

The Tariff Commission, Agricultural Protection and Food Taxes, 1903-13

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EUROPEAN agriculture's typical reaction to increasing world competition in the late nineteenth century was to exert pressure on government for protection. In France, though the grain producer's concern about the heavy surplus of imports over exports was not stilled by the disappointing tariff of 1881, the rest of the 1880s saw the imposition or raising of duties on food, agriculture's voice being strengthened in the elections of 1885 and 1889. In the Meline Tariff of 1892, agricultural duties reached 25 per cent *ad valorem*, and were raised further in the late 1890s and 1910.¹ In Germany, virtually free-trade by 1877, the first tangible results of the change in mood occasioned by foreign competition and depression in the 1870s came in the tariff of 1880, after which increased agricultural protection was 'the most noticeable feature in the history of the German tariff',² though there was frequently friction between the large grain farmers who participated in the famous 'alliance of iron and rye' and the small livestock farmers who were less well served by the policy-makers. Specific duties on grain and flour increased five-fold between 1879 and 1888, despite falling world prices, and though there was some reduction under Caprivi in 1891-4 the *Bund der Landwirte* ensured that the primary objective of the 1902 tariff was a reversal of Caprivi's policies and a considerable shift upwards in agricultural duties. The tariff of 1905 went even

further in this direction.³ In both these countries, fear of an 'industrial state' and depopulation of the countryside provided a persuasive socio-economic rationale for a resurgent agrarian-based economic nationalism.⁴ In Russia, reaction to the liberalizing tendencies of 1824-70 came in 1876 and was generally intensified thereafter, especially in 1885, 1891 and 1903. By 1912 duties on food imports averaged 67 per cent *ad valorem*.⁵ Austrian and Italian commercial policy, though less extreme than Russian, followed the general return to protection, and in the frequent tariff wars between the continental powers agricultural products played a major role.

In Britain, alone among the major European powers, the landed interest was too weak to influence government, and in any case, as the Fair Trade League found in the 1880s, was somewhat divided on account of the feeling by some farmers of Liberal leanings that protectionism was the creature of large landlords.⁶ Probably more significant than such Ricardian suspicion⁷ was the feeling that protection was politically unattainable, and by the 1890s many farmers saw little prospect of preventing what more

¹ P Ashley, *Modern Tariff History*, 1904, pt III; E Golob, *The Meline Tariff*, New York, 1944, *passim*; M S Smith, *Tariff Reform in France 1860-1900*, Ithaca, 1980, pp 165-81, 199-200, 213-14.

² Ashley, *op cit*, pp 79-80.

³ *Ibid*, pt I; Ivo N Lambie, *Free Trade and Protection in Germany*, Wiesbaden, 1963; K D Barkin, *The Controversy over German Industrialization 1890-1902*, Chicago, 1970.

⁴ As exemplified in Adolf Wagner's *Agrar- und Industriestaat*, Jena, 1901 and Jules Meline's *The Return to the Land*, 1906.

⁵ M Miller, *Economic Development of Russia 1905-1914*, 2nd edn, 1967, pp 50-1.

⁶ B H Brown, *The Tariff Reform Movement in Great Britain 1881-1895*, New York, 1943, pp 144-5.

⁷ Under a crude Ricardian theory of rent, protection would allow a rise in rents until the landlord had appropriated the entire proceeds of a duty on foodstuffs.

outspoken spirits called the deliberate 'murder' of British agriculture.⁸

Agricultural patience was tested sorely when Sir Michael Hicks Beach's Corn Registration Duty (CRD), introduced to raise revenue in the Boer War, was removed in the budget of 1903.⁹ The anger amongst farmers, however, was of less immediate significance than the controversy in the cabinet over whether to retain the duty as a vehicle for introducing colonial preference, a controversy which gave the protectionist-imperialist movement in Britain what it had lacked in the 1880s — a political leader of national and international stature.¹⁰

Joseph Chamberlain's developing concern for imperial unity had been strikingly manifest by his decision to accept the post of Colonial Secretary in preference to that of Chancellor of the Exchequer in Salisbury's ministry of 1895. At the Colonial Office, and at the Colonial Conferences of 1897 and (especially) 1902, he had seen that unity could be promoted by means only of reciprocal trade preferences, since other methods such as closer co-operation in imperial defence or a 'Council of Empire' had been vetoed by the self-governing colonies.¹¹

Cabinet defeat on the CRD led Chamberlain to launch his Tariff Reform campaign in a speech at Birmingham on 15 May 1903. Free Traders were quick to force him to admit that colonial preference would require duties on British food imports, since food constituted the bulk of colonial exports.¹² Furthermore, they delighted in reminding farmers that Chamberlain's vision of vast imperial granaries with

preferential access to the British market offered British agriculture little comfort.¹³ But Chamberlain's Tariff Reform proposals were still vague and unformed, even after a more detailed speech at Glasgow on 6 October, and in December Chamberlain announced the establishment of an unofficial Tariff Commission of fifty-nine businessmen, whose brief was to construct a detailed 'scientific tariff' which would accomplish Tariff Reform objectives. The secretary of the Commission was to be W A S Hewins, ex-director of the LSE and a prominent historical economist.¹⁴

This article examines the efforts of the Commission's Agricultural Committee to devise an agricultural policy in line with overall Tariff Reform objectives. At the same time as the agricultural interest had to be satisfied, industrial and colonial interests had to be placated. Whether we see Hewins, and by implication the Commission he guided, as exponents of 'fairly conventional industrial protectionis[m]', or as being driven by an 'imperial vision',¹⁵ agricultural protection in itself was far from being their single overriding objective. Such considerations should not, however, lead us to underrate the concern of Chamberlain, Hewins and the Commission for agricultural welfare. Though the Unionist Party's retreat from food taxes in 1913 made it clear that agriculture was the main Cinderella in its policy on Tariff Reform, the Tariff Commission's earlier efforts to design remedial measures for the agricultural situation mark it out as the most pro-agricultural of all the Tariff Reform groups and factions.

