

## Frédéric Bastiat

(1801-1850)

*Frédéric Bastiat was a French economist, known for journalistic writing in favor of free trade and the economics of Adam Smith, and for his forceful disagreement with Ricardian economics.*

*Note that this piece was written before the day of electric light. Among the terms that may be unfamiliar to you is “snuffers,” which are used to snuff, or put out, candles. Also, the author speaks of an increase in the use of tallow (for candles) leading to the necessity of an increase in the number of cattle and sheep. The connection is that tallow is made from the fat of these animals. Similarly, when he speaks of the increase in whale fisheries, the connection is that whale oil was used in oil lamps. The discussion of Lisbon oranges can be more clearly understood if one remembers that Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, is in a warm, sunny climate where oranges may be matured, as compared to Paris where oranges must be brought in and then artificially ripened.*

Frédéric Bastiat. 1845 (reprinted 1882). “Petition From the Manufacturers of Candles, Wax Lights, Lamps, Chandeliers, Reflectors, Snuffers, Extinguishers; and From the Producers of Tallow, Oil, Resin, Alcohol, and Generally of Everything Used for Lights.” *Economic Sophisms*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons.

### Petition of the Candlemakers

Petition from the manufacturers of candles, wax lights, lamps, chandeliers, reflectors, snuffers, extinguishers; and from the producers of tallow, oil, resin, alcohol, and generally of everything used for lights.

*To the Honorable the Members of the Chamber of Deputies:*

GENTLEMEN—You are in the right way: you reject abstract theories; abundance, cheapness, concerns you little. You are entirely occupied with the interest of the producer, whom you are anxious to free from foreign competition. In a word, you wish to secure the *national market to national labor*.

We come now to offer you an admirable opportunity for the application of your—what shall we say? your theory? no, nothing is more deceiving than theory—your doctrine? your system? your principle? But you do not like doctrines; you hold systems in horror; and, as for principles, you declare that there are no such things in political economy. We will say, then, your practice; your practice without theory, and without principle.

We are subjected to the intolerable competition of a foreign rival, who enjoys, it would seem, such superior facilities for the production of light, that he is enabled to *inundate* our *national market* at so exceedingly reduced a price, that, the moment he makes his appearance, he draws off all custom for us; and thus an important branch of French industry, with all its innumerable ramifications, is suddenly reduced to a state of complete stagnation. This rival, who is no other than the sun, carries on so bitter a war against us, that we have every reason to believe that he has been excited to this course by our perfidious neighbor England. (Good diplomacy this, for the present time!) In this belief we are confirmed by the fact that in all his transactions with that proud island, he is much more moderate and careful than with us.

Our petition is, that it would please your honorable body to pass a law whereby shall be directed the shutting up of windows, dormers, skylights, shutters, curtains, *vasistas*, *oeil-de-boeufs*, in a word, all openings, holes, chinks, and fissures through which the light of the sun is used to penetrate into our dwellings, to the prejudice of the profitable manufactures which we flatter ourselves we have been enabled to bestow upon the country; which country cannot,

therefore, without ingratitude, leave us now to struggle unprotected through so unequal a contest.

We pray your honorable body not to mistake our petition for a satire, nor to repulse us without at least hearing the reasons which we have to advance in its favor.

And first, if, by shutting out as much as possible all access to natural light, you thus create the necessity for artificial light, is there in France an industrial pursuit which will not, through some connection with this important object, be benefited by it?

If more tallow be consumed, there will arise a necessity for an increase of cattle and sheep. Thus artificial meadows must be in greater demand; and meat, wool, leather, and above all, manure, this basis of agricultural riches, must become more abundant.

If more oil be consumed, it will cause an increase in the cultivation of the olive tree. This plant, luxuriant and exhausting to the soil, will come in good time to profit by the increased fertility which the raising of cattle will have communicated to our fields.

Our heaths will become covered with resinous trees. Numerous swarms of bees will gather upon our mountains the perfumed treasures which are now cast upon the winds, useless as the blossoms from which they emanate. There is, in short, no branch of agriculture which would not be greatly developed by the granting of our petitions.

Navigation would equally profit. Thousands of vessels would soon be employed in the whale fisheries, and hence would arise a navy capable of sustaining the honor of France, and of responding to the patriotic sentiments of the undersigned petitioners, candle merchants, and so forth.

