, and many of its editorials were directed toward agriculture. While the general tone of the paper was bombastic, the editors often illustrated keen insight into the politico-industrial alliance of the late 19th century. As early as 1886, the editor charged that much of the news was controlled in the interest of big business. On November 18, of the same year, the paper addressed an editorial to agriculturalists:

Look farmer, see why you can't get the truth from your daily newspaper. The infamous contrast now subsisting between the Telegraph and Associated Press is the most comprehensive, deadly and alarming ring yet established upon this continent. The great banking, railroad and other capitalists who own the telegraph, can and do control the mouth of the most omnipotent public teacher since the world began - the daily newspaper.¹⁶

¹⁵The American Nonconformist and Kansas Liberator, December 20, 1886.

¹⁶Ibid., November 18, 1886.

The editor was convinced that by conspiracy, the papers using the Associated Press carried only certain news - news favorable to industry.

While the Nonconformist sometimes refused to accept the tariff as the most important question of the day, it continually argued for lower duties. In November, 1887, the editor praised a letter from Tabor, Iowa, that espoused free trade. The Nonconformist blamed the economic inequities on the "natural concomitants of the damned system of theft called protection of home industry."¹⁷ Another writer, while apologizing for not being able to subscribe, urged the paper to continue its discussion of the tariff. The correspondent stated that "the old threadbare idea of protecting home industries by taxing everybody for the benefit of a select few is just about exploded."¹⁸ The editorial policy of the paper was such that it held its rural readers' interest and they were continually reminded that they failed to share in the "good life" which much of the rest of the nation enjoyed. This idea was kept before agrarians by a series of short trenchant quips that appeared in every edition of the paper. One such favorite was: "Crops may fail, but interest never does."¹⁹ As the campaign

¹⁷Ibid., November 24, 1884.

¹⁸Ibid., December 22, 1887.

¹⁹Ibid., August 18, 1887.

wore on, the farm-tariff question dominated the pages of the American Nonconformist.

At any rate, while western reaction to Cleveland's message manifested itself in many ways, E. L. Godkin of The Nation best expressed the real results of the President's statements. He contended that Cleveland had made the tariff a question of "practical politics." The discussion of tariff, argued the editor, has been shifted from the college classroom into every farm house and home. The "plain people" - the American voters - will have to make up their minds on protection, stated Godkin.²⁰

The Republican party hesitated but one day before it sounded the trumpet of battle. The opening blast of the Grand Old Party came not from Philadelphia, the protectionist citadel, but from Paris, France, where the peripatetic James G. Blaine issued the Republican answer to the "free trade heresy of Grover Cleveland." The Blaine reply was clever, and his answer was couched in the protectionist lore that had supposedly guarded American interests for the past 28 years. Every bogey which appealed to provincial America was raised. Blaine told his American readers that he had been "especially interested in the comments of the London papers," which, he hinted, believed the President's message meant free trade. Turning to agriculture, Blaine

²⁰The Nation, XLV (December 15, 1887), 472.

warned farmers that the Chief Executive's statements pushed the United States disastrously close to free trade. Do not be misled, he cautioned, if Cleveland's program were followed, laborers will be driven into farming, which would increase production and drive prices even lower. Blaine concluded that the savior of American agriculture was to place farmers and industry side-by-side and free the farmer from his dependence on foreign markets and increase his prices.²¹ How farmers were to dispose of burgeoning surpluses the Republican leader failed to mention, but this was unimportant - protection was at stake.

Some farm papers did not agree with the President. The Western Rural felt that Cleveland "made a mess" out of the tariff problem. It believed that the President still favored a tariff that benefitted manufacturers more than consumers.²² The Belleville Advocate told its farm readers that Cleveland had "singled the farmer out for hostility." The President's reckless program, said the editor, would ruin the wool market and produce a great "grain glut."²³ Writing from the center of the wheat growing region in Minnesota, the Luverne Herald editor advised his rural readers to ignore the claim that farmers were hurt financially by

²¹The New York Tribune, December 8, 1888, 1.

²²Quoted in Martin County Sentinel, December 23, 1887.

²³The Belleville Advocate, December 16, 1887.

protection. The tariff was not framed to favor any class, stated the editor, but no one derived "greater benefit from protection than does that of agriculture."²⁴

The study of the election of 1888 has delighted many students of 19th century America. Yet, most historians, obsessed by the intrigue and skulduggery of the contest, have overlooked much of the real battlefield of the campaign. It was not in the councils of Philadelphia, Trenton, or Boston that Republican magnates worried about defection from their ranks, but in the western farm states where the party struggled to maintain the traditional loyalty of agrarian America. President Cleveland had thrown down a real challenge to the Republicans.

By 1888 many western farmers opposed the tariff and the monopolies associated with protection. Despite the repeated cries of protest against the tariff from the farm states, Republicans had usually considered the region "safe" at election time. This was no longer true. As agricultural prices continued to drop, farmers lost faith in the Republican shibboleth that high tariffs assured better prices and greater farm prosperity. Thus in 1888, Republicans were faced with the task of placating western farmers, without sacrificing protection. Farmers had to be convinced that, if protection had failed to help them, it was only because

²⁴Martin County Sentinel, February 17, 1888.

it had not been applied generously enough.²⁵

A careful investigation of the campaign to win the farm vote in 1888 has revealed the error of two widely held theories concerning the contest. Historians have long assumed that the Cleveland message suddenly presented the Republican party with a campaign issue. The facts directly contradict this notion. Republicans had believed since January, 1887, that the protection would be the key issue in the contest, and, in fact, had begun to lay the groundwork for such a campaign as early as 1885.²⁶ A second erroneous assumption is that the President's speech suddenly triggered the campaigning. It is true that the December address alerted the public to the farm-tariff question in the coming election, but the Republican party was pursuing a vigorous campaign to win the farm vote almost a year before the President's message.²⁷ Consequently, much of the campaigning to gain the crucial farm ballots had taken place before either party held its national convention in 1888.

James Moore Swank, executive head of the powerful and influential American Iron and Steel Association, master-minded

²⁵Clarence A. Wiley, "Economics and Politics of the Agricultural Tariff," Southwestern Political and Social Science Review, V (December, 1924), 264-278.

²⁶Eugene Gano Hay to Wharton Barker, January 11, 1887, Hay Papers, Library of Congress, 6; Tariff Tracts, II, 1884, James Swank Collection, 1-7.

²⁷? Dempcott to Justin Morrill, December 15, 1887, Morrill Papers, Library of Congress, 38; James M. Swank to Hay, May 18, 1887, Hay Papers, 6.

much of the farm-tariff campaign. Seldom has one man wielded as much power as Swank did in 1888. He was, in fact, a king-maker in the true sense of the word. When in March, 1888, rumors abounded that Walter Q. Gresham, a tariff reformer and judge of unimpeachable character, might be the Republican candidate, it was Swank who destroyed his chances. Through the Bulletin, the organ and spokesman of iron and steel interests, Swank left no doubt where he and the financial power of the Association stood in regard to Gresham's candidacy.

If the choice for the Presidency next fall, is to be between Mr. Cleveland and a half-hearted, milk and water revenue reform Republican, who is acceptable to the free trade element in the Republican party, Mr. Cleveland will be elected. If the Republican party is to be restored to power next fall, it must be upon an out-and-out platform of protection for the sake of protection, with candidates for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency whose records are in accord with that declaration.²⁸

The Republican strategists had originally hoped to carry their view of the farm-tariff question into the doubtful states by use of the press, but many papers in the western farm states were reluctant to carry syndicated materials of a pro-tariff nature. Under Swank's guidance the party turned to the publication of thousands of tracts designed to "educate" western farmers on the benefits of protection. In most cases the tracts were published in

²⁸Quoted in The Nation, XLVI (March 22, 1888), 228.

Philadelphia by the Association, and shipped to state, county, and local Republican committees throughout the farm states. Here the materials were wrapped, distributed, or mailed to farmers and other interested parties. The entire procedure was carried out as quietly and as secretly as possible, and farmers were never told as to where or how the documents had originated.²⁹

The Association believed that the most critical states were Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. Minnesota was the site of the most energetic campaign during 1887. The activity in Minnesota was precipitated by Eugene Gano Hay. Hay had moved to the Gopher state in 1886, and through letters of introduction provided by Benjamin Harrison, immediately met such formidable politicians and businessmen as Richard F. Pettigrew of Dakota Territory and James J. Hill of St. Paul. Hay brought with him no small reputation. He had been a successful criminal lawyer at Madison, Indiana, and was personally acquainted with the leading Republicans of that state.³⁰ Although he only arrived in Minnesota in 1886, he campaigned actively in the election of that year and was soon an important figure in state politics.

²⁹A. T. Volwiler, "Tariff Strategy and Propaganda in the United States, 1887-1888," 77-78.

³⁰Pamphlets, Hay Papers, 27; Ibid., 5.

Hay first sounded the note of alarm in a letter to Wharton Barker in January, 1887. He informed Barker that the protectionist policy of the Republican party in Minnesota was ignored by its own members, and, that the situation was critical. In his travels throughout the state, he explained that he had found influential leaders who actually believed in the "heresy of free trade." Hay saw as the only answer a "carefully managed" program which would "flood the state with protection literature during the calm between now and the national campaign - that farmers and laborers might read, think and understand for themselves"³¹ Barker passed Hay's letter on to Swank, and promised the Minnesotan that help was on the way.³²

In response to Hay's plea, Swank forwarded a series of tracts for his consideration, and requested that Hay make arrangements for their distribution.³³ Hay, in a lengthy reply, complained that at present he was without a suitable organization which would allow him to discreetly distribute the documents. Hay warned Swank that if the tracts were to be of any value they had to go to the "voter at his post office, and not in such a way as would lead him to believe that someone was endeavoring to influence him." Hay stated

³¹Hay to Barker, January 11, 1887, Hay Papers, 6.

³²Barker to Hay, January 15, 1887, ibid., 6.

³³Swank to Hay, May 18, 1887, ibid., 6.

that he hoped to get a list of the Republicans in every county who favored free trade, and supply them from time to time with materials on the logic of protection. The Minnesotan also advised Swank that publication of tracts in Norwegian and Swedish was imperative, as many Minnesota voters did not read English. He further proposed that rural newspapers be provided "fresh editorial material" on the tariff, as most county editors were unable to write with any knowledge on the subject. Furthermore, Hay informed Swank of the necessity of hiring Republicans to assist him in his organizational campaign, explaining that paid workers were more reliable and efficient. Hay admitted that his plan was expensive, but believed the "game is worth the candle."³⁴

Swank was pleased with the Minnesotan's energy and dedication to the tariff campaign as only a year before the Association had tried unsuccessfully to interest any Minnesota politicians in the protectionist cause. However, under Hay's guidance, the organizational groundwork advanced at a rapid rate. At the advice of Hay, Swank placed, free of charge, a number of tracts in the hands of every Republican and Greenback editor in the state, and promised more of the same upon request. By repeatedly confronting the editors with well written pro-tariff arguments, Swank hoped to woo many newspapers into his camp long before 1888.³⁵ In this

³⁴Hay to Swank, June 9, 1887, ibid., 6.

³⁵Swank to Hay, June 20, 1887, ibid., 6.

manner, tracts continued to flow into the state throughout the year, but in lesser numbers than either Hay or Swank desired.

The delay of larger shipments was occasioned by two problems. The first was the lack of co-ordination among Minnesota Republicans at the local level, which was needed to assure the systematic distribution of the material. This problem was solved shortly after the first of the year when a conference of Republican leaders in Minneapolis afforded the opportunity to organize a campaign of distribution.³⁶ The second problem was selecting the right tracts for translation into Norwegian and Swedish and choosing ones suitable for Minnesota.³⁷ The tracts believed finally chosen were: The Farmers and the Tariff; The Western View of the Tariff; How Protection Benefits Farmers and Mechanics; Farmers and Tariff of 1883; Producers and Consumers, Some Plain Facts Which Show How Protection Benefits All the People of Our Country; European Wages; and Reduction of Internal Taxes.³⁸

On January 12, 1888, Swank informed Hay that he had 100,000 tariff tracts in English, Swedish, and Norwegian ready for shipment to Minnesota.³⁹ Only a week and a half

³⁶Hay to Swank, January 20, 1888, ibid., 6.

³⁷Swank to Hay, January 12, 1888, ibid., 6; Swank to Hay, January 14, 1888, ibid., 6.

³⁸A. T. Volwiler, "Tariff Strategy and Propaganda in the United States, 1887-1888," 84-85.

³⁹Swank to Hay, January 12, 1888, Hay Papers, 6.

later he advised the Minnesotan to have 50,000 tracts printed in Norwegian and Swedish, more could be printed later "if found necessary."⁴⁰ Minnesota farmers were flooded with a torrent of tariff documents by the end of January. As the tempo of the campaign increased, Hay complained of overwork and urged Swank to enlist other Minnesotans in the cause. He suggested Robert B. Langdon, a prominent Minneapolis businessman and Republican,⁴¹ whom he believed could be of great help. Swank's letter to Langdon was carefully drafted and contained a plea for both organizational and financial help. He enclosed a confidential circular from the Republican National Committee which had urgently recommended the heavy distribution of protective tariff documents in the West. Swank explained that the Association had already printed 700,000 such documents, with many earmarked for Minnesota. This, the writer stated, was all expensive, and "a depression in the iron trade" had made it "somewhat difficult" for the Association to raise the \$10,000 needed in the West. Swank assured Langdon that he had written only because "the prosperity of this country must depend upon the maintenance of our Protective policy, and I have thought that as a businessman you would be glad to help in any proper effort to maintain this policy."⁴²

⁴⁰Swank to Hay, January 23, 1888, ibid., 6.

⁴¹Hay to Swank, January 20, 1888, ibid., 6.

⁴²Swank to R. B. Langdon, January 25, 1888, ibid., 6.

Despite the carefully couched plea, Langdon failed to respond. The rebuff irritated Swank, and he turned to his friend John Sherman of Ohio. Throughout 1887 Swank had kept in close touch with the Ohio Senator and had handled the distribution of tariff documents for him.⁴³ Moreover, he had hinted that he was willing to support Sherman as a candidate for President in 1888. "The White House and treasury department cannot be occupied by enemies of American industry," wrote Swank. He concluded that the Republican party must have a candidate "that is sound on the tariff."⁴⁴ In a final effort to get closer co-operation, he wrote Sherman in February, 1888, and asked him to please see Senators Dwight Sabin and Cushman Davis of Minnesota and Spooner and Sawyer of Wisconsin. Swank reiterated that it was especially crucial that Sabin and Davis help our "friends in Minnesota." He explained that the Association had printed 281,911 tracts since the middle of January, and more were ready to go. "We have a large force of clerks at work endorsing wrappers, and putting up packages," he concluded.⁴⁵

In the meantime, Hay worried that the tariff literature was not taking hold among the farmers and decided to

⁴³Swank to John Sherman, April 6, 1887, Sherman Papers, 400, Library of Congress.

⁴⁴Swank to Sherman, April 8, 1887, ibid., 400.