But the task was not easy, and below we examine the constraints and limitations which conspired to defeat their purpose. In

⁸ Sir Wm E Cooper, *The Murder of Agriculture*, Letchworth, 1908; F A Channing, *The Truth about Agricultural Depression*, 1897, pp xii, 60-3; B H Brown, *op cit*, pp 145-52; Rider Haggard, *A Farmer's Year*, 1899, pp 413-4; *idem*, *Rural England*, 2nd edn, 1906, I, p x.

⁹ For Henry Chaplin's deputation to Balfour, see J Amery, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, V, 1969, pp 181-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chs 97-9.

¹¹ For a good short summary, see S H Zebel, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the Genesis of Tariff Reform', *Journal of British Studies*, VII, 1967, pp 138-41. Also, J E Kettle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences 1887-1911*, 1967, esp chs 2-3.

¹² *Parliamentary Debates*, CXXIII, 28 May 1903, 185.

¹³ A J Marrison, 'The Development of a Tariff Reform Policy during Joseph Chamberlain's First Campaign', in W H Chaloner and B M Ratcliffe (eds), *Trade and Transport*, Manchester, 1977, p 223.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

¹⁵ B Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform*, 1960, p. 208; cf I M Drummond, *British Economic Policy and the Empire 1919-1939*, 1972, pp 37-8. Both these authorities would acknowledge the overlap in Hewins's concerns and motivations.

Section I we chart the equivocal attitudes of farmers to Tariff Reform and briefly examine the mechanism established by the Commission to construct a Tariff Reform policy on agriculture which was at the same time more congenial to farmers and in line with wider Tariff Reform objectives of industrial regeneration and imperial consolidation. Section II examines the difficulties posed in aiding agriculture by either a duty or a bounty on wheat, whilst Section III analyses the problems encountered in trying to compensate for this through other provisions such as a tax on barley, and Section IV discusses the difficulties in trying to supplement the policy with politically acceptable non-tariff measures. Section V gives brief consideration to the fate of the Commission's proposals in the wider collapse of a Tariff Reform policy on agriculture.

I

At Glasgow Chamberlain had advocated a duty of 2s per quarter on foreign corn, a 'corresponding' tax on flour, and 'about 5 per cent' on meat and dairy produce. Maize and bacon were to be exempt, as were colonial products except for wine and fruit, which would receive 'substantial preference'. To offset any rise in prices, existing revenue duties (on tea, coffee, etc) would be reduced.¹⁶

In its examination and modification of these initial proposals, the Commission knew there was disquiet among farmers over aspects of the policy. Speaking at the Central Chamber of Agriculture's Annual Meeting, Rider Haggard feared Chamberlain's policy was 'not made . . . with any special reference to agriculture, and if agriculture did come in it would only be by a side wind'. Sir Edward Strachey feared any preferential deal with the colonies.¹⁷ Even Lord Onslow, president of

the Board of Agriculture and a cautious supporter of Chamberlain, remarked in an open letter to a tenant that he feared the spectre of free entry of wheat from 'millions of acres of colonial soil, yet untilled'.¹⁸ Several Chambers of Agriculture, including the Stockton, Cleveland, West Riding and Scottish Chambers, were known to be unhappy with Chamberlain's speech.

Farmers were fearful of being dupes in a policy which benefited only industrial and colonial interests, and were particularly concerned over the claim of some Tariff Reformers that the price of wheat might even fall if preference encouraged colonial production and exports more than it stifled foreign shipments to Britain.¹⁹ But Henry Chaplin, at the same time agricultural champion and strong Tariff Reformer, was determined that an equitable policy must embrace agriculture as well as industry. Replying to Haggard, he stressed the danger of 'one-sided' protection of manufactures as envisaged in Balfour's policy of 'retaliation'. At present, Chamberlain's policy was the best available, and Tariff Reform plans were still incomplete, still capable of expansion.²⁰

Thus Chaplin knew that support for Tariff Reform was for many in agriculture a tactical, even provisional move. As A H H Matthews, secretary of the Central Chamber, was to inform the Committee when a member, only about half of the forty-one Chambers and Farmers' Associations which passed resolutions on Tariff Reform between June 1903 and March 1904 endorsed Chamberlain's scheme unequivocally.²¹ Nevertheless, the Commission found it easier to recruit Agricultural Committee members than it did industrialists to sit on the main Commission, a sign that there was little opposition to Tariff Reform amongst farmers that could not be

¹⁸ *Morning Post*, 26 November 1903.

¹⁹ *Marrison, loc cit*, pp 222-3.

²⁰ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 1903; *Morning Post*, 15 December 1903.

²¹ 'Resolutions on Tariff Reform by Chambers of Agriculture' (undated typescript); C-756, Tariff Commission Papers (herein after TCP).

¹⁶ Reprinted in J M Robertson (ed), *The Collapse of 'Tariff Reform': Mr Chamberlain's Case Exposed*, 1911, pp 2-66, esp. pp 50-6.