But what words can express the magnificence which Paris will then exhibit! Cast an eye upon the future and behold the gildings, the bronzes, the magnificent crystal chandeliers, lamps, reflectors, and candelabra, which will glitter in the spacious stores, compared with which the splendor of the present day will appear trifling and insignificant.

There is none, not even the poor manufacturer of resin in the midst of his pine forest, nor the miserable miller in his dark dwelling, but who would enjoy an increase of salary and of comforts.

Gentlemen, if you will be pleased to reflect, you cannot fail to be convinced that there is perhaps not one Frenchman, from the opulent stockholder of Anzin down to the poorest vender of matches, who is not interested in the success of our petition.

We foresee your objections, gentlemen; but there is not one that you can oppose to us which you will not be obliged to gather from the works of the partisans of free trade. We dare challenge you to pronounce one word against our petition, which is not equally opposed to your own practice and the principle which guides your policy.

Do you tell us, that if we gain by this protection, France will not gain, because the consumer must pay the price of it?

We answer you:

You have no longer any right to cite the interest of the consumer. For whenever this has been found to compete with that of the producer, you have invariably sacrificed the first. You have done this to *encourage labor*, to *increase the demand for labor*. The same reason should now induce you to act in the same manner.

You have yourselves already answered the objection. When you were told, the consumer is interested in the free introduction of coal, iron, corn, wheat, cloths, and so forth, your answer was, Yes, but the producer is interested in their exclusion. Thus, also if the consumer is interested in the admission of light, we, the producers, pray for its interdiction.

You have also said, the producer and the consumer are one. If the manufacturer gains by protection, he will cause the agriculturist to gain also; if agriculture prospers, it opens a market for manufactured goods. Thus we, if you confer upon us the monopoly of furnishing light during the day, will as a first consequence buy large quantities of tallow, coals, oil, resin, wax, alcohol, silver, iron, bronze, crystal, for the supply of our business; and then we and our numerous contractors having become rich, our consumption will be great, and will become a means of contributing to the comfort and competency of the workers in every branch of national labor.

Will you say that the light of the sun is a gratuitous gift, and that to repulse gratuitous gifts is to repulse riches under pretense of encouraging the means of obtaining them?

Take care—you carry the death blow to your own policy. Remember that hitherto you have always repulsed foreign produce *because* it was an approach to a gratuitous gift, and *the more in proportion* as this approach was more close. You have, in obeying the wishes of other monopolists, acted only from a *half-motive*; to grant our petition there is a much *fuller inducement*. To repulse us, precisely for the reason that our case is a more complete one than any which have preceded it, would be to lay down the following equation: + X + = - ; in other words, it would be to accumulate absurdity upon absurdity.

Labor and nature concur in different proportions, according to country and climate, in every article of production. The portion of nature is always gratuitous; that of labor alone regulates the price. If a Lisbon orange can be sold at half the price of a Parisian one, it is because a natural and gratuitous heat does for the one what the other only obtains from an artificial and consequently expensive one.

When, therefore, we purchase a Portuguese orange, we may say that we obtain it half gratuitously and half by the right of labor; in other words, at *half-price* compared with those of Paris.

Now it is precisely on account of this *demi-gratuity* (excuse the word) that you argue in favor of exclusion. How, you say, could national labor sustain the competition of foreign labor, when the first has everything to do, and the last is rid of half the trouble, the sun taking the rest of the business upon himself? If then the *demi-gratuity* can determine you to check competition, on what principle can the *entire gratuity* be alleged as a reason for admitting it? You are no logicians if, refusing the *demi-gratuity* as hurtful to human labor, you do not a *fortiori*, and with double zeal, reject the full gratuity.

Again, when any article, as coal, iron, cheese, or cloth, comes to us from foreign countries with less labor than if we produced it ourselves, the difference in price is a *gratuitous gift* conferred upon us; and the gift is more or less considerable, according as the difference is greater or less. It is the quarter, the half, or the three quarters of the value of the produce, in proportion as the foreign merchant requires the three quarters, the half, or the quarter of the price. It is as complete as possible when the producer offers, as the sun does with light, the whole in free gift. The question is, and we put it formally, whether you wish for France the benefit of gratuitous consumption, or the supposed advantages of laborious production. Choose, but be consistent. And does it not argue the greatest inconsistency to check as you do the importation of coal, iron, cheese, and goods of foreign manufacture, merely because and even in proportion as their price approaches *zero*, while at the same time you freely admit, and without limitation, the light of the sun, whose price is during the whole day at *zero*?