⁴⁵Swank to Sherman, February 16, 1888, ibid., 429.

take the message to them directly. Through a heavy personal contribution, and with the help of William D. Washburn, a Minnesota Senate candidate, funds were raised to bring tariff speakers to the state. Hay hired Roswald G. Horr of Michigan and General George Sheridan. The former he described "as the ablest tariff debater the country has ever produced." These gentlemen, following a carefully arranged schedule by Hay, set off through the heavy snows and stumped the Minnesota countryside until spring. Hay later reminisced that "a political campaign in the middle of winter in Minnesota had its disadvantages, but it had the advantage of novelty; and in towns at least, and later in the spring among the farmers, the meetings were well attended."⁴⁶ Hay concluded the results were "almost startling."

As late as March, Swank exuded none of the confidence expressed by Hay. In a bitter letter to Sherman, Swank attacked what he considered the cowardly actions of Minnesota politicians. Their refusal to take the stump and educate the people on the benefits of protection had set the cause back ten years in that state, Swank complained. Although he declared that the situation in Minnesota "was very bad" the Philadelphian hoped for "bolder and better leadership" from Senator Davis. Swank ended his letter on a note

⁴⁶Eugene Gano Hay, "Men and Measures of the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," unpublished manuscript, Hay Papers, Library of Congress, copy in the possession of Professor Gilbert C. Fite and author, 173-174.

of optimism, and admitted that the Association had accomplished much since the middle of January in the states of Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Iowa.⁴⁷

Actually, the situation in Iowa was but little less critical than in Minnesota. Swank, however, was unaware of the full extent of the problem in that state until later in the campaign. The failure of The Million in late 1887 had undoubtedly done much to put his mind at ease with regard to Iowa. Protectionists had repeatedly claimed that the journal poisoned the minds of farmers in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, and Illinois. Consequently, they hailed its passing with a sigh of relief.⁴⁸ There were other factors which also lessened Swank's involvement in Iowa at this early date. Three Iowa Republicans, William B. Allison, senior Senator, Charles Beardsley, State Republican Chairman, and James S. Clarkson, editor of the Iowa State Register and Vice Chairman of the Republican National Committee, all worked tirelessly to keep the farmers loyal to the party.

Allison had visited Iowa in January, 1888, and had publicly admitted that his constituents favored a revision of the tariff.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the Senator immediately set

⁴⁷Swank to Sherman, March 6, 1888, Sherman Papers, 433.

⁴⁸The Bulletin, XXI (November 16, 1884), 315.

⁴⁹The Nation, XLVI (January 12, 1888), 21.

to work to stem reduction sympathy in his state. In the same month Beardsley confirmed the unrest among farmers, but at this date assured Allison that with a \$50 donation from each Iowa Congressman, he could "carry the fight against free trade."⁵⁰ Other correspondence was less optimistic, and cautioned Allison that the situation was more critical than it first appeared. One letter from Clarence, Iowa, informed Allison that ever since Cleveland's speech "there has been great interest in the tariff question and seems to be increasing daily." Two public discussions had already been held, he explained, and there were more scheduled. He requested the Senator to furnish speeches and tariff documents that would help the Republican cause.⁵¹ Even the Young Men's Republican Club of New York wrote Allison to inquire about the status of the tariff in Iowa. The anxious writer claimed he had firsthand knowledge of a great low tariff movement in Iowa. "Could the Democrats win?" he asked.⁵²

By February, Beardsley, too, showed greater concern about the drift of farm sentiment. Although the American

⁵⁰Charles Beardsley to William B. Allison, January 10, 1888, William Boyd Allison Papers, Box 259, Des Moines, Iowa.

⁵¹G. W. Batty to Allison, February 4, 1888, ibid., Box 265.

⁵²David Sickles to Allison, February 4, 1888, ibid., Box 265.

Iron and Steel Association supplied him with large quantities of documents, the desired response was not achieved. Beardsley immediately wrote a number of Republican newspapers in the state, and informed them of the party's problem. He explained that "several so-called agricultural newspapers" printed outside the state were being read by Iowa farmers and had as their intention the conversion of farmers to free trade. Beardsley told the editor that protection was the "great question of 1888, and they needed to give the subject of a protective tariff constant and increased attention in their daily and weekly editions.⁵³

While Beardsley's farm-tariff correspondence in the early months of 1888 revealed a genuine concern with the problem, his letters disclosed none of the panic expressed later in the campaign. His reason for confidence was explained in a letter to an Iowa editor when he noted that he had large amounts of tariff documents, and had established a systematic method of distribution. He wrote that shortly after the last election he gathered the names and addresses of 10,000 to 15,000 young men entitled to vote in 1888. More importantly, he had the names and addresses of 20,000 farmers which afforded easy handling of the

⁵³Beardsley to Burlington, Iowa, editor, February 1, 1888, ibid., Box 259.

tariff materials in the rural areas.⁵⁴ The foreign language tracts available in German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Irish were provided by Swank and Allison and placed in the hands of leading Republicans for distribution.⁵⁵

Swank and the Republican party had been so energetic and thorough that on April 2 he penned an optimistic note to Sherman:

The Republican party is all right on the tariff in the following states, and there will be no defections from our ranks in any of them on the issue raised by Mr. Cleveland: Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oregon. I reach this conclusion as the result of a winter's reading of letters from all the states mentioned, and as a result, too of much reading of Western newspapers. Minnesota is the only state of which I have any doubt on the tariff question, and if I had been properly helped three months ago, that state would also be all right today.⁵⁶

Swank had other reasons for feeling confident. The American Iron and Steel Association had published over 500,000 tracts since the middle of January and had gained valuable allies in some farm states. In Illinois, for example, the Association now controlled the editorial policy of the powerful Chicago Inter Ocean, while in Nebraska, Senator Charles F. Manderson had agreed to co-operate in taking the protectionist message to his farm constituents.⁵⁷ Interestingly

⁵⁴Beardsley To Burlington, Iowa, editor, February 1, 1888, ibid., Box 259.

⁵⁵Swank to Hay, February 15, 1888, Hay Papers, 6; New York Republikaner to Allison, January 7, 1888, Allison Papers, Box 259; Robert B. Porter to Allison, March 22, 1888, ibid., 264.

⁵⁶Swank to Sherman, April 2, 1888, Sherman Papers, 439.

⁵⁷Swank to Sherman, February 16, 1888, ibid., 429.

enough, Swank's letter on the farm states was written on the very day that Roger Q. Mills introduced the Democratic reform measure, and a full two months before either party held its national convention.

CHAPTER VII

THE FARMER, THE TARIFF, AND THE

ELECTION OF 1888

The Mills bill of April, 1888, stands in sharp contrast to past attempts at tariff reform. For the first time since the Civil War, the full power and prestige of the Presidency was squarely behind the effort of tariff reduction. The measure was a part of the administrative planning outlined by Cleveland at the Oak View Conferences in the fall of 1887. Roger Q. Mills, a Texan, and a close friend of Cleveland, drafted the bill. Mills was a long time student of the tariff, and since his election to the House in 1873 had carefully watched the machinations of the protectionists. The discussion in the House lasted 51 days and consumed 240 hours, no fewer than 151 times did the solons rise to expound on the merits, or the defects, of the tariff.¹

The speeches contained little that was new, but the fortunes of both parties rode on the question of protection

¹U. S. Congressional Record, 59th Cong., 1st Sess., 1888, 6519; Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 372, 389.

and a feeling of tension and excitement filled the Congressional chambers. Republicans had begun to attack the "mystery bill" long before debate ever opened. Mills, as Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, had denied hearings on the measure and scoffed at the cries of protest that arose. In answer, he merely stated that the hearings were a farce, and those people who needed lower duties were never represented. Speaker John Carlisle supported his colleague's arguments; no "soil-stained farmer" or "greasy mechanic" ever appeared concluded Carlisle.²

Republicans had awaited the bill's completion with great anxiety, certain that Mills was intent upon destroying the protective system. When the schedule was made public, they believed their suspicions confirmed. Groans of anguish arose from those whose Congressional seats depended upon the largesse of protected industries. The free list proposals came as the greatest shock; raw materials such as salt, wool, lumber, hemp and flax were listed. Other free list items included cotton ties, tin plate, soap, bricks, and lime.³ While the changes were made on some agricultural commodities, the reductions were not drastic. The duties on small grains remained generally the same; wheat 20 cents per bushel, oats 10 cents per bushel, and

²Barnes, 132.

³Stanwood, 233.

rye 10 cents per bushel. However, poultry, bacon, ham, beef, mutton, pork, broom corn, and peas were to be admitted free.⁴

If protectionists were staggered by the bill, they could take solace in the minority report that accompanied the measure. Written by William McKinley, the report was an emotional attack on the administration. To see the tariff suddenly swept away from the wool growers of Ohio was more than young Napoleon of protection could stand. "Wool on the free list is a deadly assault upon a great agricultural interest, and will fall with terrible severity upon a million people, their households, and dependencies," he warned.⁵ McKinley declared: "the bill is a radical reversal of the tariff policy of the country . . . under which we have made the industrial and agricultural progress without a parallel in the world's history."⁶ This measure is a "direct attempt to fasten upon this country the British policy of free foreign trade," concluded the Ohioan.⁷

Throughout the "great tariff debate" of 1888 the three Congressmen who spoke most effectively for the western farmer were John Anderson and James B. Weaver of Iowa, and

⁴John M. Carson, The Tariff Act of 1890, compared with the Tariff Act of 1883 and the Mills Bill (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1891), 21-25.

⁵Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1893), 281.

⁶Ibid., 278.

⁷Ibid., 289.

Knute Nelson of Minnesota. They argued for free lumber, salt, coal, and sugar, as against free whiskey and tobacco. These men believed that the farmers needed greater markets and cheaper prices on clothing and shelter and they voiced old arguments which carried new importance in 1888. Even disinterested Congressmen had heard stories of the great "free trade" sympathy and were familiar with rumors of a third party movement in the West. In an election year, no speech by a man from a "doubtful" state could be ignored. Furthermore, contradictory petitions arrived almost daily from farm states and added to Congressional confusion.⁸

Nelson's re-election by a 42,000 majority in Minnesota strengthened his position as spokesman for the West. The Minnesotan was not a free trader, but believed that the tariff should never exceed the difference in the cost of production at home and abroad. Why, he asked, could "the farmers of this country, paying as they do a tariff royalty to every industry but their own, and paying relatively higher wages for labor than any other industry in this country," still compete effectively with the rest of the world. Certainly, it was not due to the tariff protection on farm commodities, Nelson concluded. Why did the Republican conventions of Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska demand reduction of the tariff? Because, he argued,

⁸U. S. Congressional Record, 50th Cong., 1st Sess., 1888, 4261, 3115, 823, 1004, 3029, 3436, 4652.

it was the wishes of the people.⁹ Anderson cautioned House members not to ignore the thunder from the West. "Our farmers in the West are more and more coming to understand that the beauties of protection, as portrayed by its advocates, relate to the condition of those who are the beneficiaries of the system, and not to those who foot the bills."¹⁰ Weaver, an avowed Union Labor party member, and a favorite target of the Republican foil, never failed to rise to the occasion. His biting sarcasm and wit often brightened the sonorous speeches of the House. When told that much lumber came in free, and Iowans benefitted, he mockingly retorted:

The gentleman from Maine (Mr. Dingley) assures the House that logs and round lumber are on the free list. That is true - and who gets the benefit of it? The American mill-owner imports his logs from Canada free, converts them into lumber, and there sells it at the tariff price to my constituents.¹¹

While western farm representatives demanded tariff reduction and extension of the free list, they nonetheless wanted some commodities such as flax protected. Flax growers had done well in some of the prairie states as all parts of the plant could be processed. Consequently, students of the tariff have criticized agrarians for their "inconsistency." This arises from the belief which

⁹U. S. Congressional Record, 59th Cong., 1st Sess., 1888, 2507-2508; Jacob A. O. Preus, "Knute Nelson," Minnesota History Bulletin, V (May, 1925), 355.

¹⁰Ibid., 4374.

¹¹Ibid., 4783.

protectionists worked so hard to perpetuate - that farmers were free traders. This was not true; agrarians seldom asked to repeal the tariff, but only to reduce it, and equalize the burden.¹²

At the same time debate dragged on in Congress, there was widespread popular interest in the tariff question. The agricultural community was aware of its importance in the coming election. The American Nonconformist noted a sudden interest displayed by politicians in trying to placate the farmer. The first thing they do, said the editor, "is hold a congress of farmers composed largely of men who would not know a pumpkin from a sweet potato."¹³ The Nonconformist stepped up its attacks on the tariff and trusts throughout 1888. "There is no good reason why western farmers have to be so poor," argued the editor. But he contended that because of protection great combinations had arisen, and every farmer was taxed to support them. The only answer to this situation, the editor concluded, was a farm uprising.¹⁴ The Nonconformist did not stand alone in its charge that the tariff created trusts. The Chicago Tribune in February,

¹²Ibid., 5064-5067.

¹³The American Nonconformist, February 16, 1888.

¹⁴Ibid., May 31, 1888.

1888, announced that farm implements sold for less abroad than at home. Why was this true?¹⁵

The Industrial Age of Duluth, Minnesota, supported the charges of the Tribune. This paper contended that bread, meat, machinery, and foodstuffs were purchased in Europe more cheaply than at home. The editor believed that only the New England and manufacturing states benefited from the tariff. Here, he argued, were centered the great combinations that "should not be permitted to exist a single day." The idea that farm commodities received protection at two per cent on beef and mutton was ludicrous, he concluded.¹⁶

The Prairie Farmer also warned its readers that trusts had become a grave danger to farmers. Items used daily by agrarians - oil, coal, sugar, steel, and tin - were all controlled by combinations. This journal argued that new tariff laws or even free trade would bring no relief from the "grinding monopolies." Immediate government legislation was necessary.¹⁷ The Worthington Advance (Minnesota) urged farmers to retaliate against trusts by forming their own. The editor argued that agrarians could claim their intentions were the same as industry to pay the farm-laborers higher wages. Business would not allow farmers to

¹⁵The Chicago Tribune, February 11, 1888, 1.

¹⁶The Industrial Age, Duluth, Minnesota, March 24, 1888.

¹⁷The Prairie Farmer, LX (April 14, 1888), 233.

do this, contended the Advance, but if agriculture dares to raise its voice against industry, it is a "blow at infant industries."¹⁸

Samuel J. Kirkwood, a businessman and former Iowa Senator, wrote to Allison about the tariff as a campaign issue. He told the Senator that Iowa farmers were unhappy with monopoly.

To make farmers pay tax on all they buy and get nothing on what they sell is not fair. The Abominable "Trusts" or combinations of manufacturers and others to keep up the prices by preventing competition is producing a great deal of prejudice against a high tariff among farmers and any party that is identified with these combinations will suffer.¹⁹

An article that appeared in the Winterset, Iowa, Madisonian told of the evolution of farm thought on the tariff. The writer explained that the farmer's isolation had prevented his growth of knowledge on public questions. On the other hand, he stated, those who were elected to represent the farmers knew little about agriculture, as they had gained their nominations through influential townspeople and party managers. But, as they were traditionally Republicans, farmers dutifully voted for them with the result that "farm representatives" were peculiarly unrepresentative of their constituents. This accounted for why the American farmer

¹⁸The Worthington Advance, April 26, 1888.