¹⁷ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 and 8 November 1903.

met by improvement of the Glasgow proposals. Help from Matthews at the Central Chamber and, more clandestinely, from Onslow, Sir Thomas Elliott and Jacob Wilson at the Board of Agriculture, enabled a committee to be assembled without political embarrassment.²²

Conscious of the need to establish the reputation of the Committee as a true friend of agriculture, Chaplin sought to choose members who were prestigious in their localities, and who would be seen to possess expertise and authority.²³ He also ensured a significant departure from prevailing Commission practice. With manufacturing, the Commission pursued a methodology intended to establish whether the relevant British industry suffered under natural or institutional disadvantages which would render the claim for protection unjustified.²⁴ British industry should be protected only against unfair foreign commercial practices, not against classic 'comparative advantage'. This was difficult to maintain in the case of agriculture, given the low production costs of the New World.²⁵ But, as Matthews argued, 'It is either a good thing for Agriculture in this country to be flourishing, or it is not. I have never yet come across anyone who holds the latter opinion, so let it be granted that it is good.'²⁶ Accepting this naive but fairly early appreciation of the divergence between private and social costs

and benefits,²⁷ Chaplin was determined that the Committee should not waste its energies examining the state of British agriculture. To do so would merely duplicate the work of the two Royal Commissions on agricultural depression on which he himself had sat. Thus he ensured that the Committee's job was limited to examining the probable effects of Chamberlain's policy proposals on agriculture, ways of extending or improving those proposals, and the best ways of harmonizing any conflict of interest between agriculture and manufacturing.²⁸

Under Hewins and the full-time staff, the preliminary work of compiling and dispatching questionnaires was accomplished quickly, and by June 1904 replies were being received in considerable numbers, though the summer revealed a relative sparsity of returns from Wales and Ireland.²⁹ Efforts to remedy this proved successful in the case of Ireland, assistance being received from Sir William Goulding and various Irish local authorities,³⁰ but Welsh farmers remained 'very difficult to get at in such matters',³¹ and in the end only some forty-eight of a total of 2251 replies came from that country.³²

Initially, it was feared that farmers would be less able and less willing than industrialists to fill in and return the questionnaires, early drafts of which were criticized for being too complicated.³³ Such fears were apparently exaggerated, and Hewins wrote to Arthur Wilson Fox, a man well-versed in agricultural enquiry, of the 'excellent manner' in which farmers filled in the forms.³⁴ The

²² There were political difficulties of a kind in the appointment of William Frankish. A member of the Lincolnshire Chamber dominated by Lord Heneage, he was thought undesirable by some Commission members since he was associated with the view that Chamberlain's scheme would aid the farmer little. But Chaplin's demand that Frankish should be included to reassure the Lincolnshire farmers and disarm future criticism from that quarter prevailed. See Chaplin to Hewins, 5 March (telegram) and 6 March 1904; C-76(I), TCP. Also Lord Heneage to Ed, *The Times*, 9 August 1904.

²³ Of the sixteen active farmers on the Committee, acreage is known for ten. Only two of these (both in Ireland) farmed less than 1000 acres. See appendix, pp 186-7.

²⁴ A J Marrison, 'British Businessmen and the "Scientific Tariff": A Study of Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Commission 1903-1921', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1980, Chs 4 and 5.

²⁵ It was realized, however, that technical efficiency and yields per acre in Britain stood international comparison well. See *The Tariff Commission*, vol 3, *Report of the Agricultural Committee*, 1906, para 552 (hereinafter *Agricultural Report*).

²⁶ A H H Matthews, 'Agriculture and Preferential Tariffs', undated typescript, c1904, p 5; copy in TCP.

²⁷ Chaplin also had in mind, of course, the need for food duties as a prerequisite for imperial preference, and the necessity, as he saw it, for safeguarding food supplies in time of war.

²⁸ Chaplin to Hewins, 31 January and 4 March 1904; C-76(I), TCP. Also *Agricultural Committee Minutes* (printed), 8 March 1904; TCP (hereinafter ACM(P)).

²⁹ P Hurd to Hewins, 8 September 1904; C-174.1, TCP.

³⁰ See correspondence between Hewins and Goulding between September 1904 and November 1906; C-137, TCP.

³¹ *Agricultural Committee Minutes* (verbatim typescript), 28 June 1906, p 28; TCP (hereinafter ACM(VT)).

³² Southeastern and Midland counties (including East Yorkshire) provided 41.5% of the returns to the questionnaires, Northern and Northwestern counties 15.1%, Scotland 11.1%, Ireland 19.4% and Wales 2.1%.

³³ R W Hudson to Hewins, 16 March 1904; C-608, TCP.

³⁴ Hewins to Wilson Fox, 26 May 1905; C-1591, TCP.

selection of witnesses, too, went much more smoothly than in difficult trades such as cotton and chemicals. Some 146 agricultural witnesses were examined, thirty or so being directly nominated by local Farmers' Clubs and Chambers of Agriculture.³⁵

II

Free Traders such as Sir William Harcourt saw the landed interest as fervent supporters of Chamberlain because of their desire for a rise in the price of corn under protection, and Free Trade propaganda wisely and effectively fuelled the indignation of workers against a tax on bread, that most biblical of consumer goods. Free Traders hence treated a corn tax and a wheat tax as synonymous.³⁶

The Tariff Commission's Agricultural Committee, however, put little value on a tax on wheat in itself. Most members thought Chamberlain's proposed 2s duty too small to transform the profitability or scale of UK wheat farming, and in view of the fact that public hostility to corn duties was 'one of the great difficulties we have to meet',³⁷ they saw little scope for raising it enough to make any significant difference. Duties on the German scale (*c* 10s per quarter) were out of the question.

Mitchell Harris, the bacon curer, and John Stratton, the large-scale Hampshire farmer, were willing to abandon the wheat duty to aid political acceptance of a wider Tariff Reform policy. But, as Chamberlain remarked, the corn tax was 'almost the fundamental part' of Tariff Reform. Even he, however, admitted the almost symbolic nature of a wheat duty in his proposals. Since there was 'no serious foundation' for the fear that a 2s duty would raise prices, the 'lies' and 'misinterpretations' of the opposition would gradually be revealed for what they were. He admitted the duty's ineffectiveness, but

considered it unwise 'to run away in sight of the enemy'. Opponents who had so far:

... devoted themselves entirely to attacking us upon the wheat duty would... immediately begin to attack us upon the meat duty or something else of that kind: and the very fact that we appeared to be frightened at their arguments would give them encouragement...³⁸

Thus, the wheat duty was necessary as 'a sort of umbrella to protect us from [criticism of our] other taxes', and as a necessary prelude to colonial preference. One possible compensation for its inadequacy was a differentially heavy duty on foreign flour. The Agricultural Committee hoped this would aid small country mills, which had been declining rapidly for some thirty years with a consequent loss of rural employment.³⁹ Such hopes were in fact rather optimistic. A rise in the grain:flour ratio of imports⁴⁰ would have largely benefited the port miller. Given the capital intensity of the first-class roller mills at the major ports and the prevalence of overproduction around 1900,⁴¹ it is likely that even urban employment would have been little stimulated. Chaplin's additional objective, that an increase in the grain:flour ratio of imports would also improve the supply of offals available to British farmers (incidentally necessitating an export duty to prevent offals finding their way to Europe and returning as 'Butter and Bacon' to add to the misfortunes of British farmers) was also of doubtful benefit. As flour miller Joseph Rank stated, British farmers were well served already, only surplus bran and pollard being exported in spite of prices in Europe being 5s to 7s 6d higher even after heavy transport costs.⁴²

³⁵ ACM(I²), *passim*.

³⁶ 'Mr. Chamberlain's Proposals', *Free Trader*, 31 July 1904, p. 4.

³⁷ Chaplin, ACM(VT), 28 June 1906, p. 1; TCP.

³⁸ Tariff Commission Minutes (verbatim typescript), 11 July 1906, pp. 7-9, 14-16; TCP (hereinafter TCM (VT)).

³⁹ See remarks of William Cooper, TCM (VT), 11 July 1906, p. 11; TCP.

⁴⁰ This had happened under Hicks Beach's Corn Registration Duty, when there was a differential of 3d per quarter on wheat and 5d per quarter on flour.

⁴¹ H. W. Macrosty, 'The Grainmilling Industry: A Study in Organisation', *Economic Journal*, XIII, 1903, esp. pp. 324-8.

⁴² Chaplin to Hewins, 10 November 1906; C-76(II); Rank to Hewins, 18 March 1905; C-333, TCP.

Given that the Committee realized any practicable wheat duty would be of little benefit to agriculture, there was considerable support for a production bounty. This had been first mentioned by Sir Charles Follett,⁴³ a member of the Commission but not of its Agricultural Committee, and it was raised again at the joint meeting of the Commission and the Committee in July 1906, when Sir Walter Peace⁴⁴ suggested a bounty of £1 per acre on wheat.

Chamberlain, though realizing the popularity of such a proposal with farmers, argued that year-to-year changes in acreage would introduce uncertainty into government spending. His remark that a bounty 'would no doubt be a popular thing' with the electorate was probably disingenuous, designed to placate those on the Committee who supported one. More likely he agreed with Alfred Gilbey, of the wines and spirits firm, that bounties were, in the age of the Brussels Sugar Convention, regarded as 'the worst form of protection . . . and . . . very unpopular'. Chamberlain's opposition, however, did not lessen the appeal of bounties for many on the Committee. John Dennis, Covent Garden merchant and farmer, urged an indirect alternative — that agriculture should stake its claim on the revenues gained from the proposed duties on food and manufactures by demanding a reduction of taxes on agricultural land. Manufacturers, he argued, would welcome such a measure since 'those very funds which are being placed at the disposal of agriculturalists . . . would be funds which in the raising of them protected the manufacturers'. The more moderate view of Sir Samuel Boulton⁴⁵ that such a subsidy be limited to the revenue raised by the 2s wheat duty, or even 'a portion of it', received even wider support, not least from opponents of a direct bounty such as Gilbey. Dennis was not alone in the opinion that, without some form

of indirect bounty or subsidy, 'I fail to see entirely where the farmer . . . will be able to get any benefit whatever out of Tariff Reform.'⁴⁶

The prevailing fear amongst Committee members that agriculture stood to gain little from existing Tariff Reform plans was shown again in discussion of the treatment of colonial wheat. Chaplin had originally envisaged the Committee adhering to Chamberlain's Glasgow proposal that colonial corn should be admitted free. Opponents of this view wanted the old 1s Corn Registration Duty to be restored, and treated as an irreducible minimum.⁴⁷ Chamberlain was prepared to give ground on this, since 'it is a little hard upon [British farmers] that they do not get anything whatever', whilst free entry of corn from Canada and Australia might 'induce such an enormous increase in their production as to lower the price and leave the [British] farmers worse off than ever'.⁴⁸

Though this was a significant concession of principle, it left undecided whether the duty on foreign wheat should be 2s (as at Glasgow) or 3s (Glasgow plus the CRD). The majority of members favoured the latter, and when, subsequently, Chaplin coupled a 3s duty with a duty of 5s on foreign and 1s 8d on colonial flour in a motion from the chair, there was mild euphoria. But Gilbey and Stratton counselled caution, arguing cogently that the trivial economic advantage would not be worth the political hostility it would incur.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it is likely that Chamberlain and Hewins worked behind the scenes, aware not only of the public reaction to an increase in the proposed bread tax but also of the likely attitude of the Commission itself, mostly industrial and

⁴³ Recently retired Solicitor to HM Customs.

⁴⁴ Recently retired Agent-General for Natal in London.

⁴⁵ Chemicals producer, tar distiller and timber importer.

⁴⁶ TCM(VT), 11 July 1906, pp 17, 19-25; TCP.

⁴⁷ The opposition was led by Lord Desborough (formerly W H Grenfell, member of a prominent family of merchant bankers and owner of 12,000 acres), Bridges Webb (a London grain import merchant) and William Cooper (a Smithfield cattle merchant).

⁴⁸ TCM(VT), 11 July 1906, pp 11-17; TCP.