¹⁹Samuel J. Kirkwood to Allison, April 23, 1888, Allison Papers, Box 263.

had paid the burdensome price of the tariff for a quarter of a century. Now, concluded the writer, this was no longer true, as the discussion of the tariff reached into the remotest areas.²⁰

Many western newspapers which reached a wide farm audience continued to demand tariff reform, but found Cleveland and the Mills bill unacceptable. The Martin County Sentinel of Fairmont, Minnesota, repeatedly editorialized for reductions, but was unwilling to leave Republican ranks to obtain it. The Sentinel attacked the inability of the Democratic Congress to pass a reform bill and rightly criticized the Mills measure for its sectional character. This Minnesota paper complained of free wool and flax and started to carry news releases that criticized the Mills bill.²¹ Even the crusading Chicago Tribune told its readers not to leave Harrison and the Republican party because of the amount of duty on certain imports. The Tribune charged that the Democrats had failed to fulfill their campaign promise to reduce the tariff, and it remained for Republicans to make good these pledges.²²

The staunchly conservative Omaha Republican (Nebraska) viewed the Mills bill as part of a giant conspiracy led

²⁰The Winterset Madisonian, Winterset, Iowa, May 31, 1888.

²¹The Martin County Sentinel, January 20, 1888.

²²The Chicago Tribune, July 2, 1888, 4; Ibid., July 7, 1888, 1.

by the Cobden Club. This Club was an organization of the British aristocracy, explained the editor, and its agents were in every city, town, and hamlet where they furtively worked for free trade. Remember, warned the Republican, England and Canada want Cleveland re-elected while they hate Harrison. The editor confided to his readers that the English dislike for Benjamin Harrison was hereditary, and dated back to the time when his great-grandfather signed the Declaration of Independence. This paper, while it invited discussion and comment on the tariff, seldom printed opposing letters, but rather subjected their content to severe criticism for the enlightenment of their readers.²³ The Belleville Advocate agreed with the free trade accusations of the Nebraska paper and called for a halt to the election of "copperheads and confederates" to public office.²⁴

The criticism of the Winterset Madisonian differed little from other protectionist papers. However, the Madisonian's influence in Iowa stemmed from its dogged dedication to protection. The editor never tired of hammering at the calamity which would beset farmers should Cleveland be

²³The Omaha Republican, May 13, 1888, 4; Ibid., July 2, 1888, 4.

²⁴The Belleville Advocate, May 4, 1888; Ibid., June 8, 1888, 4.

elected, or the Mills bill passed.²⁵ Likewise, The Bulletin, published in Philadelphia and distributed widely, told agrarians that protection was the creation of the American farmer. Every tariff, stated the editor, "has been passed by the votes of the representatives of rural constituents." Farmers were told they could overthrow "the tariff whenever they are satisfied that this is their best policy."²⁶

Meanwhile, in the midst of the discussion on tariff policy, political interest shifted from Washington and the public press to St. Louis, the site of the Democratic National Convention. The first task which confronted the party was relatively easy, the re-nomination of Grover Cleveland. The choice of his running mate, 75-year-old Allen G. Thurman of Ohio, was somewhat more difficult, but still achieved with relative ease. The question which aroused the greatest consternation was endorsement of the Mills bill. The President, in hopes of escaping the Republican taunt of free trade, had drafted a mildly worded tariff plank for the St. Louis meeting. To many ardent revisionists, a moderately worded plank on the tariff was unacceptable. Nonetheless, the Mill's bill failed to gain endorsement in the platform and its proponents had to be

²⁵The Winterset Madisonian, March 8, 1888; Ibid., May 31, 1888; Ibid., June 15, 1888.

²⁶The Bulletin, XXII (February 15, 1888), 50.

satisfied with resolutions offered from the convention floor. The party platform, however, was clear on the tariff. "The Democratic party . . . endorses the view expressed by President Cleveland in his last annual message as the correct interpretation of that platform upon the question of tariff reduction" ²⁷

More inexplicable than the failure to endorse the Mills bill was the selection of campaign chairmen. The convention chose William H. Barnum of Connecticut and Calvin S. Brice of Ohio. Cleveland's reasons for choosing these two men have never been satisfactorily explained. Neither was committed to tariff reform. Brice, a member of the American Iron and Steel Association, owed his Senate seat to the Association's support, and Barnum, with his heavy investments in iron ore, would have suffered financially had raw materials been admitted free. ²⁸ It is odd that Cleveland did not choose a man from west of the Mississippi where his message had generated enthusiasm and weakened the hold of the Republican party. ²⁹ Yet, shortly after his nomination he revealed an amazing naivete with

²⁷Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, 1888 (St. Louis: Woodward and Tiernan Printing Co., 1888), 94.

²⁸Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 415.

²⁹John Martin to Grover Cleveland, April 10, 1888, Cleveland Papers.

regard to the campaign. In a letter to Bissell he summarized his opinion of the political climate. He stated that "the political turmoil has not fairly begun yet. In fact, the campaign thus far as I see it is very quiet."³⁰

Republicans assembled in Chicago fourteen days later to name their choice for high office. The American Iron and Steel Association had already set the tone of the convention by demanding that the candidate must be favorable to protection and business.³¹ After a week of strenuous bargaining and intrigue Benjamin Harrison of Indiana received the nomination. A few years later a personal secretary of Harrison's stated that "never before or since has a nomination been made that was so much the result of perfect organized effort."³²

The platform contained an unequivocal endorsement of the tariff. In a direct slap at Cleveland, Republicans declared: "We are uncompromisingly in favor of the American system of protection; we protest against its destruction as proposed by the president and his party."³³ The Mills bill was denounced and declared detrimental to industry and

³⁰Wilson Bissell to Cleveland, June 17, 1888, ibid.

³¹Report of the National Convention of 1888, Louis T. Michener Papers, Library of Congress, Box 1; The Nation, XLVI (March 22, 1888), 228.

³²Eugene Gano Hay, "Men and Measures of the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," 105.

³³McKee, 240.

farming. In one fell swoop an appeal was made to agriculture and a plan for the reduction of the surplus revealed:

The Republican Party would effect all needed reduction of the national revenue by repealing the taxes upon tobacco, which are an annoyance and burden to agriculture, and the tax upon spirits used in the arts and for mechanical purposes³⁴

Some younger Republicans were hesitant about gambling the party's fortune solely on the tariff. Theodore Roosevelt called on campaign leaders Matthew Quay and William Dudley and urged them to broaden the contest to include more than a single issue like the tariff. His pleas were ignored. Quay, who owed his position as chairman of the Republican National Committee to James Swank, could hardly have answered affirmatively.³⁵

The long awaited vote on the Mills bill in the House came on July 21, only after the adjournment of the Republican National Convention. The galleries and halls were clogged with spectators and Senators who had come to view the balloting. Presiding over the nervous onlookers was Mrs. Cleveland who waited anxiously to carry the result of the vote to her husband. The final vote saw the measure pass by a 162-149 margin, as the two parties divided along partisan lines. Yet, if passage constituted a triumph for

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵James Malin, "Roosevelt in the Elections of 1884 and 1888," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XIV (June, 1927), 175.

the Democrats, James Swank, likewise, savored the fruits of victory. Although he had hoped the measure would fail, his April predictions had proved amazingly accurate. Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois voted against the bill; only Minnesota defected. Indiana Congressmen divided their votes on the measure. Out of the potential 72 votes in the 8 states, only 23 ayes were cast with Kansas failing to register a single vote in favor of the bill.³⁶ These were Republican votes against a Democratic bill.

The failure of the measure to gain greater support in the western agricultural states probably stemmed from a number of reasons. Many farmers who kept a small flock of sheep disliked the idea of free wool. Free flax also seemed to them unnecessary and detrimental to their interests.³⁷ Furthermore, it is impossible to dismiss the herculean efforts of the American and Iron and Steel Association. They missed no opportunity to resurrect the cry of the "bloody shirt," free trade, and Democratic insincerity on tariff reduction. The Grand Old Party was difficult to abandon in this atmosphere of emotionalism. Moreover, of course, industrialism was growing rapidly in states like Illinois

³⁶U. S. Congressional Record, 50th Cong., 1st Sess., 1888, 6660.

³⁷Howland Fish to Cleveland, April 28, 1888, Cleveland Papers.

and Michigan and there were strong economic interests which demanded protection.

As the Mills bill moved to the Senate, Republicans faced their most crucial decision of the campaign. A number of alternatives were open but each was fraught with danger. The Senate could amend the bill, secure its passage, and claim the measure as Republican legislation. Another possibility was the drafting of a substitute bill which the Democratic House would undoubtedly reject. A final option was to find the bill unacceptable in any form and stall until the Senate adjourned.

In a letter to Justin Morrill on April 2, James Swank outlined the course he believed most suitable if the Mills bill should pass. Swank wanted a substitute measure drafted by the House, which provided for reductions on sugar and tobacco. He warned Morrill against any decision to amend the Mills bill, as these amendments "might be unfavorable to a number of industries." Even worse, he added, was the possibility that the Senate amendments might be rejected. Swank believed that if an entirely new measure were drafted and became law, Republicans would gain the credit; if defeated, the Democrats would have to shoulder the blame.³⁸

William B. Allison, who had charge of the bill in the Senate, also decided that a new measure was necessary. Allison

³⁸Swank to Morrill, April 20, 1888, Justin Morrill Papers, 38.

believed that if the western farm states were to remain loyal to the party, a gesture toward reduction was necessary. There was also the possibility that if the Senate merely killed the Mills bill Cleveland might call a special session just prior to the election and take Republican campaigners away from the hustings.³⁹ The Allison decision, however, did not end the arguments over the wisdom of new legislation. The Senator received conflicting mail throughout the summer on the course he had chosen to follow.

Sherman and Shelby Cullom of Illinois counseled that Allison had risked the party's fortunes needlessly; no new bill was necessary.⁴⁰ A letter from William J. Fowler of Chesterton, New York, stressed the need for new legislation to save the farm vote. Fowler told Allison that Democrats knew they might lose in New York, but believed they could offset this loss in the farm states. He urged revision to prevent this from happening.⁴¹

The most forceful letter Allison received was from Joseph Medill, editor of the Chicago Tribune. Medill warned the Senator to postpone any tariff legislation until the

³⁹News clipping, John Sherman Papers, 453; D. P. Miller to Allison, Allison Papers, Box 264.

⁴⁰John Fisk to Allison, July 25, 1888, ibid., Box 261; Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 432.

⁴¹William J. Fowler to Allison, July 27, 1888, Allison Papers, Box 261.

next session. Do not make the mistake of 1883, he continued. Use a "cunning method of increasing the duties on western farmers, and you may calculate with absolute certainty on dwindling majorities in the western part of the United States." Your committee, he told Allison, hears only the "horse leech class," who "cry give give."

We have lots of Republicans deeply dissatisfied with that rabid, unrepblican McKinley plank, but they have been kept from bolting by the strength of old party ties and the vigorous assaults that have been made on certain sections of the Mills bill and the scare cry of free trade against the Democrats and they have barely concluded to vote for Harrison on the assurance that the Republican Senate was framing a better tariff reform bill than the Democratic House had done.⁴²

If the Senate bill is not a reform measure, do not let "it see the light of day," Medill pleaded.

Although Congress remained in session throughout the summer, campaign workers continued to marshal votes. Both parties knew the tariff hearings were a facade; their real purpose was not legislation, but a campaign document for the purpose of debate.⁴³ Nonetheless, the events of the summer served the protectionist cause well. Swank and the Association left no stone unturned in gathering funds for the Republican purse. By August, the farm unrest in Iowa had

⁴²J. Medill to Allison, September 23, 1888, ibid., Box 263.

⁴³G. M. Dodge to Allison, July 16, 1888, ibid., Box 261.

increased, and Beardsley appealed to Swank for money.⁴⁴

Swank responded with \$2,000 for the Iowa campaign. Shortly thereafter Beardsley also received additional help from the American Protective Tariff League which distributed pamphlets and tracts throughout the state. At the same time Swank presented Allison with a subtle request for an increase of nickel rates. This clearly indicates the influence of industry on the Republican party in the late 19th century.

I wish your committee could see its way clear to make the duty on nickel 20 cents a pound instead of 15 cents Mr. Wharton will be satisfied with 20 cents and I sincerely hope you gratify his wish in this matter. No American consumer has ever yet suffered by furnishing adequate protection to producers, and I am sure the consumers of nickel will not have to pay anymore for this article if the duty were 20 cents than if it were 15 cents. Mr. Wharton is at Newport and he has not asked me to write you on this subject, but I know how deeply he feels about it, and as he gives me such valuable help in the collection of campaign funds and in otherwise helping our party I have thought that you would like to gratify him in a matter which involves no question of principle.⁴⁵

Only two weeks later Allison again felt the heavy pressure of the business community. Somehow word had leaked to the press that the Senate bill fixed the duty on steel rails at \$14, a figure considerably lower than Swank had promised to

⁴⁴William J. Fowler to Benjamin Harrison, Benjamin Harrison Papers, Library of Congress, 42; Beardsley to Allison, August 18, 1888, Allison Papers, Box 259; Henry M. Hoyt to Allison, October 10, 1888, ibid., Box 262.

⁴⁵Swank to Allison, September 13, 1888, ibid., Box 265.

steel interests. In a frantic letter Swank pled the case of industry and the meaning of business support for the Republican party:

This year we (the Association) have undertaken to raise more money than in any previous campaign. I have personally appealed for financial aid for the National Committee to the Bessemer Steel Rail Manufacturers, assuring them at every turn I have made, that their interests were safe in the hands of the Republican party. I have particularly assured them that the duty on steel rails had been fixed in your bill at \$15.68. Upon the strength of these assurances I have given these friends agreed to help Chairman Quay's committee to a considerable sum of money, which I have hoped would reach about \$75,000 or \$80,000. I have already collected and paid over to the Committee \$37,000, all contributed by steel manufacturers, \$2,000 of which were sent to Dr. Beardsley. I am just making arrangements to call on steel rail manufacturers to duplicate the checks they have already paid.

All this is strictly confidential. How can I go ahead with this work if the impression should be generally created that your bill fixes the duty on steel rails at \$14? Human nature is human nature the world over.

We would not for one moment think of using any improper means to secure the favorable consideration by your Committee of the steel rail duty. But our friends on the Committee are Republicans, striving for the success of our party in the coming election. I beg you, therefore, to make it easy for me, and not difficult or maybe impossible to secure the \$35,000 or \$40,000 of additional collections which I hope to make from the steel rail manufacturers.⁴⁶

The party also garnered funds from other sources, and seemingly located inexhaustible reservoirs. James P. Foster, President of the Republican League, had declared the necessity

⁴⁶Swank to Allison, September 26, 1888, ibid., Box 261.

to "fry all the fat" out of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers. Wharton Barker declared in July, 1888, that he would raise \$100,000 to help the party.⁴⁷ In this same month, Harrison's son wrote his father from Helena, Montana, and informed him that the campaign drive in the Far West was well under way. Young Harrison explained that Republicans in Washington and Dakota Territory had both started \$50,000 fund drives, while Montana had set a goal of \$20,000. He urged his father to have the National Committee concentrate on Minnesota, as these territories would "cheerfully give money, if it will help to bring their admission."⁴⁸ Other contributions, while smaller, still helped to swell the party's coffers. J. W. Rush, Governor of Wisconsin, and later Secretary of Agriculture under Harrison, forwarded \$2,000 and promised his and Senator Sawyer's help.⁴⁹

During the campaign the statements made by Harrison on the farm-tariff problem adhered closely to the party line. He told Indiana farmers that the home market remained the only truly satisfactory one for agriculture. Ohio, he declared, was the perfect example; Buckeye agrarians were

⁴⁷Edward Arthur White, "The Republican Party in National Politics, 1888-1891," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1941, 215.

⁴⁸R. B. Harrison to Benjamin Harrison, July 28, 1888, Harrison Papers, 36.

⁴⁹J. W. Rusk to Louis T. Michener, October 21, 1888, Michener Papers, Box 1.

prosperous because they had nearby "a city of well paid wage earners in shops and factories."⁵⁰ The Nation cogently summarized the extent of Harrison's knowledge on protection. Godkin stated that "his views about the tariff are the commonplaces which a busy lawyer has probably picked up in conversation or inherited. It is clear enough that he has not studied the question at all."⁵¹

Cleveland failed to get his campaign under way until July, and never succeeded in making an effective appeal to the western farm vote. With 18 months headstart in this region by the Republicans, it is unlikely that Cleveland could have won the West. But the fact remains that opportunity was at hand, and the Democrats failed to utilize this occasion to the fullest extent. The greatest Democratic activity was confined to the East. Here the Massachusetts Reform League, and American Free Trade League under the guidance of Wheeler and others, worked diligently, but this did little to influence the West.

The most important publication aimed at farmers and distributed by the Democrats was entitled, Friendly Letters to American Farmers, by J. S. Moore. The author explained how the tariff raised the prices on goods such as lumber, salt, clothes, and crockery and forced farmers to pay the

⁵⁰Charles Hedges (ed.), Speeches of Benjamin Harrison (New York: United States Book Co., 1892), 26, 181-182.

⁵¹The Nation, XLVII (September 13, 1888), 201.

bill.⁵² The Cleveland forces were not unaware of the importance of the agricultural vote. R. H. Stockton advised the President to conduct a hard hitting campaign among farmers: "Take it into the enemies stronghold," Stockton urged, and work in Kansas, Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. Reach every Republican farmer and "lay the facts before him, as to the taxes he pays (don't call it tariff)," he warned. If you "strike a telling blow," you can carry these states, concluded Stockton.⁵³

Farmers themselves wrote the President about the tariff problem. A letter from P. J. Ward of Terre Haute, Indiana, explained that many Republicans and Union Labor party members were not well informed on the question. Ward told Cleveland that he had written a number of letters for publication on the farm-tariff problem in the Terre Haute Daily and Weekly Gazette, but more work needed to be done among Republican farmers. The writer argued that he needed help in his missionary work, and he enclosed an article that he wanted the President to have placed in the hands of Republican farmers.⁵⁴ Another such letter came from Cedar Glen, Maryland, where a farmer stated that he hoped to keep the agriculturalist within Democratic ranks, and planned to hold a large farm meeting to help do so.⁵⁵

⁵²Wheeler, 184-192.

⁵³R. H. Stockton to Cleveland, July 9, 1888, Cleveland Papers.

⁵⁴P. J. Ward to Cleveland, October 25, 1888, ibid.

⁵⁵George M. Henault to Cleveland, October 29, 1888, ibid.

A significant weakness of the Cleveland campaign among western farmers was revealed in a letter to the President's secretary, Daniel Lamont. Lamont was told that the party could not meet the demand for speeches and campaign material in the West. George Parker complained that Democrats were unable even to satisfy the requests for documents from Illinois.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Democrats received no help to the extent given by the Home Market Club of Boston or the American Protective League, both of which assisted Republicans in Iowa and other western states. The American Tariff Reform League located in Chicago failed to render the party any significant aid in the western states. Cleveland's failure to play a personal role in the campaign was equally damaging. Congress remained in session, and the President stayed at his White House desk throughout the summer.⁵⁷ Any possibility of a western tour was ruled out which would have allowed Cleveland to personally explain to farmers that another four years did not mean free trade, or any other of the charges spread throughout the country. One favorite was:

Vote for Cleveland if you want factories closed;
low wages; fewer comforts; a vast army of tramps;
ragged wives; hungry children; a great rejoicing
in England; and laughter and applause from the
solid South.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ibid. George F. Parker to Daniel Lamont, September 2, 1888,

⁵⁷Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 423.

⁵⁸Leaflet, Harrison Papers, 43.

Cleveland cannot, however, be exonerated for his failure to push the campaign hard, once the Democratic machinery was under way. By late August the President was told that he was losing the race and that the situation looked very grave. In his acceptance letter released September 8, he tried to recoup lost ground. Fiery and bellicose in tone, the letter was devoted almost entirely to the tariff problem. He reiterated his early charges that the tariff raised prices and worked great hardship upon the consumers, but his effort had come too late.⁵⁹

Despite the tremendous effort of the Republicans they were uncertain of victory. In an August letter to Shelby M. Cullom, J. Medill assessed the party chances. Medill was uncertain but believed that if the party were defeated, the McKinley plank should take the blame. McKinley wants taxes on salt, clothes, and lumber, and free whiskey stated Medill. "How many farmers votes will that get us this fall?" he asked. "About two thousand millionaires run the policies of the Republican party and make its tariffs," concluded Medill. "We other thirty million Republicans have precious little voice in the matter. Whatever duties protect the two

⁵⁹Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 434; Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1888, 169-179.

thousand plutocrats is protection to American industries. Whatever don't is free trade."⁶⁰

J. W. Reid illustrated the strategy utilized by Republicans in the final days of the contest. On October 6, he wrote to Harrison and told him to stay in Indiana. You may be asked to come east in the final weeks, he stated, but refuse to do so, things are going well. This is just when accidents happen, he warned, and if you come east there is great opportunity for just such an event.⁶¹

On October 3, just about a month before the election, the Senate presented the bill prepared by the Committee on Finance, a measure authored by Allison and Aldrich. While it called for a 50 per cent reduction on sugar, it was definitely a protectionist measure. Some rates were increased, but members of the Committee asserted that this would lessen imports and thereby reduce the surplus. The two parties debated the measure with little enthusiasm for two weeks, as both sides marked time until adjournment⁶² on October 20 which ended one of the longest Congressional sessions in history. Congressmen then streamed out of the Capitol to

⁶⁰Quoted in Shelby M. Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service (Chicago: McClurg Company, 1911), 444-445.

⁶¹J. W. Reid to Harrison, October 6, 1888, Harrison Papers, 43.

⁶²U. S. Congressional Redord, 50th Cong., 1st Sess., 1888, 9892.

attend to last minute fence-mending and politicking. Allison basked in the momentary worship of his fellow Republicans. He had successfully held Congress in session until the last minute and presented a bill suitable to all interests. That the session had ended before the bill could be enacted was, of course, no fault of the Republican party. Strangely enough, only a few years earlier James Garfield had refused the Iowa Senator the position of Secretary of the Treasury. Garfield believed he was "unsound" on the tariff.⁶³

Yet nothing revealed the determination of protectionists to keep the tariff issue a vital part of the campaign, as did the announcement made in the September Bulletin. The editor stated that "Without intermission, since the President startled the country, our work has continued." Between January 15, 1888, and September 1, the American Iron and Steel Association had distributed 1,101,877 tariff documents, and the work would continue, he concluded.⁶⁴ In November the Association released figures which showed the careful attention paid to western farm states. Tracts shipped to Indiana numbered 135,472, Minnesota 125,519,

⁶³James S. Clarkson to Allison, October 10, 1888, Allison Papers, Box 42; Harrison to Allison, October 9, 1888, *ibid.*, Box 42; Leland Sage, William Boyd Allison, A Study in Practical Politics (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1956), 168.

⁶⁴The Bulletin, XXII (September 12, 1888), 276.

Iowa 106,942, Illinois 103,991, Nebraska 96,057, and Kansas 92,230. In two other states where agricultural discontent was rife, Wisconsin and Michigan received 73,751 and 81,106 each.⁶⁵ These figures, while large, still do not represent the total effort. The Association continually urged prominent Congressional leaders to distribute their speeches and other materials at their own expense. Sherman was especially diligent in this work and shipped his speeches and addresses in lots of from 5,000 to 10,000 at a time wherever needed.⁶⁶

When the polls closed on November 6, 1888, Grover Cleveland had lost the election even though he had a popular majority of over 100,000 votes. The people had spoken, but the wrong ones. In comparison with the 1884 figures, Cleveland gained more votes in Indiana, Illinois, and Minnesota, but fewer in Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas.⁶⁷ While historians have argued that the election was stolen from Cleveland by fraud in Indiana, this does not explain the balloting in the other farm states. E. L. Godkin registered the dismay of many reformers when the farm vote was tallied.

⁶⁵Ibid., XXII (November 7, 1888), 333.

⁶⁶Herbert Radclyffe, Secretary of the Home Market Club of Boston, to Sherman, March 9, 1888, Sherman Papers, 433; W. S. Cappler, Chairman of the Ohio State Republican Executive Committee, to Sherman, August 22, 1888, ibid., 454.

⁶⁷McKee, 230, 257.

In bewilderment he wrote,

It is useless to deny or evade the fact that the vote has shown that the farmers, on whom the tariff reformers relied with such confidence . . . are at present either opposed to or indifferent to changes in the tariff, and that no serious change can be made until they are won over.⁶⁸

In an afterthought he hoped that the American farmer was not like his English counterpart who had once "thanked God that he was not open to conviction."

The editor overlooked a number of reasons, some obvious, and others less clear for the Democratic lack of success in the farm states. In some instances western farm editors just could not bring themselves to support the Mills bill which represented the Democratic effort for reform. The schedules alone were not the only reason that it was hard for Northwesterners to support the Democrats. No writer better explained the fierce loyalty which many midwesterners felt for the Republican party than did the editor of the *Abercrombie Herald* (North Dakota). Commenting on the election he stated:

It was indeed gratifying to see our Scandinavian friends come to the polls and cast a Republican ballot scarcely marred with the pencil. These sturdy sons of Scandinavia never enjoyed the privileges of a free and protected government until they set foot upon American soil, and that they appreciate our Republican form of government manifested itself when they walked to the ballot box as citizens of the United States and deposited therein their veto to

⁶⁸The Nation, XLVII (November 22, 1888), 403.

Grover Cleveland's free trade doctrine and his English sympathies. Thank God that these people are enlightened and have all the patriotism of the American citizen. May they be blessed for their wisdom in supporting the party that insures wealth, peace, and contentment for all time to come. You cannot find one speck of anarchy among these people nor do you hear a single complaint. No, they love our country and our laws, and there is not a people who would be more willing to lay aside the plow and shoulder a U. S. musket to preserve peace than these loyal men of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. They love our Stars and Stripes and we welcome them into the Republican fold.⁶⁹

The sectional character and leadership of the bill breathed new life into all the old divisive cliches, and made Democrats extremely vulnerable to the emotional attraction of "General" Harrison. Furthermore, the Allison bill had provided the gesture toward reform. Fortunately for the Republicans it was not passed, as the results would have been disastrous as they were two years later. But with no knowledge of the Allison measure, the traditionally Republican farmers followed the advice of the Chicago Tribune to let the Grand Old Party make good the pledge of tariff reform.

In his fight for a lower tariff, Cleveland may be adjudged as lacking in political ingenuity and savvy, but not sincerity. He told an aide two days after his defeat, that "I would rather have my name to that tariff measure than be president."⁷⁰ The President was not solely to blame

⁶⁹Quoted in footnote: Alma Tweto, "History of Abercrombie Township, Richland County," Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, III (1910), November 16, 1888, editorial from the Abercrombie Herald, 176.

⁷⁰McElroy, I, 299.

for his defeat in the farm states, as some events were out of his control. The Democratic party simply did not have the financial or party organization to meet the heavy work of the Republicans. Cleveland's gravest error was his seeming unawareness of the long and strenuous campaign conducted among farmers by his opponents, and his failure to move boldly when he did become aware of the situation. It is not unreasonable to assume, however, that even those farm states which cast their ballots against Cleveland voted for tariff reform, but wanted it accomplished under a Republican administration. This assumption takes on greater validity when studied against the events of 1890. Consequently, it is wrong to say that Cleveland's demand for a low tariff cost him the farm vote in 1888. Many westerners simply believed they would get reform from their own Republican party.

CHAPTER VIII

AGRICULTURE AND THE MCKINLEY BILL

Grover Cleveland received the news of Harrison's election at midnight on election day eve. While deeply disappointed, the President was not embittered by the Republican victory. Cleveland believed that although ostensibly his defeat stemmed from the tariff question, that on the real issue - tariff reform - the party would inevitably triumph.¹ The President was not the only one who saw ultimate victory in his defeat, as his mail was heavy with words of praise and encouragement. "Your defeat is more honorable than their victory. Your December message rang the death knell of protection" wrote L. J. Harbison.² A letter from Wisconsin told the President that he had been "sacrificed at the expense of tariff reform - what you have accomplished will show year by year," concluded the writer.³ "Give the tariff plenty of attention, don't let it drop or

¹Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 439.

²L. J. Harbison to Cleveland, November 20, 1888, Grover Cleveland Papers.

³Fred G. Flower to Cleveland, November 8, 1888, in ibid.

you will demoralize the party. No hope for revenue reform except in the Democratic party," warned a New York correspondent.⁴

The Congress which reconvened on December 5, 1888, met only until March 4, 1889. Although the substitute measure for the Mills bill was discussed, no tariff legislation was passed as neither Cleveland nor the Democratic house would have approved the protectionist Senate bill. A constitutional objection finally doomed the measure, as the House refused to accept a revenue bill that had originated in the Senate.⁵

The penetrating chill of a Virginia winter met the members of the 51st Congress as their trains arrived in Washington in November and December, 1889. The Washington weather must have seemed inhospitable to the newly elected members as they awkwardly set about the task of learning the ways of Washington. For freshmen Republican Congressmen the reception was a bit warmer than for their Democratic counterparts. The Grand Old Party was in control of all three branches of government for the first time since 1875 and an air of conviviality and comradery prevailed.⁶

⁴John Bigelow to Cleveland, November 8, 1888, ibid.

⁵Stanwood, 241-242.

⁶Morgan, 123.