⁴⁹ ACM(VT), 31 July 1906, pp 37-9; TCP.

not agricultural in its interests.⁵⁰ When, by a cloudy and obscure process, the 2s proposal was revived and embodied in a draft report, Committee members were to learn, if they had not known before, of the considerable unspoken opposition to going beyond 2s. But they were also beginning to realize the wisdom behind restraint. All agreed with Hewins that a duty of at least 10s would be necessary to have any significant effect on UK wheat output, and that this was not only politically unrealistic but would also affect other branches of agriculture severely. In this sense, therefore, it seemed to make little difference whether 2s or 3s were finally chosen, and the choice was made on political grounds.

This disappointment strengthened the Committee members' resolve to secure an indirect bounty. The Committee's 'establishment' was prepared to countenance recommending full implementation of Chaplin's own Agricultural Rates Act of 1896,⁵¹ or the transference of the burden of expenditure on education, police and highways from local to national funds.⁵² But even such modest measures (Hewins later calculated that extension of rate relief under Chaplin's Act would only cost the Exchequer some £0.75m pa) posed a political difficulty. The need to provide compensating reductions in existing revenue duties, and the political opposition to the original Agricultural Rates Act,⁵³ boded ill for any attempt to extend rate relief. Thus, though

Chamberlain's scheme as it stood was realized to benefit industry much more than agriculture, any attempt to redress this by even such a modest indirect bounty would appear to the public as precisely the opposite — as conceding rate reductions to an interest group which had already been granted the iniquitous 'stomach tax'.

When Committee members discovered that the original draft report of October 1906 limited indirect aid to agriculture to such moderate measures, and rather hid them in the text to boot, they were furious. Their anger was surpassed by that of Commissioner Sir Walter Peace, who, in one of those rare moments of Tariff Commission history, even threatened a minority report. More radical members, such as Rouse Orlebar and John Dennis, wanted specific earmarking of 'some part of the proceeds of the new taxes' for agriculture. This would give farmers 'the impression that they are getting some benefit from Tariff Reform'.⁵⁴ But, more than that, supporters of earmarking doubtless appreciated that even a low earmarking ratio (say 10 per cent on an anticipated wheat duty revenue of £7-8m, equivalent to the £0.75m cost of rate reductions) would, with the principle established, have afforded farmers the opportunity of exerting pressure to raise the ratio. Furthermore, some on the Committee seemed to regard earmarking as a half-way house towards bounties, which even more would have put the salvation of farmers in their own hands.

Indeed, the Commission's leaders made strenuous efforts to resist suggestions of earmarking and bounties. It was made known that Austen Chamberlain, as an ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'looked very askance' at earmarking, a practice in any case unnecessary since both he and his father thought that increased revenues from Tariff Reform would allow greater subsidies to

⁵⁰ For differing analyses of interests on the Commission, see B Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform*, 1960, pp 101-4, and A J Marrison, 'Businessmen, Industries and Tariff Reform in Great Britain, 1903-1930', *Business History*, XXV, 1983, pp 148-78.

⁵¹ The Royal Commission of 1894-7 had recommended the removal of three-quarters of the rates on agricultural land, but the Exchequer had subsequently limited the reduction to one-half.

⁵² This suggestion, made by A H H Matthews, was based on a distorted interpretation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Local Taxation of 1896-1902. Like the Royal Commission's recommendations, the Tariff Commission's proposals were, in the event, much more cautious. See *Agricultural Report*, paras 368-9.

⁵³ J F Rees, *A Short Fiscal and Financial History of England 1815-1918*, 1921, p 178. A jaundiced cartoon in *Punch* depicted Chaplin transferring a large sack of rates from a massive rural cart-horse to an already creaking and overburdened urban ass. Reproduced in P J Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression 1870-1914*, 1974, p 61.

⁵⁴ ACM(VT), 9 October 1906, pp 16-26; 22 October 1906, pp 1-22; TCP.

agriculture out of the Consolidated Fund.⁵⁵ There was still considerable support for bounties, but since three of their strongest advocates, Boulton, Peace and Follett, were members of the Commission but not of its Agricultural Committee, heavy-handed chairmanship of the latter by Chaplin ensured that sufficient pressure could not be exerted to re-introduce them onto the agenda. When, at a later meeting, Lord Desborough observed that he 'though there was going to be a great push today for bounties', the secretary remarked cryptically that 'We have disposed of that.'⁵⁶ The majority had, quietly and resignedly, come to accept Matthews's view that bounties were 'for the time being . . . beyond the scope of practical politics'.⁵⁷

III

Given the difficulty of proposing a wheat duty big enough to provide material benefit to farmers, Hewins and Chaplin sought to recompense them in the barley duty. Physically, British barley output exceeded wheat output in 1890-1904,⁵⁸ and little was imported from the colonies, though field trials were under way in New Zealand and the north-west provinces of Canada, whilst India exported 'small quantities' and Queensland had just sent its first ever shipment to London.⁵⁹ Hence, imperial preference would be unlikely to erode the benefit to the farmer from Tariff Reform.

P R Gray, of County Kildare, saw the potential of heavy protection of barley counterbalanced by a compensating reduction in the beer duty. Charles Babington, of Watneys the brewers, thought the scheme both acceptable and workable, but it was less easy to satisfy the other drink interests.

⁵⁵ ACM(VT), 22 October 1906, p 20; TCP.

⁵⁶ ACM(VT), 9 November 1906, p 4; TCP.

⁵⁷ ACM(VT), 22 October 1906, p 25; TCP.

⁵⁸ B R Mitchell and P Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge, 1962, pp 86-7.

⁵⁹ Sir Jacob Wilson to Chaplin, 28 April 1904; C76(I), TCP. William Frankish to Hewins, 2 May 1904; C-1304, TCP. C Babington to Hewins, 3 November 1905; C-1836, TCP.