Benjamin Harrison's first message to Congress carried the same confidence expressed by Congressional Republicans. The President recommended a revision of the tariff, but cautioned that it was "a matter of great delicacy because of its direct effect upon the business of the country. . . ." ⁷ Harrison admitted that a reduction might cause a momentary disturbance, but declared that the protective principle should be maintained and fairly applied to the "products of our farm as well as our shops." ⁸

The President's concern for bringing agriculture under the "protection umbrella" might have gained impetus from the mail he received shortly after his election. An Illinois farmer wrote that Harrison should take time to listen to farmers for at least a moment, and contended that agriculture needed help against the combinations and monopolies which robbed them. He told the new Chief Executive that if Cleveland had taken that "stand, the end result of the election might have been different." ⁹ A similar letter asked the President to use principle as a guide in formulating tariff policy. Ignore the vested interests who try to

⁷Richardson, VIII, 5473-5474.

⁸Ibid., 5474.

⁹A. C. Barnes to Harrison, November 18, 1888, Harrison Papers, 47, Library of Congress.

influence legislation; the necessities of life, such as salt, food, lumber, and tin should be admitted free, concluded the writer.¹⁰

The tariff remarks in Harrison's message were read with nodding approval by a majority of the Republicans. Their narrow victory of 1888 was still a vivid memory, and the battle had been fought and won on the question of protection. The "voice of the people" had spoken, declared Henry L. Dawes.¹¹ The Republicans wasted no time before turning their attention to the tariff. Speaker Thomas Reed quickly named William McKinley of Ohio as Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means. Other Republicans were Nelson Dingley, Jr. of Maine, Sumner E. Payne of New York, Julius C. Burrows of Michigan, Thomas M. Bayne of Pennsylvania, Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin; John Gear of Iowa; and Joseph E. McKenna of California. Democratic members were John G. Carlisle of Kentucky; Roger Q. Mills of Texas; Clifton R. Breckenridge of Arkansas; Roswell G. Flower of New York; and Benton McMillin of Tennessee.¹²

It was fitting that McKinley should fall heir to the position formerly held by "Pig Iron" Kelley. McKinley

¹⁰Wayne MacVeagh to Harrison, November 16, 1888, ibid., 47.

¹¹Henry L. Dawes, "A Year of Republican Control," The Forum, IX (March, 1890), 24.

¹²Stanwood, 259-260.

deeply admired the old protectionist chieftain, and had watched and studied the tactics of the Pennsylvanian for 14 years.¹³ McKinley, like Kelley, spent long hours pouring over the complicated schedules and figures, and the evenings when he set his work aside, he enjoyed entertaining the lobbyists and businessmen who eagerly sought the ear of the "Major." Above all else, the Ohioan deeply believed in the protective tariff, and he was never quite able to understand the cynicism with which his colleagues viewed requests for higher duties. Steeped in the traditional and leary of the unconventional, to McKinley anything but protection was anathema.¹⁴ The growing internationalism of the late 19th century frightened McKinley and he suspected that many of these ideas came from free trade colleges and universities. "I would rather have my political economy founded upon the everyday experience of the puddler or potter than the learning of a college professor," he declared.¹⁵ Thus in the winter of 1890 the Ohioan turned quickly to his task.

McKinley decided immediately to hold open hearings before presenting a bill to Congress. This action was taken in part as a direct slap at the Mills bill which Republicans

¹³Tarbell, 185.

¹⁴Margaret Leech, In the Days of McKinley (New York: Harper Brothers, 1959), 21, 38, 36.

¹⁵Ibid., 24.

had called a "dark lantern" measure.¹⁶ The hearings were begun on December 26, 1889, and continued until shortly before the Committee reported on April 16, 1890. Unfortunately, the testimony taken by the Committee is less than satisfactory for evaluating western farm attitudes, as a majority of those who testified were from the middle and New England states.¹⁷

J. H. Brigham, Master of the National Grange, appeared and pled for more protection on behalf of all agriculture. He cited the necessity of higher duties on barley, eggs, cheese, butter, cattle, hogs, sheep and horses.¹⁸ A study of the testimony reveals that northeastern farmers feared Canadian competition. F. Lansing of New York argued for higher duties on barley and hay, the cash crop of his region. Lansing did not believe however, that wheat, corn, pork or beef could benefit from the tariff because of the heavy exports by the United States. Alexander J. Wedderburn of the Virginia Grange argued that if the nation had declared for protection, agriculture deserved a "proportionate share."¹⁹ One strong voice against higher duties was J. W. Bollinger of Pennsylvania who contended that the farm depression resulted from the tariff

¹⁶Stanwood, 261.

¹⁷U. S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, Revision of the Tariff Hearings, No. 176, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1889-1890, 851-909.

¹⁸Ibid., 877-886.

¹⁹Ibid., 860-861.

and he complained that nearly everything the farmer had to buy was increased in price by the tariff. Bollinger claimed:

That the farmer is asked to pay the "lions share" of the twelve millions of taxes annually collected to protect a few Louisiana cane raisers, . . . Carolina rice farmers . . . Michigan and Wisconsin lumbermen . . . and . . . an imaginary tin mine to be discovered way out West somewhere, perhaps in the dim future, of which the farmer hears about every second year, about the time congressmen are elected.²⁰

Despite Bollinger's strong statements, the majority testimony gathered in hearings from farmers and other agricultural spokesmen revealed a strong pro-tariff sympathy.²¹ Nonetheless, it is odd that the Republican controlled Ways and Means Committee failed to obtain testimony from western farmers. The incongruity of the action lies in the fact that it was in western farm states where politico-industrial alliance of the Republican party expended such great efforts to maintain its hold on the agricultural vote in 1888. There are two or three possible reasons for this attitude by the party. First, the Republicans might have been so obligated to industrial interests for the 1888 victory, as Democratic critics charged, that they had no alternative but to pass a highly protective measure.²² Secondly, McKinley and others

²⁰Ibid., 891.

²¹Ibid., 889.

²²George C. Vest, "The Hopes of the Democratic Party," North American Review, XCIX (November, 1889), 547.

undoubtedly believed that prolonging the hearings was unnecessary as the decision to extend protection to a number of agricultural commodities had probably already been decided. Furthermore, there was little chance of a defection by any large number of midwestern Congressmen as many had received extensive help in their campaigns from the protectionist American Iron and Steel Association. Finally, tariff leaders could have assumed that the "educational" campaign of 1887-1888 had been so successful that farm loyalty to the Republicans was assured.

That G.O.P. leaders could have assumed this appears almost inexplicable when studied against the happenings of 1889 and early 1890. Moreover, the events of this period go far in proving that the farm revolt in the midterm election of 1890 was not a sudden uprising against the tariff, but merely the climax of a long period of discontent. Actually, the disaster was only narrowly avoided in 1888 when many farmers had threatened to move into the Democratic party. Their reason for not doing so was that their own representatives were advocating reform, and Republican national spokesmen promised the same.²³

Farm newspapers and journals repeatedly hammered at the injustice of the tariff and trusts throughout 1889

²³Horace S. Merrill, William Freeman Vilas, Doctrinaire Democrat (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1954), 155-156.

and 1890. The American Nonconformist never tired of explaining the injustice of protection to its Kansas readers. The editor argued that the "king of monopoly in the interest of a high protective tariff bought and paid for a certain number of votes, now the voters must pay back on the installment plan, which is no shirt, no clothes . . . without tribute to the high protective system so profitable to monopoly."²⁴

In an editorial entitled the "Trusts Must Go" The Prairie Farmer joined the fight against concentrated capital. The editor called for national and state legislation to police the coal, sugar, and whiskey combinations. This journal complained that the "greedy maws" were never satisfied, and always called for more plunder. The editor noted, however, that Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois, and Michigan had begun to take action against the monopolies.²⁵ The Prairie Farmer centered much of its criticism on the binder twine trust. In a March editorial the journal announced that the twine trust planned "to squeeze more than a million dollars out of the pockets of the western farmers" in 1889. The editor explained that this was not through legitimate business, but by extortion.²⁶

Speaking to a farm meeting at Bloomington, Illinois, in May, 1889, Jonathan Periam, editor of The Prairie Farmer

²⁴The American Nonconformist, January 17, 1889.

²⁵The Prairie Farmer, LXI (January 18, 1889), 40.

²⁶Ibid., (March 23, 1889), 177.

pointed to the tariff as a major cause of agricultural distress. Periam admitted that he had long believed in the tariff, but emphasized the hardship it worked on farmers.

The abolition of the tariff on sugar for six or twelve months would burst the obnoxious sugar trust. It would have broken the twine combination in its infancy, and the same tactics would in turn abolish every trust that this country is cursed with. They have made us in reality, the worst taxed people on the face of the earth.²⁷

The strong denunciations against the "twine barons" were not limited to Illinois, but were heard throughout all the western farm states. In Clay County, Kansas, agrarians organized the Farmers Protective Association, and pledged to pay no more than 12 cents per pound for quality twine. Two hundred farmers meeting at Hiawatha, Kansas, in April, 1889, advocated handbinding, and pledged to support the Farmers Alliance in its fight against the twine trust.²⁸ Similar accusations were made in Minnesota when the Farmers Alliance of Granite Falls, Minnesota, passed a resolution stating that "we believe the low price of all our products is owing largely to the fact that powerful monopolies, greedy trusts and unscrupulous corporations, have got control of the market" ²⁹ A letter to the Nonconformist from Essex,

²⁷Ibid., (May 4, 1889), 288.

²⁸The American Nonconformist, April 11, 1889; Ibid., April 4, 1889.

²⁹The Great West (St. Paul, Minnesota), December 20, 1889.

Iowa, laconically described the plight of the farmer of that state: "I don't know what the happy farmers of Kansas are doing, but I do know that the farmers of Iowa are feeding beef and pork for the manure, and are paying taxes twice a year on the manure."³⁰ Perhaps this pithy note explains why a year later the Iowa Agricultural Report wondered about the feasibility of an inexpensive stove that would burn corn for fuel.³¹

Undoubtedly, the militancy of the farm press and community resulted in part from the growth of the Farmers Alliance, as Alliance membership swelled rapidly in Minnesota, Kansas, Illinois, Indiana and Nebraska in 1889 and 1890.³² With its national organization and burgeoning membership, the Alliance provided farmers with a voice which commanded attention on the political scene. Moreover, midwestern agrarians accepted far more readily the denunciation of the tariff when made by one of their "own kind," than criticism by a junketing Democratic politician. Jay Burrows, President of the Northern Alliance and editor of the weekly paper, The Alliance, was extremely influential among western agrarians.³³

³⁰The American Nonconformist, June 6, 1889.

³¹Herman C. Nixon, "The Economic Basis of the Populist Movement in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XXI (July, 1923), 388.

³²Haynes, 239-244; Hicks, 102-103.

³³Ibid., 118.

Speaking before a farm meeting at Cowley County, Kansas, Burrows delivered a scathing indictment on the hypocrisy of protection.

Some papers say everything is dependent upon the farmer, he is the backbone. They come out and tell you it is honorable, and tell about the country home life - how nice it is, and tell you that you are doing well enough - and they congratulate the people on their condition - Good God of Heaven! what sort of condition? I want for the farmer some of the protection the other fellow gets - 40 per cent. I don't like protection to be confined to a certain class; one class gets all and the other class don't get anything. The fellow who is protected has been eating out of the spoon long enough; I want it awhile, and if you'll give each of us a spoon I'll be dogged if I can't eat as much as he can.³⁴

Burrows, like the majority of farm leaders, refused to accept overproduction as a cause of agricultural distress. He told a Grand Alliance meeting at Winfield, Kansas, that "the cry of overproduction is all bosh." Go to western Kansas or southern Illinois and see the starving farmers and coal miners, how can any one cry overproduction, he asked.³⁵ Right or wrong, the evangelistic fervor of the farm spokesmen fell like music on the ears of bedraggled farmers. Nodding heads greeted the charge that the farmers' wealth was quietly slipping away from them "to line the pockets of a class of men who speculate upon the necessities of every man and

³⁴The American Nonconformist, October 31, 1889.

³⁵Ibid., October 24, 1889.

woman who have to buy any articles of household necessity."³⁶

The infectious enthusiasm was picked up by the farm press and it dutifully reported speeches of rural leaders. "We are fighting against class legislation" stated Henry L. Loucks of the Dakota Farmers Alliance. "We are not working for retaliation but salvation" concluded the Dakotan.³⁷ Shall farmers strike and raise only enough for their own needs, asked the editor of the Nonconformist? Perhaps, he mused, if the world is dependent on agriculture for the necessities of life that this would awaken the country to the agrarian's plight.³⁸

The low farm prices only added to the discontent in the West. Although George B. Loring, ex-commissioner of Agriculture, told the country in May, 1889, that farming paid, most agrarians bitterly disagreed. Prices on farm commodities in 1889, and wheat in particular, dipped from the slight rise of 1888. In Kansas wheat averaged 83 cents per bushel throughout 1888, but fell to 52 cents in 1889. Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Indiana, and Illinois all showed lower wheat prices in 1889. Much of the time, however, the farmer was more interested in the exchange value of his crop than he was in the exact price it would bring. Farmers in

³⁶The Prairie Farmer, LXI (October 26, 1889), 688.

³⁷The American Nonconformist, July 25, 1889.

³⁸Ibid., June 13, 1889.

Kansas, for example, complained that it took a bushel of wheat to buy four pounds of granulated sugar, and pointed to the fact that sugar was protected by a trust and wheat was not.³⁹ The tariff, they argued "made millionaires" and allowed a dozen men to make 40 per cent on articles the Kansas farmer had to buy and it still forced them to sell in a free trade market. "It don't wash," contended the editor, "and the next time you hear of Kansas giving a plurality of 82,000 in favor of a system that fills the newspaper with sheriff sales . . . it will be another class of voters than the present ones that are tilling the Kansas farms."⁴⁰ The Northwestern Farmer seconded the accusation of the Nonconformist and stated that only farmers in Minnesota and Dakota who voted for the tariff were wool growers. He argued that "the farmers and stockmen of the entire northwest who gave to these states their Republican majorities, are low tariff men, if we except one class - the wool growers."⁴¹ Even The Bulletin, the protectionist organ, admitted that Kansas farmers complained of vicious legislation and threatened to back their demands with 100,000 ballots.⁴²

³⁹G. B. Loring, "American Farming, Does It Pay?" North American Review, CXLVIII (May, 1889), 360-371; Report of the Secretary of Agriculture (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1890), 320; The American Nonconformist, July 4, 1889.

⁴⁰Ibid., December 5, 1889.

⁴¹The Northwestern Farmer, V (September, 1889), 192.

⁴²The Bulletin, XXIII (March 26, 1890), 82.

It is impossible to believe that Republican leadership could have missed or ignored the spirited and critical accounts of the tariff which appeared in the rural press throughout 1889. Furthermore, a number of prominent Republican leaders and Congressmen were aware of the anti-tariff movement among farmers. Iowa, although having elected only one low-tariff advocate to the 51st Congress, was a seedbed of tariff reform by 1889. The Iowa Republican state convention acknowledged for the first time, although indirectly, that tariffs raised prices. The convention stated that it was the duty of the state and federal governments to enact laws against "trusts and combines which unnaturally raise prices."⁴³ Even more disturbing was the election of Democrat Horace Boies to the governorship in 1889. Boies was the first Democrat elected since the formation of the Republican party in 1856, and had campaigned for prohibition and a lower tariff.⁴⁴ Boies became increasingly outspoken on the protection question and blamed the "agricultural decay" of Iowa on the tariff.⁴⁵

Iowa's leading Senator, William B. Allison, was aware of the restlessness among his farm constituents. As early as December, 1888, Joseph Medill informed Allison that

⁴³The Nation, IXL (August 22, 1889), 139.

⁴⁴Jean B. Kearn, "The Political Career of Horace Boies," Iowa Journal of History, XLVII (July, 1949), 215-216, 220.

⁴⁵Speech, William B. Allison Papers, Box 392.

downward revision of the tariff was a necessity or Republicans would lose the House of Representatives by a "decisive majority" in 1890.⁴⁶ By March, 1890, Medill was even more emphatic; "the tariff must be materially lowered on the necessities of life by this Congress, else the people will elect one next fall which will attack it with a meat ax," he concluded.⁴⁷ Medill was not alone in his fears as Allison was literally flooded with mail that warned of impending disaster should Congress ignore farm demands.

A January letter cautioned Allison that Congress's decision would effect not only the midterm election, but also the presidential race of 1892. This writer told of his long trip through Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, and Wisconsin "where the subject of tariff is vigorously discussed" by farmers and merchants. The people want lower duties, declared the writer, and if Republicans do not act, the voters will revolt.⁴⁸ In February, 1890, Louis T. Michener, Harrison's campaign manager in 1888, wrote Allison a worried letter concerning the Alliance movement. Michener reported that the depression among farmers was real, and that corn was selling for as little as 10 cents per bushel in parts of Kansas and Nebraska.

⁴⁶J. Medill to Allison, December 6, 1888; Ibid., Box 263.

⁴⁷Ibid., March 5, 1890; Ibid., Box 278.

⁴⁸Jacob Dietz to Allison, January 25, 1890; Ibid., Box 274.

The Indianan was uneasy about the political effects of the farmers depressed condition.⁴⁹ A letter from Ben Johnston a Keosauqua, Iowa, lawyer, minced no words. Johnston reminded Allison that "the tariff matter is assuming vast importance to our farmers." The attorney explained that Iowa agrarians believed that the Republican party had failed to help them. If the party wanted to retain their loyalty, this Congress had to come to their aid, declared the writer. Emphasizing his point, Johnston stated: "they are no longer an ignorant class but read and think for themselves, and there is a widespread feeling that a reduction should be made and they are not going to be satisfied with anything else, they say." The attorney assured Allison that he had his information from "good solid farmers," and that they would no longer tolerate 15 or 16 cents for oats, and 17 to 18 cents for corn while the eastern trusts thrive at their expense. Johnston predicted that farmers would elect a Democrat to replace protectionist John Gear.⁵⁰ At this time, Gear was a member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Allison was not the only Republican informed on farmers hostility to the tariff, nor was Iowa the only state where discontent was rife. Wisconsin, too was the center

⁴⁹Louis T. Michener to Allison, February 15, 1890; Ibid., Box 278.

⁵⁰Ben Johnston to Allison, March 19, 1890; Ibid., Box 276.

of a vigorous anti-tariff movement. In January, 1889, Wisconsin Democrats had urged the party chairmen in Illinois, Iowa, and Indiana to circulate The Tariff Reform Advocate, a low tariff sheet printed both in English and German and published in Jefferson, Wisconsin. This paper called for the gospel of reform. Moreover, James A. Sanders, publisher of The Breeders Gazette, helped to champion the farm cause in Wisconsin. Sanders wrote Secretary of Agriculture, Jeremiah Rusk, in February, 1890, and urged that Rusk make arrangements for American farmers to market surplus beef and meat products abroad.

Sanders told the Secretary that "if you could but sit by my side for one week and read the blasts that come in from farmers all over the country upon this matter, you would not consider that I am the least impatient."⁵¹ The publisher cautioned Rusk that he saw "a tide that bids fair to carry the bulk of western farmers (aside from the wool growers) into an attitude of opposition to the Republican party."⁵² Rusk appears to have given little thought to this warning as he announced on May 2, just 5 days before debate opened on the McKinley bill, that "longrun self interest demands that we should afford him [the farmer] the benefits of a

⁵¹Quoted in Merrill, 161.

⁵²Ibid., 161.

home market for all that he may be able to produce on our own soil."⁵³

Ohio, Indiana, and Minnesota were sites of tariff agitation, also. John Sherman of Ohio was told that the "farmers of the nation are in a restless state," and that many Ohio agrarians wanted lower duties on sugar.⁵⁴ In the President's home state of Indiana, Democrats won decisively in the April township elections. While these results undoubtedly surprised Harrison, the President had been told of "unusual activity of the Democrats among the Grangers in the western states."⁵⁵ Farmers who attended the Alliance meeting at St. Paul in March, 1890, were treated to a rousing low tariff address by Republican Governor William R. Merriam. Other speakers who appeared told of the "great tariff reform movement" in surrounding states.⁵⁶

In the meantime, if the agricultural community eagerly awaited the introduction of the McKinley bill, it was not reflected in the farm press. Moreover, articles appeared in papers and journals which attacked the theory that tariff provided a great home market for agriculture.

⁵³The Great West, May 2, 1890.

⁵⁴C. H. Larry to John Sherman, ? 1889, John Sherman Papers, 500; News clipping, ibid., 492.

⁵⁵The Nation, L (April 17, 1890), 305-306; Republican State Central Committee, Portland, Oregon, to Benjamin Harrison, March 19, 1890, Benjamin Harrison Papers.

⁵⁶Edward White, "Republican Politics, 1888-1891," 451; The Great West, March 14, 1890.

The Industrial Age of Duluth, Minnesota, criticized the "monopolist press" which pretended to be interested in the farmers' welfare. This trick will not work any more, declared the editor, "it has lost all its charm" for farmers.⁵⁷ The Kansas City Times admitted that perhaps the tariff had developed industry, but the farmer had paid for the expenses of the "scheme."⁵⁸ In an unsympathetic editorial The Philadelphia Times chided farmers for their complaints about the tariff. Agriculture is merely "reaping the logical fruits of their suicidal theories," stated the editor. He declared that their farms would continue to diminish in price "just as long as they insist that every thing they use and wear shall be largely taxed for the benefit of others."⁵⁹

The national platform of the Grange demanded equality of tariffs, and argued that farming deserved protection proportionate to that of industry.⁶⁰ The American Nonconformist was less restrained in its editorials, and often attacked Congressmen who supported high tariffs. The Nonconformist believed that no "intelligent farmer" favored the tariff, and that large numbers of agrarians would be

⁵⁷The Industrial Age, Duluth, Minnesota, April 12, 1890.

⁵⁸Quoted in The American Nonconformist, November 14, 1889.

⁵⁹Ibid., January 9, 1890.

⁶⁰The Prairie Farmer, LXII (January 25, 1890), 49.

found in the Democratic ranks where tariff reform was possible.⁶¹ The paper complained that agriculture competed with the world, while manufacturing continued to profit from the tariff. The cry of free trade will no longer scare farmers, warned the editor.⁶² The Nonconformist sarcastically told its readers that it was good news that Senator Allison had been re-elected. "Let Iowa have another six years of Allison, it will be the most effective box of pills ever administered in that state," he concluded.⁶³

Despite the seeming widespread farm opposition to higher duties, the bill which was placed before Congress in April, 1890, was the highest in United States history. The measure was officially titled an "act to reduce the revenue and equalize duties on imports and for other purposes." The theory was simple, no imports, no revenue. The opening address by McKinley clearly illustrated party feeling. In foreboding tones, he declared that the Republican majorities in Congress proved that the people had voted for protection. "The people have spoken; they want their will registered and their decree embodied in public legislation."⁶⁴

⁶¹The American Nonconformist, January 16, 1890.

⁶²Ibid., January 23, 1890.

⁶³Ibid., January 30, 1890.

⁶⁴U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1890, 4247.

The McKinley bill offered agriculture a complete schedule of protective duties for the first time in American history. Rates were increased on products previously protected. Wheat was raised from 20 to 25 cents a bushel, corn from 10 to 15 cents per bushel, oats 10 to 15 cents per bushel, barley 10 to 30 cents per bushel, and broom corn from the free list to \$8 a ton. Other increases included beef, pork, and mutton at 2 cents per pound, bacon and ham 5 cents per pound, eggs 5 cents per dozen, milk 5 cents per gallon, and butter 6 cents per pound.⁶⁵ An integral part of the bill, and one of great interest to farmers, was the free admission of raw sugar which they hoped might result in lower sugar prices. Republicans, however, saw this as an opportunity to greatly reduce the treasury surplus, since sugar was the greatest revenue producer on the dutiable list. Furthermore, the measure promised domestic producers a two cent a pound bounty which in turn would draw money from the Treasury.⁶⁶

McKinley told farmers that the agricultural community had received the "careful attention" of the Ways and Means Committee. "Every power of relief within the tariff's ability to give has been done," he stated. Extolling the

⁶⁵Carson, 21-25.

⁶⁶Taussig, Tariff History, 276.

wisdom of the new policy, the Ohioan assured farmers an increase of \$25,000,000,000 in profits because of the prohibition of Canadian imports. The foreign market in time would be lost to India and Russia, McKinley argued, and even now the home market was threatened. To safeguard the home market was the only sensible course of action. "What American can oppose this worthy and patriotic objective" he asked.⁶⁷

In the concluding comments of his speech McKinley told of his emotional attachment to protection.

With me this position is a deep conviction, not a theory. I believe in it and warmly advocate it because enveloped in it are my country's highest development and prosperity; out of it come the greatest gains to the people, the greatest comfort to the masses, the widest encouragement for manly aspirations, with the largest rewards, dignifying and elevating our citizenship, upon which the safety and purity and permanency of our political system depend.⁶⁸

The course of the McKinley bill through Congress to its enactment on October 1 was a torturous one. The speeches given by western Representatives and Senators during the long debate carry a tone of futility and inevitability. Seldom did a western Representative attack the protective tariff with the intensity of a James Weaver, Knute

⁶⁷U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1890, 4247-4254.

⁶⁸Ibid., 4255.

Nelson, or Milo White. Yet, at this very time hostility was greater among their farm constituents than ever before. Typical of the reserved comment was the understatement of Preston Plumb of Kansas when he said that "so far as I know the sentiment of that western country, it is not especially hungry for tariff legislation."⁶⁹ Senator Paddock of Nebraska was but little more emphatic. Paddock admitted that he had reservations about the bill and reiterated that western Republicans had stood by the party in 1888 in the belief that any reduction should come from the Grand Old Party.⁷⁰ Representatives Springer of Illinois and Dannel of Minnesota also declared that they had misgivings about the measure, but favored the protection it gave to farm commodities.⁷¹

Only Democrat Walter Hayes of Iowa raised his voice in strong protest. Hayes believed that the "pretended protection" given to farmers by "imposition of a tariff upon farm products is a snare and a delusion and, where it has any effect is against his interests."⁷² Yet, it was not their own representatives, but southerners who took up the cudgel on behalf of the western farmer. J. D. Sayers of Texas

⁶⁹Ibid., 8104.

⁷⁰Ibid., 9455-9456.

⁷¹Ibid., 4489; U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1890, Appendix 793-794.

⁷²U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1890, 4527, 4531.

argued that the new duties of 15 cents on corn and oats and 25 cents on wheat could not do agriculture the slightest bit of good. Benton McMillin of Tennessee accused the Ways and Means Committee of getting together to "delude" the farmer. McMillin charged that McKinley did not want agriculture to understand what the bill would do.⁷³

The most damaging evidence was presented by R. Pierce of Tennessee as he quoted a letter from J. M. Thompson, Master of the Illinois Patrons of Husbandry:

Farmers in these organizations and out of Illinois have been studying the tariff question, 7-10 have become dissatisfied and do not regard the schedule with much favor. The Ways and Means Committee seems to believe they can pacify the farmer by putting a tariff on wheat, corn, oats, beans, barley, and cabbage. Now any farmer of ordinary sense or intelligence should know this is a humbug, and will not raise the price of his products one cent, nor would \$5 per bushel on corn help him a particle. If they are honestly trying to help us why don't they vote us a bonus on these products as they do sugar.⁷⁴

Even though western Congressmen worried about the repercussions from the measure, the bill passed the House by a vote of 164-142. Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, and the two Dakotas were unanimous in approval, while Iowa cast one nay, Illinois five and Indiana nine.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., 4979, 4326-4327.

⁷⁴Ibid., 4348-4349.

⁷⁵Ibid., 5112; The Prairie Farmer, LXII (May 24, 1890), 328.

Yet, if some western Representatives were blind to the disaster which might befall their party as a result of the bill, James G. Blaine, Secretary of State, was not. He had watched Republicans edging toward what he believed certain political disaster should the measure become law and his interest in the legislation was both political and diplomatic. In his position, he was deeply involved with proceedings of the Pan American Congress, which met in Washington during 1889-1890. At the close of the meeting in April, 1890, some 15 of the republics indicated a desire for reciprocal agreements with the United States. Blaine then urged President Harrison to declare American ports free to the products of American nations who would reciprocate.⁷⁶

As early as April 10, Blaine had written McKinley and asked that hides remain on the free list. If you do not, he stated, "it will benefit the farmer by adding 5 to 8 per cent to the price of his children's shoes." Blaine warned that "such movements as this for protection will protect the Republican Party into speedy retirement."⁷⁷ McKinley listened to the Secretary's pleas, but was cool to the idea

⁷⁶U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st. Sess., 1890, 6256-6259.

⁷⁷Quoted in Muzzey, 444.

of reciprocity and the bill passed the House with reciprocity provision.⁷⁸

There is doubt that Blaine was sincerely interested in reciprocity for the good of the nation, but his statements and letters became more and more political in tone as he pushed for reciprocity. The secretary realized that something had to be done to retain the West, and he hoped to make protection irresistible by associating it with reciprocity. Blaine believed that the surplus-producing farmer would welcome reciprocity.⁷⁹ Consequently, his failure to gain a reciprocity clause from the House did not stymie his efforts. While the measure was in the Senate, he wrote his old friend and colleague Senator W. R. Frye:

The charge against the protective policy which has injured it most is that its benefits go wholly to the manufacturer . . . and not at all to the farmer. Here is an opportunity where the farmer may be benefitted - primarily, undeniably, richly benefitted. Here is an opportunity for a Republican Congress to open the markets of forty millions of people to the products of American farms. Shall we seize the opportunity or throw it away.⁸⁰

Blaine contended that "there is not a section or a line in the entire bill that will open the market for another bushel of wheat or another barrel of pork."⁸¹

⁷⁸Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley, 397-430.

⁷⁹Murat Halstead, "The Defeat of Blaine for Presidency," Harpers Monthly, VI (December, 1895), 169.

⁸⁰Quoted in Tarbell, 205.

⁸¹Ibid., 205.