Alfred Gilbey, mindful of Chamberlain's exemption of maize as a food of the poor in his Glasgow speech, feared that a tax on barley would damage malt whisky distillers whilst benefiting grain spirit distillers. He suggested a compensating increase in the liquor duty on grain whisky to even the balance.⁶⁰

The Committee found it hard to obtain evidence to test the plausibility of such a scheme, since relations between the eleven large UK grain distilleries and the 149 malt distilleries were poor.⁶¹ But it was clear that, to harmonize interests, a tax on barley would have required a reduction of the beer duty and a tax on maize (or a reduction of the duty on malt- relative to grain-whisky). This would have damaged livestock feeders. As Chaplin summarized the position:

The Barley grower is injured by the exemption of maize from duty, because that will induce a larger use of maize in brewing. On the other hand the exemption of maize suits the feeders. The bacon curers complain of the exemption of bacon from duty, because their best food for bacon, namely barley meal, will be taxed. On the other hand, the duty on barley is the mainstay of the grower of grain because, while the duty on wheat will ere long be rendered ineffective by the increase of wheat from the Colonies, very little barley comes from the Colonies at present.⁶²

Taxing bacon and maize, to secure the important tax on barley, would have hit at the exemptions promised in the Glasgow speech.⁶³ Thus, Chaplin suggested a duty on barley imported for brewing but not on lighter, low quality, feed barley. The pig breeder would have his grievance removed, both his product and his feed remaining untaxed. But such a scheme was unacceptable to the bacon curer, Mitchell Harris, who had always been opposed to the exemption of bacon in the Glasgow scheme.⁶⁴ He doubted that bacon still constituted an

⁶⁰ P R Gray to Hewins, 16 June 1904; C-582, TCP. C Babington to Hewins, 3 November 1905; C-1836, TCP. Gilbey to Hewins, 25 January 1904 and 20 October 1905; C-203, TCP.

⁶¹ Gilbey to Hewins, 19 July 1905; Sir Thomas Dewar to Hewins, 12 October 1905; Hewins to Gilbey, 19 October 1905; C-203, TCP.

⁶² Unrilted typescript dated 3 August 1905; in C-76(II), TCP.

⁶³ TCM(VT), 11 July 1906, p 35; TCP.

⁶⁴ *Agricultural Report*, para 1111.

important food of the poor, in view of the recent rise in imports of frozen mutton and cheap Argentine beef. Furthermore, taxation of pork would merely intensify foreign competition in Britain's untaxed bacon market.⁶⁵

This forcible declaration of protectionist intent impressed Agricultural Committee members, though at the joint meeting of Commission and Committee the non-agricultural Commission members were less receptive. Only after consultation with Arthur Wilson Fox, whose reports for the Board of Trade had originally stressed the importance of bacon in the diet of farm workers,⁶⁶ were Hewins and Chaplin prepared to concede that even in rural areas labourers were increasingly substituting cheap imported meat for bacon.⁶⁷

The Committee was less willing, however, to introduce a distinction between malting and feeding barley. Though Babington had declared this perfectly possible, given that brewers already supplied the necessary returns to the Board of Trade, Matthews feared the possibility of evasion, whilst Hewins had received intelligence that a similar differentiation in the German tariff of 1905 had already proved unworkable.⁶⁸ Recommending a duty on barley equivalent to that on wheat, the *Agricultural Report*, as finally published, was to state blandly that the introduction of a differential would 'depend . . . upon many technical considerations which would have to be worked out by official experts'.⁶⁹

Thus Chaplin's scheme, whereby exemption of bacon and maize would be permitted by a differential duty on barley, and that thereby barley might be subject to a much higher duty than wheat to compensate for the acknowledged inadequacy of the wheat duty, was abandoned. Gray's suggestion of

4-8s per quarter on malting barley⁷⁰ could scarcely have been applied to feeding barley, since, at prices of 25s per quarter or less,⁷¹ this would have meant a duty of 16-32 per cent when, on other farm produce, the Committee was discussing and recommending duties of 5-10 per cent. Even with a 5-10 per cent tax on bacon, there was not the latitude for compensating barley feeders that changes in the liquor duties would have provided for the compensation of brewers and malt distillers.

From the farmer's point of view, however, the dropping of the proposal for a high barley duty at least had the advantage of bringing bacon and maize into the net of taxation — he could take comfort in a sort of residual blanket protectionism. Several Committee members were unhappy about the decision to subject maize to duty, Dennis even considering the Committee 'pledged' to honour Chamberlain's original proposal,⁷² but the determined Harris, now supported by Gilbey, was able to ensure that even Chaplin's suggestion that maize be taxed more lightly than other cereals was cast aside.⁷³

IV

Given the Agricultural Committee's protectionist sentiments, its tariff recommendations (Table 1) were only a moderate escalation of Chamberlain's Glasgow proposals, the most significant area of advance being the taxation of colonial produce. This moderation was partly ensured by the Tariff Commission establishment's victory in defeating bounties and earmarking and in keeping the wheat duty down to 2 shillings, and by the decision not to recommend a high duty on malting barley. It cannot be argued, however, that these decisions established a precedent for similarly moderate (5-10 per cent) duties on meat, dairy and market

⁶⁵ TCM(VT), 11 July 1906, pp 34-40; TCP.

⁶⁶ See, eg, Board of Trade, *Report on Wages, Earnings and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in the UK*, Cd 346, 1900.

⁶⁷ ACM(VT), 31 July 1906, pp 32-5; TCP.

⁶⁸ ACM(VT), 9 October 1906, p 30; TCP.

⁶⁹ *Agricultural Report*, paras 382, 394.

⁷⁰ Gray to Hewins, 16 June 1904; C-582, TCP.

⁷¹ *Agricultural Report*, Table 7, para 72.

⁷² TCM(VT), 11 July 1906, pp 44-5; TCP.

⁷³ ACM(VT), 31 July 1906, pp 36-9; 9 October 1906, p 30; TCP.