In a letter to the Boston Journal, Blaine explained the political significance of reciprocity. "The protectionist who opposes reciprocity in the form in which it is now presented knocks away one of the strongest supports of his system. The enactment of reciprocity is the safeguard of protection. The defeat of reciprocity is the opportunity of free trade," he concluded.⁸²

Blaine's reciprocity policy was welcome news to many farmers, some of whom had already asked for such a program. The Interstate Wheat Growers Association composed of farmers between Mississippi and Missouri Valleys and the states of California, Oregon and Washington had met in St. Louis in 1889 and passed a resolution in favor of reciprocity. They believed that if foreign duties were reduced, higher farm prices were possible.⁸³ The-Prairie Farmer announced its approval of reciprocity and declared that it was a good thing for farmers. The journal criticized the "McKinley organs - paid organs of the syndicates and monopolies" for trying to defeat reciprocity. Give the farmer of the United States a chance, concluded the editor.⁸⁴ Even President

⁸²Quoted in Laughlin and Willis, 190.

⁸³The American Nonconformist, October 31, 1889.

⁸⁴The Prairie Farmer, LXII (June 28, 1890), 408; Ibid., (August 16, 1890), 520.

Harrison was enthused by the public reception of reciprocity and admitted that a change had come over the Senate and House.⁸⁵

While the idea of reciprocity was applauded by most western farmers, few cheered when the House passed the McKinley bill. In an editorial of unparalleled criticism, the Great West attacked the Minnesotans who voted for the measure.

What was it Comstock, Lind, Dannel, Hall, Snyder - was it ignorance? or knavery that led you to misunderstand this bill, discussed for three months? We can tell you what it was - it was both! No more common-place, inefficient, contemptible little herd of nobodies ever ruled the destinies of an empire like Minnesota. For ignorance, broad, deep, long, compact, of all great national issues, of state craft, of economics, of progressive civilization we will put these five party puppets against any grogshop politicians in the country.⁸⁶

The Prairie Farmer was more restrained but no less critical.

The editor stated that the administration was not living up to its promises of tariff relief. He believed that the McKinley bill would give "the masses a stone instead of bread."⁸⁷ Discussing the measure in a later issue the journal stated that except here and there, we find pretty strong unanimity that it is one-sided . . . it is distinctly in the interest of the manufacturer rather than the producer."⁸⁸

⁸⁵Muzzey, 447.

⁸⁶The Great West, July 4, 1890.

⁸⁷The Prairie Farmer, LXII (May 24, 1890), 328.

⁸⁸Ibid., (June 7, 1890), 360.

He concluded that protection "is too good for the monopolist and too bad for the farmer."⁸⁹

Shortly after the bill reached the Senate, the Committee of National Grange presented a carefully worded petition to the House and Senate. The petition while not bellicose or truculent was couched in ominous tones. The petition insisted that agricultural interests were more important than man or party, and stated that no tariff law should discriminate against the farmer. If protection was inevitable, farmers demanded their fair share. If manufacturers continued to demand free raw materials, agriculture would demand free manufactured goods. "The time to turn down with impunity the agricultural interests of this country has gone by." In conclusion the petition stated "we are no longer a mass of unorganized hopelessness, dire necessity has forced us to organize for self-preservation, an Army more numerous than the combined armies of Grant, Lee, and Sherman is already in the field."⁹⁰

In the meantime, the bill remained mired in the Upper House, in part because the House refused to pass the silver bill proposed by the Senate. In retaliation, representatives of "silver states" then voted with the Democrats

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Farmers Review, XXI (June 18, 1890), 416.

to delay debate on the tariff. When it became evident that without a silver bill there would be no tariff, a compromise was struck, and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act passed on July 14, 1890.⁹¹ Only a few days earlier in July the Sherman Anti-Trust Act was enacted. Agitation against industrial consolidation had greatly increased, and the passage of the bill on July 2, 1890, regardless of how ineffectual, allowed Republicans to go before the voters as enemies of combinations and monopolies.⁹²

The prolonged debate on the tariff in the Senate resulted from the discussion of reciprocity amendment proposed by the Finance Committee. Democratic members attacked the failure of the proposed amendment to include trade with Canada. Justin Morrill rebutted the Democratic criticism with the claim that the United States did not want reciprocity treaties with countries whose exchange was based on agricultural commodities.⁹³ Senator George Vest of Missouri raised the strongest voice on behalf of the western farmer. Vest argued that once again farmers were being sold one thing and delivered another. The amendment is a sham, claimed

⁹¹H. Wayne Morgan, "Western Silver and the Tariff of 1890," New Mexico Historical Review, XXXV (April, 1960), 118-126.

⁹²L. A. Coolidge, An Old Fashioned Senator: Orville H. Platt (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 444; Sherman, 1070-1076.

⁹³U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1890, 7888.

Vest, South America was not in need of agricultural products, she was fast becoming our rival. The Missourian pointed to the inconsistency of Blaine's argument. Why, he asked, could the Secretary tell western farmers to look to South America for new markets, when his own colleagues admitted that the nations provided for their own domestic demands, as well as shipped to Europe.⁹⁴ Even more ironic, contended Vest, was the idea that we should have no reciprocity with England because she competed with us in manufacturers. "Mr. Blaine's market is in the wrong place," he concluded. The people of the West cannot give up the market in Great Britain. They are bound to have our corn and our wheat. The South American people do not want it and will not take it."⁹⁵

Democratic resistance only stalled the ultimate passage of the reciprocity amendment, and it was finally approved by a party vote of 33-28. The clause gave the President the right to levy duties on hides, sugar, molasses, tea and coffee, which were free in the McKinley bill, if any nation exporting any of these items to the United States was taxing American products at an unjust rate.⁹⁶

The final vote on the McKinley bill in the Senate came on September 30 when it passed by a 33 to 27 margin.

⁹⁴Ibid., 7905.

⁹⁵Ibid., 9938.

⁹⁶Taussig, Tariff History, 278-279.

Three western Republican Senators voted against the measure, Plumb of Kansas, Paddock of Nebraska, and Pettigrew of South Dakota. When questioned as to why he had deserted the party, Pettigrew simply answered that it was "distinctly an eastern measure."⁹⁷ Paddock believed the bill was certain to raise prices for his constituents, while Plumb of Kansas left Republican ranks largely because the bill failed to embody his plan for a customs commission.⁹⁸ On October 1, 1890, the bill which was signed into law, became the highest tariff of American history. Was this bill an "American bill," made for "American interests?" as McKinley once stated. Did the farmer believe his interests had been carefully guarded? Thirty-five days from the measure's enactment he gave his answer.

⁹⁷The St. Paul Daily Globe, October 2, 1890, 4.

⁹⁸U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1890, 9456; William Connelly, The Life of Preston B. Plumb (Chicago: Browne and Howell Co., 1913), 375.

CHAPTER IX

THE FARMER TAKES A STAND

The storm which struck the Republican party in November, 1890, may have come as a surprise to some, but the clouds had been visible on the western horizon ever since 1888 for those who cared to notice them. Despite repeated claims that the McKinley bill would be a great boon to the farmer, the agricultural community did not seem to agree. While the measure languished in the Senate, William Allison was repeatedly told that the farm-tariff situation in his state was critical. His long time friend, Samuel J. Kirkwood, wrote in June to tell him that farmers complained that they would receive "only a shadow of help from the tariff bill." They were tired of theories, he stated.¹

Republican Joseph Medill sent a pleading letter to the Senator on June 6, 1890. He asked Allison if the high tariff Republicans really believed the people wanted duties raised from 10 to 100 per cent. Was the bill put forward on

¹Samuel J. Kirkwood to William Allison, June 2, 1890, Allison Papers, Box 277.

the theory that the Republicans had so much strength in the western states of Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, that it can tell its "discontented members to go to," he queried. The bill will aid only eastern truck farmers, he argued, not the West where the help is needed. "Who is pushing the bill, who is the power behind the throne?" Medill charged that "certain greedy men are saying this is their best opportunity to thrust their hand still deeper into the people's pocket."²

Allison continued to hear bad reports in July. A letter from the Republican county chairman of Sibley, Iowa, explained that "farmers are bitterly opposed to the McKinley bill, but the fact remains they want lower and not higher duties." The writer expressed the fear that "our representative in Washington does not understand the feeling that prevails among his constituents."³ A month later, the panic of local Republicans was even more pronounced. E. E. Mack, Chairman of the Republican State Central Committee, told the Senator, "We need an avalanche of educational material," on silver and the McKinley bill. Mack complained that the opposition was doing well by attacking these issues. "We must have ammunition to fire back at them," he pleaded.⁴ The

²J. Medill to Allison, June 6, 1890, ibid., Box 278.

³G. W. Lister to Allison, July 23, 1890, ibid., Box 277.

⁴E. E. Mack to Allison, August 20, 1890, ibid., Box 277.

actions of Governor Boies were equally distressing to the protectionist cause. In appointing delegates to the National Farmers Congress held at Council Bluffs, August 26-29, 1890, he chose only advocates of tariff reform.⁵

Many of the letters Allison received in favor of the bill urged that it be passed immediately. Theodore Justice of the Justice Wool Commission wrote that some of his "Republican friends" were threatening to vote Democratic because of the long delay in passage. Justice complained that it was costing business money as long as shipments of foreign goods were coming now in order to avert the tariff. He cautioned that the 80,000 majority in Pennsylvania might be lost. Justice wanted the bill hurried through and an end to foolish talk "that money is being used among free trade Senators."⁶

Senator John Sherman received similar letters that called for rapid enactment of the measure. W. S. Strong told the Ohioan that delay of the bill threatened to stagnate the economy. "Pass the bill," he urged, "amend it later."⁷ J. H. Brigham, Master of the Patrons of Husbandry, reiterated Strong's plea to pass the bill quickly and told Sherman, "it

⁵Kearn, "The Political Career of Horace Boies," 226.

⁶Theodore Justice to Allison, July 24, 1890, Allison Papers, Box 276.

⁷W. S. Strong to John Sherman, May 28, 1890, Sherman Papers, 518.

is political wisdom to encourage them [farmers] into the belief that the Republican party will carefully guard their interests."⁸ Not all of Sherman's correspondents found the McKinley bill so appealing. J. H. Taylor of Oxford, Ohio, attacked the measure and Sherman in vindictive tones. He called the bill "hellish legislation" and asked Sherman to show where the "rotten McKinley bill" would find a market for a bushel of wheat. The bill was a fraud, he declared.⁹

Even President Harrison received a warning from Minnesota's Mark Dannel. Dannel informed the Chief Executive that agrarians were complaining because Harrison had failed to appoint a farmer to any prominent position. "With the Alliances so strong" Dannel stated, it might help if the President considered this course of action.¹⁰

Whitelaw Reid, a Republican and diplomatic representative to France also reported that the bill was highly unpopular. Reid was trying to open up new markets for American pork, but complained that when he talked pork, the French talked McKinley bill. Reid admitted that the measure weakened his hand at negotiation, and he attempted to have the Senate

⁸J. H. Brigham to Sherman, September 15, 1890, ibid., 527.

⁹J. H. Tyler to Sherman, September 15, 1890, ibid., 527.

¹⁰Mark Dannel to Harrison, July 24, 1890, Harrison Papers, 110.

lower some duties on French products. This, however, failed, and because of the McKinley bill France retaliated with a tariff that prevented American imports.¹¹

Actually, the storm of protest from agricultural papers and journals had never quieted since December, 1888. As the bill was being considered, criticism had increased in intensity and continued after passage. Even old line Republican papers abandoned the party and came out against the tariff. One such paper was the Atchison, Kansas, Champion, which for 30 years had defended protection. Yet on July 31, 1890, the editor declared against the protective tariff by stating the the West "cannot afford" protection. "The western farmer had no interest whatever in a protective tariff."¹² The Keokuk Gate City, (Iowa) pointed to the votes of Plumb and Paddock as resulting from the pressure of their constituents. In August the Omaha Bee reminded Congress that the "West has demanded, and still demands, a revision of the tariff, and it insists that it shall be downward and not upward."¹³

The Great West at St. Paul scoffed at the duty on wheat. The duty of 25 cents means nothing, said the editor, as the millers gain a drawback of 24 3/4 cents a bushel, under

¹¹Brigham, Duncan, "Protectionism and Pork: Whitelaw Reid as Diplomat, 1889-1891," Agricultural History, XXXIII (October, 1959), 190-195.

¹²Quoted in The Nation, LI (August 7, 1890), 101.

¹³Ibid., 122-123.

the old bill it was 18 cents. The whole thing is a fraud, he declared.¹⁴ In a biting editorial entitled "Tribute to Caesar," the St. Paul Daily Globe stated that:

The West with all its wealth is being plundered by the East. Eastern millionaires say give, give, and the sheriffs hammer begins to ring the charges. Going! going! going, on hundreds of little clustering homes in the West to supply the insatiable appetite of the tariff cow.¹⁵

In a trenchant comment the Madison, Wisconsin, Democrat attacked Robert LaFollette's tariff stand. "Young as he is, he has yet outlived his usefulness as a public servant and should be retired . . . he has utterly disregarded the demands of his constituency in this farming district and freely tied himself to the greedy Eastern monopolists."¹⁶ In November the Farm Stock and Home said free sugar was so much "humbug." People do not buy raw sugar; contended the journal, besides rates on hardware articles had been raised from 50- 100 per cent.¹⁷

On November 4, 1890, the Republicans were swept out of office by the Democratic party. Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois and Indiana elected 44 Democrats and

¹⁴The Great West, October 31, 1890.

¹⁵The St. Paul Daily Globe, (October 1, 1890), 6.

¹⁶Quoted in Merrill, 167.

¹⁷Farm Stock and Home, VI (November 1, 1890), 398-399.

Independents, and only 15 Republicans. Only two years earlier 44 Republicans and 18 Democrats had won at the polls. Wisconsin, too, shared in the Democratic victory as 8 out of the 9 Congressional seats were taken from the Grand Old Party.¹⁸

The Bulletin, long the articulate spokesman for industrial America, called the elections a "political revolution." Expressing shock and dismay, the editor declared that "the state and Congressional elections which occurred on November 4 are unparalleled in their surprises in the history of the country."¹⁹ While The Bulletin looked about to find something other than the tariff to blame, it met with little success. No other issue since 1880 had dominated the national scene like the tariff. From 1888 on the question received even greater attention in the agricultural and national press. Some attacks by farm papers might have been ignored, but when rural editors continually hammered at the problem, it revealed more than a passing dissatisfaction. Moreover, as the number of stories devoted to the tariff increased, so did the intensity of criticism. No editorial policy better illustrated the drift from a pro-tariff policy to open condemnation of the entire protective policy, with

¹⁸Haynes, 237; Merrill, 167.

¹⁹The Bulletin, XXIII (November 12, 1890), 324.

the exception of reciprocity, than did The Prairie Farmer. After the elections of 1890 the editor proudly announced how The Prairie Farmer had opposed the McKinley bill. "The farmers have spoken and the landslide has been terrific," he concluded.²⁰

Many American historians, like The Bulletin, have concluded that the farm action in 1890 was a spur of the moment revolt against the tariff. They have drawn these conclusions from a study of the vote of farm representatives. Yet, as a survey of the record has indicated, these representatives did not always vote as their constituents wished. Under the lash of the Republican party, and often indebted to industrial interests for election help, it was difficult and many times political suicide to vote for lower tariffs. No Congressman ever stated the situation more cogently than Richard Bland when he castigated western representatives for misleading the farmer.

We hear a great deal in this House and at the other end of the Capitol, especially do we hear it upon the stump when gentlemen go home and ask to be returned, of their devotion to the farmer. We hear a great deal of devotion to the agricultural interest by representatives here and elsewhere; but Mr. Chairman, when it comes to the test in some way or other that interest seems to have more friends and less

²⁰The Prairie Farmer, LII (November 22, 1890), 744.

done for it than any other class in the community.²¹

The Republicans charged that by misrepresentation the farmer had become frightened of the tariff. Tin peddlers supposedly had gone from town to town and had told of an imminent price hike on account of the new law.²² While this may or may not have been true, it is undeniable that implementation of the new law would have caused some price rise. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that Republicans profited as much as Democrats from any price jitters of the public. Many stores, like Field and Mahler of St. Paul, headed their advertisements with the caption "The New Tariff," and told potential customers of the coming price hikes of from 12 to 25 per cent. Other stores printed letters from wholesale houses telling of the impending price rise.²³ Even staunchly pro-tariff papers, while they editorialized that prices were not going up, carried large advertisements which convinced farmers that prices would rise.²⁴

²¹U. S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 1st Sess., 1882, 3675-3676.

²²The Winterset Madisonian, November 14, 1890.

²³The St. Paul Daily Globe, October 5, 1890, 2; Ibid., October 6, 1890, 4.

²⁴The Winterset Madisonian, November 21, 1890.

There is little doubt but that most farmers believed that prices were headed up, and whether they were or not, made little difference. On October 11, 1890, The Indiana Farmer, carried a full listing of items which it claimed would go up in price. Hosiery, tin ware, buttons, glassware, cooking utensils, lamp chimneys, and china were some of the goods named.²⁵ The editor of The Ohio Practical Farmer told his readers that some of the rumors concerning higher prices were true, but that it was difficult to tell how serious the price rise might be until the bill had operated for a time.²⁶ The Southern Planter argued that a favored minority, under the shield of the tariff, sold at the highest possible price.²⁷ "Boots and shoes are going up," stated the St. Paul Daily Globe. This paper explained that the increase resulted from the tariff law which not only affected shoes, but every other necessity.²⁸ Although the price question was important in the 1890 election, it seems doubtful that this could have brought in one month's time such heavy retribution against Republicans.

²⁵The Indiana Farmer, XXV (October 11, 1890), 8.

²⁶The Ohio Practical Farmer, LXXVIII (October 25, 1890), 268.

²⁷The Southern Farmer, LI (October 6, 1890), 471.

²⁸The St. Paul Daily Globe, October 31, 1890, 4.

The way midwest farmers cast their votes in 1890 did not result from a sudden decision.

The truth is that the farm-tariff issue in the western states finally crystallized by 1890, and might have sooner if agriculture had been united and possessed able leadership. A case in point was the Farmers Alliance through which agrarians conveyed their dislike of the tariff. This was especially true in Minnesota where farmers found the McKinley measure unbearable.²⁹ Likewise, a similar situation in Illinois revealed that the Grange distrusted the tariff, and the increase of prices on goods after passage of the McKinley bill solidified members' animosity and convinced them once and for all of the duplicity behind tariff legislation.³⁰

Kansas farmers were also unwilling to accept the McKinley bill. The election of William Peffer is significant on this point, as Peffer attacked the protective tariff relentlessly throughout 1890 in his paper The Kansas Farmer.³¹ Peffer's arguments could not have failed to arouse his farm

²⁹John D. Hicks, "The Peoples Party in Minnesota," Minnesota Historical Bulletin, V (November 1924), 541.

³⁰Scott, 18, 99; Destler, "Agricultural Readjustment and Agrarian Unrest in Illinois, 1880-1896," 110-116; U.S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., 1890, 4348-4349.

³¹Mahnken, "The Congressmen of the Grain Belt States and Tariff Legislation, 1865-1890," 205.

readers and his triumph over John Ingalls, who had represented Kansas since 1873, was no small vote of confidence. At the same time the American Nonconformist at Winfield, Kansas, advised Plumb to leave the Republican party. The editor said that Plumb was interested in the welfare of the people, which meant that he could not in "good conscience" serve in the Republican ranks. The Nonconformist doubted that tariff reform by Republicans was possible.³²

Nebraska, too, revealed its enthusiasm for reform when it elected a young lawyer named William Jennings Bryan who had campaigned on the tariff issue throughout 1889-1890. The Omaha World lavished praise on Paddock for his vote against McKinleyism and stated that his popularity was never greater in Nebraska. Moreover, the leading Republican newspaper in the state, the Omaha Bee, had severely criticized the McKinley bill as being detrimental to western farmers, and therefore urged lower duties, not higher ones.³³

The drift of sentiment was even more pronounced in Iowa where in 1889 Democrat Horace Boies had campaigned on tariff reform and prohibition. Moreover, the letters which Allison received, many from lawyers who were in close touch

³²Haynes, 251; The American Nonconformist, October 16, 1890.

³³M. R. Werner, Bryan (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1920), 64; Mahnken, "The Congressmen of the Grain Belt States and Tariff Legislation, 1865-1890," 204; Quoted in The St. Paul Daily Globe, October 2, 1890, 4.

with farmers, revealed the intensity of feeling against the tariff.³⁴ In Wisconsin it was very near the same story as two biographers of leading Wisconsin politicians credit the tariff with a significant role in the Wisconsin upset.³⁵

When Republicans reflected on the reason for their defeat, they, too, inevitably returned to the tariff as the most important cause. While Joseph Medill had predicted the catastrophe of 1890 a full two years earlier, his letter to Shelby Cullom registered disbelief. On November 25 he told Cullom "I did not think the blow would be a cyclone when I saw you just before the election. I knew that a storm was coming, but did not dream that its severity would be so dreadful. The thing to do this winter is repeal the McKinley bill"³⁶ Cullom was equally candid when he wrote President Harrison on November 11. He told Harrison that:

Any man in the country standing upon the doctrine of high protection would have been defeated. The people sat down upon the McKinley Tariff Bill two years ago, and they have never gotten up. They were thoroughly imbued, with the feeling that the party did not do right in revising the tariff up instead of down.³⁷

³⁴Ben Johnston to Allison, March 19, 1890, Allison Papers, Box 276.

³⁵Merrill, 169; Current, Pine Logs, 252, 254.

³⁶Quoted in Shelby M. Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service (Chicago: McClurg Co., 1911), 445.

³⁷Quoted in the Autobiography of Andrew Dickinson White, II (New York: Century Co., 1903), 259.

John Sherman heard similar explanations for the Republican defeat. A letter from Kansas City, Missouri, to Sherman stated that the "recent landslide" resulted in large part from the McKinley bill. The people believed it favored the industrialists at their expense. This feeling was intense in the West, the writer concluded.³⁸

The President himself was unsure of the reason for the defeat and was deeply concerned about the power of farm organizations. "If the Alliance can pull one-half of our Republican voters in such states as Kansas and Nebraska our future is not cheerful," he concluded.³⁹ Oddly enough, the President believed that the tariff had not hurt the party in his home state because of Republican victories in California and Ohio.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Michener had warned Harrison in October, 1889, that Republicans would lose in northwest Indiana.⁴¹

In a long letter on November 25 to Harrison, James S. Clarkson explained the reasons for the party's defeat. He told Harrison that the Democrats had captured a large number

³⁸W. I. Ewart to Sherman, November 13, 1890, Sherman Papers, 530.

³⁹Harrison to Howard Cale, November 17, 1890, 114.

⁴⁰Harrison Papers, 114.

⁴¹Michener to Harrison, October 29, 1890, Harrison Papers, 114.

of leading papers and magazines of the country, as well as some of the agricultural and trade papers. Democrats, he stated, had sent large numbers of documents directly to farmers. Clarkson admitted that some of the leading Republican papers in Nebraska and Kansas had defected from the Party.

Turning to agriculture, he told the President that the farmer had not shared in the prosperity of the last 7 years. Clarkson claimed that the farmer had not averaged \$500 a year for "labor and investments over and above his food and fuel supplied by the farm." He is in debt, argued Clarkson. "The farmer can no longer be held by the argument of protection and home market alone. The farmers must have more attention than we paid to him . . . ,"⁴² if we are to keep his loyalty, concluded Clarkson.

Much of Clarkson's analysis of the campaign was correct. Democrats had utilized the American Press Association, the A. N. Kellogg Newspaper Company at Kansas City, the Chicago Newspaper Union and its branches at St. Paul, Indianapolis, St. Louis and Detroit, and other cities to carry the message of tariff reform. Democrats estimated their circulation in the country and smaller towns and hamlets where they would reach farm readers was about 1,050,000.⁴³

⁴²Clarkson to Harrison, November 26, 1890, ibid., 114.

⁴³Wheeler, 201.

Republicans faced other problems in 1890 which hampered their campaign. Clarkson informed Allison in September that the Congressional Campaign Committee was near bankruptcy. It was impossible, Clarkson wrote, to pay even the expenses of those who spoke on behalf of the party.⁴⁴ He complained to John Sherman that when he asked Republican office holders for contributions, he had received only \$70. Consequently, the publication of tariff documents was slowed.⁴⁵ The lack of Republican campaign funds in 1890 is best illustrated by the plight of Senator Sewell of New Jersey. When he applied to the National Committee for financial aid, he was refused. He registered his disgust and dismay when he stated "what in thunder is the use of breaking our necks to pass tariff bills, if the people who are going to make everlasting fortunes out of the actions of the Republican Party, do not come up liberally to sustain it" ⁴⁶

The zeal of the industrialists was just not present in 1890, as it had been two years earlier. Perhaps the

⁴⁴Clarkson to Allison, September 11, 1890, Allison Papers, Box 273.

⁴⁵Clarkson to Sherman, October 20, 1890, Sherman Papers, 529; Matthew Quay to Michener, July 30, 1889, Michener Papers, Box 1.

⁴⁶Volwiler, "Tariff Strategy and Propaganda in the United States, 1887-1888," 94.

tardy action of the Senate in pushing the bill to enactment had cooled the ardor of business support. Moreover, industrial interests were still tired from the exhaustive campaign of 1888, and were eager to enjoy the benefits which a Republican victory had promised. Indifference might also have stemmed from the fact that the bill became law a month before the elections were held. Thus with their demands for protection answered, and the Presidency safe in Republican hands, many industrialists saw little cause for alarm. But the fact remains, the enthusiasm of 1888 was not present in 1890.

Yet it is doubtful that even with a tremendous effort in 1890, that Republicans could have turned the tide. As John Carlisle said in May, 1890, farm disgust with the Republican tariff policy was "so general that the wail of the farmer is heard in every part of the land."⁴⁷ Commenting shortly after the November results, Carlisle stated that it was useless to say the bill had been misrepresented. The Act was condemned because the people understood it, concluded Carlisle.⁴⁸ The farmer had taken a stand.

It had taken almost 30 years for the western farmer to decisively repudiate the protective tariff. Yet, since 1789

⁴⁷ John G. Carlisle, "Republican Promise and Performance," The Forum, IX (May, 1890), 248.

⁴⁸ John G. Carlisle, "The Recent Election," North American Review, CLI (December, 1890), 645.

and earlier agrarians had questioned the wisdom of such a policy for farm commodities. A number of factors aided in confusing the farmer when he attempted to make a decision on the issue. There was the patriotic and emotional appeal which the protective tariff held for the new nation. Any attempt at reduction brought the cry of "British free trade," and conjured up thoughts of greedy English merchants profiting at the expense of the American yeoman. While this tact was most effective in the pre-Civil War period, it was but little less potent in the late 19th century. Furthermore, the problem was not clear cut, and both parties clouded the issue by heaping derision on the views of their opponents. This only confused and perplexed the western farmer who did not grasp that the prices of farm products became fixed by the surplus sold in free trade markets. In essence, they bought in a protected market and sold in a free one.

The expansion of agriculture into the Mississippi Valley caused many farmers who intuitively distrusted the idea of protection to want to believe in it. Far from markets, isolated, and producing greater crops than ever before, the home market theory was especially appealing. Agrarians were told that a protective tariff would allow new industries to develop, which in turn meant greater markets and higher prices for surplus farm products.

By the late 'fifties, farm complaints were drowned in the drama of the approaching war. Moreover, northern and western agrarians prospered during the conflict and the tariff question was forgotten.

Nonetheless, the Civil War stands as a watershed in tariff history as a new philosophy evolved during the period of tumult. The controversy shifted from the point of protection versus revenue only, to simply the kind of protection to be afforded. The industrial order had expanded and profited under wartime tariffs and sought to prevent the removal of compensatory duties, and, if possible, extend them. This was only feasible, however, with the votes of the farm representatives in Congress. Consequently, great effort was expended to convince the agricultural community of the necessity of a protective tariff.

The agricultural recession which started in the late 'sixties and worsened in succeeding decades caused farmers to scrutinize more carefully the protective policy. Many farmers challenged the protective theory by the 1870's. The tariff had not, they claimed, placed farm and factory side by side, nor had agriculture shared equally in the wealth produced by the tariff.

Farmers now argued that the tariff was a tax, which raised the cost of everything which they had to buy, but added

no value to what they sold. Leaderless and with no strong national organization, agriculture was unable to make its tariff views known or to influence the course of legislation. Not until the election of Grover Cleveland was the farm-tariff problem pointed up as a national issue. Cleveland's leadership helped to crystallize the question. Farm criticism of the tariff intensified in the 'eighties as business consolidation increased. It seemed to the agrarian that virtually all the necessities of life which he was forced to buy were controlled by large industries shielded by protective tariffs.

The repeated failure of Congress to lower duties only increased farm animosity. Nonetheless, the western agricultural states remained intensely loyal to the Republican party, and hoped that the G.O.P. would carry out its oft-stated pledge of tariff reform. But when Republicans chose to ignore farm demands once again in 1890, the retribution was swift. The farm states had demanded tariff reductions as early as 1869, but their efforts were continually stymied. Not until 1890 did the long years of patient waiting give way to independent action.

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William Boyd Allison Papers.

This collection is especially rich for a study of the farm-tariff problem in the post-Civil War years. It includes speeches, news clippings, and a dearth of valuable correspondence from prominent political leaders of the day.

Cambria Public Library, Johnstown, Pennsylvania

James M. Swank Collection.

This collection includes a few letters and fragmentary pieces of Swank's private correspondence. It also includes Swank's personal collection of tariff tracts and documents which were drafted and published from 1870 until the early years of the twentieth century. Included also are scrapbooks and reminiscences dealing with Swank's career as Executive Head of the American Iron and Steel Association. The collection also includes two of his books, History of the Manufacture of Iron in All Ages and Notes and Comments on Industrial, Economic, Political, and Historical Subjects.

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