TABLE I
**Recommendations of the Agricultural Committee
 (Provisional Scale of Duties)**

	General Tariff	Preferential Tariff
Wheat	6d per cwt (c 2s per qr)	3d per cwt (c 1s per qr)
Barley	Duties equivalent to those on wheat	Duties equivalent to those on wheat
Oats		
Rye		
Maize		
Wheaten and other flour and meal		
Animals and meat, including bacon	General level to be 5% Specific duties equivalent in general to from 5% to 10% <i>ad val</i> : though in particular cases some duties when calculated may be found to be lower and in others rather higher than these limits	Subject to negotiation with the Colonies
Dairy produce including poultry & eggs		
Market garden produce including potatoes & hops		
Hay & straw		

Source: *Agricultural Report*, para 394

garden produce, since these were little discussed and there was already a consensus on meat (though not on live versus dead meat)⁷⁴ well before the wheat question was finally settled. This suggests, therefore, that even the more heavily protectionist sentiments on the Committee were relatively satisfied with 5–10 per cent on such products.

Indeed, the replies to the questionnaires printed in the *Agricultural Report* suggest that farmers were relatively well disposed to 5 per cent on meat. On wheat there was considerable diversity. 309 replies thought the 2s duty beneficial to agriculture though many felt that the main benefit would lie less in the price effect than in the stimulus to milling or in greater price stability. Thirty-nine thought a 2s duty useless unless

combined with reductions in agricultural taxation or production bounties. 187 farmers felt that 2s would be of little or no benefit, either because they feared a rise in feed prices or because they accepted the Tariff Reform argument that colonial imports would expand to negate the effects of the duty. Forty-one explicitly opposed exemption of colonial wheat, and 123 suggested that higher duties were necessary, 5–10s being commonly suggested. But replies on a 5 per cent meat duty were more favourable. The Committee printed 207 claiming this would be beneficial, and recorded another 158 of the same opinion. Thirty-one farmers thought a meat duty of little value unless combined with a reduction in agricultural taxes. Only seventy-five thought that 5 per cent on meat would be of no benefit at all, and, though a further eighty-two thought 5 per cent not sufficient, even here the suggestions were less extreme than in the case of wheat, 10 per cent being the most commonly cited figure.⁷⁵

But, in spite of recommendations replacing colonial exemption by colonial prefer-

⁷⁴ On the matter of discriminating between imports of dead meat, live cattle for slaughter, and store cattle, the Committee exhibited confusion, partly because of badly designed questionnaires and ambiguous replies, and partly because of a division of opinion on the Committee. See TCM(VT), 11 July 1906, pp 28–31 and ACM(VT), 22 October 1906, pp 39–43; TCP. For Austen Chamberlain's confusion on reading the *Agricultural Report* (relevant paras 385, 1894–1991), see his *Politics from Inside*, 1936, p 159. On the general history of the agricultural lobby against live cattle imports, see A H H Matthews, *op cit*, ch 2.

⁷⁵ *Agricultural Report*, paras 1532–1696, 1772–1893.

ence, measures to revive the milling trade, the inclusion of bacon and maize, and a proposal to reduce agricultural rates, it is clear that the Committee hardly thought it had improved the Glasgow policy sufficiently to restore agriculture's fortunes. Their overriding objective was to help win the initial political acceptance of Tariff Reform. They could bear the brickbats hurled at them by farmers who argued that the proposed duties would not raise prices because colonial imports would increase, since these were the very arguments that they, as Tariff Reformers, were using to convince the much larger non-agricultural electorate. Furthermore, many on the Committee saw its tariff schedule as only a beginning. It was a frequent Free Trade accusation that tariffs, once introduced, tended to rise,⁷⁶ and the private discussions of the Committee would, if made public, have provided some justification for the taunt. Even Chaplin thought that, under a Unionist government, public opinion and government favour might swing back towards the unloved farmer, and make 'a little bit more' possible later on.⁷⁷ William Frankish urged that the Committee's recommendations should not be so extreme as to 'prejudice other Interests than Agriculture. Our Duty and Interest is to get these small Duties established and leave the rest to the future.'⁷⁸

The recommendation of substantial 'non-fiscal' measures to aid agriculture (usually less non-fiscal than they appeared) was politically as difficult as the recommendation of higher tariffs. John Dennis's vision of 300 sugar refineries, at a capital cost of £15 m, totally displacing Britain's sugar imports,⁷⁹ depended at the very least on the existing revenue duty on sugar remaining in force, together with a government

guarantee that, should commercial production be established in the UK, the home excise duty then imposed would be kept as low as permissible under the Brussels Convention.⁸⁰ But Lord Denbigh, well-known for his experiments at Newnham, had failed in persuading even Balfour's administration to give such an undertaking, and he feared that a Liberal government would reduce or abolish the countervailing duty on bounty-fed European beet sugar established after Brussels.⁸¹ Tobacco was a similar case. As Tariff Commissioner Sir Charles Follett, retired Solicitor to HM Customs, wrote, a duty of 'many times its value' on imported tobacco coupled with an abolition of the home excise duty was 'almost too fundamental an attack on our present fiscal system to be brought in in this casual way'.⁸² Furthermore, the Tariff Reformers were hampered by Chamberlain's offer of removing the sugar duty and part of the tobacco duty, along with other revenue duties, as a quid pro quo to the consumer for taxes on other foodstuffs. Initially enthusiastic, even Chaplin lost his resolve.⁸³

Even where non-fiscal measures were not subject to fiscal constraints, there were equally intractable problems. The Commission establishment sought to avoid alienating the railway interest, favouring a recommendation that the Board of Agriculture be empowered to assist farmers bringing complaints before the Railway and Canal Commissioners.⁸⁴ But several members, led by Dennis who had had personal experience of a fruitless appearance before this tribunal, thought the legal

⁷⁶ Marrison, 'Development of a Tariff Reform Policy', *loc cit.*, p. 226.

⁷⁷ ACM(VT), 9 October 1906, p. 35; TCP. See also remarks of C J Phillips and A H H Matthews in ACM(VT), 22 October 1906, pp. 35, 41-2; TCP.

⁷⁸ Frankish to Hewins, 12 October 1906; C-1304, TCP.

⁷⁹ 'Sugar Production in the UK', 3 May 1904; copy in C-135, TCP.

⁸⁰ The Convention allowed for a differential of 2s 6d per cwt. With the revenue duty (in 1904) at 4s 2d, this would have required a minimum excise duty of 1s 8d per cwt.

⁸¹ Denbigh to Chaplin, 27 August 1906; C-76(II), TCP. Denbigh, 'The Possibilities of British Sugar Manufacture' (pamphlet, 1906).

⁸² Follett to Hewins, 5 November 1906, C-633, TCP. See also ACM(VT) 31 July 1906, p. 29, and 9 October 1906, p. 28; TCP.

⁸³ Chaplin to Hewins, 16 October and 10 November 1906; C-76(II), TCP. Also Charles Lyle to Hewins, 11 January 1910; C-1154, TCP.

⁸⁴ As argued in Haygarth Brown's minority report in *Report of the Departmental Committee on Railway Rates (Preferential Treatment)*, Cd 2959, 1906, LV, p. 41, paras 31-3.

definition of discrimination under the 1894 Railway and Canal Traffic Act was inadequate. Dennis's complaints of excessive rates and favourable treatment of imports on trunk lines leading from the ports mirrored the disquiet of the rural community⁸⁵ and had been endorsed in many of the replies to the questionnaires. To Dennis, the question of discrimination was inseparably linked with the more general issue of the level of freight rates on agricultural produce, and in the Railway Commissioners he discerned the expected Board of Trade bias in favour of the 'wealthy, powerful and highly organised railway interest'.⁸⁶

Sir Vincent Caillard, who had minor railway interests himself, gave the standard defence that imports arrived in large, well-packed consignments. Hewins, trying to conciliate both sides, argued that the situation was probably justifiable economically, but was not on that account desirable. Basing railway rates on costs incurred was, he realized, impossible ('The railway system is administered as a whole. It is impossible . . . to say what was the cost to the railway company of bringing me up from Putney this morning to Waterloo'), but he did advocate local organization of farmers and joined with Chaplin in suggesting a conference between railway managers and agricultural representatives.⁸⁷ These suggestions, subsequently incorporated into the Committee's final recommendations,⁸⁸ were received coolly by Committee members, partly because they were tainted with a co-operative flavour that most regarded as useless and partly because they tended to postulate an economic rationalism on the part of the railways that members were unwilling to concede.

⁸⁵ See P J Cain, 'Railways and Price Discrimination: The Case of Agriculture, 1880-1914', *Business History*, XVIII, 1976, pp 190-204; *idem*, 'The British Railway Rates Problem, 1894-1913', *Business History*, XX, 1978, pp 87-99; A H H Matthews, *op cit*, ch 7.

⁸⁶ ACM(VT), 31 July 1906, pp 5-12; TCP.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp 13-14; ACM(VT), 22 October 1906, pp 8-16; TCP.

⁸⁸ Local organization was to involve state assistance to chambers of agriculture to establish co-operative methods of handling.

Perhaps to try to propitiate members for the inadequacy of these 'non-fiscal' proposals, Chaplin subsequently sought approval for associating the Committee's *Report* with Jesse Collings's Land Purchase Bill (England and Wales), intended to grant low-interest loans to tenants wishing to purchase their holdings.⁸⁹ The Committee shared his enthusiasm in attempting to forge a link between Tariff Reform and Collings's bill, which was thought 'extremely popular' in rural areas:

. . . there is nothing in the world would bring a new fiscal policy [ie Tariff Reform] more completely to the front, and to the minds of the country, than a large addition of smallholders all over the kingdom. (Hear, hear.)⁹⁰

Subsequently, land reform along such lines was to become a more central part of Tariff Reform policy towards agriculture,⁹¹ and no doubt many Unionists hoped such a bill would 'cut at the very root of Socialism' and compete successfully against the Liberals' Land Tenure Bill.⁹² But, in terms of the narrower issue of a subsidy, it might be noted that Collings's bill would not have committed a Tariff Reform government to large public expenditure. After an initial outlay of some £12m, the fund would have revolved, the longer-run cost being measured by the differential between the 3 1/4 per cent rate on loans to farmers (as specified in the bill) and the rate at which the government borrowed.⁹³ Even had this differential been (an unlikely) 3 per cent, the recurrent cost would only have been some £1/3m *per annum*.

⁸⁹ Similar to Balfour's Land Purchase (Ireland) Act of 1903, the bill had originally been conceived as a way of reducing rural depopulation by encouraging smallholding, but had been modified until it provided for a maximum advance of £9000, enough to buy 450 acres at average land prices in 1906.

⁹⁰ ACM(VT), 22 October 1906, pp 35-7; TCP.

⁹¹ A Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903-1913*, Oxford, 1979, pp 199-201, 214, 263-4, 274-5.

⁹² J L Green (Secretary of the Rural Labourers' League) to Chaplin, 9 October 1906; C-76(11), TCP. Collings was President of the League.

⁹³ This would seem a sensible basis for calculating the cost even if such a scheme had been financed out of the revenue from new duties.

V

The vagueness of the presentation of the 'non-fiscal' recommendations in the *Agricultural Report*, and the preference exhibited for loans rather than outright subsidies, minimized their potential impact within the overall plan. The Commission establishment had avoided recommending that orgy of spending of the new protective taxes in direct aid of agriculture that several members sought openly, and all perhaps desired.⁹⁴ But it had introduced the concept of agricultural subsidies into the arena of Unionist policy and politics, and it had done so without thwarting Chamberlain's plan for compensating reductions in revenue duties. Coupled with the advances over Glasgow in the tariff schedule, especially the inclusion of colonial grain and bacon and maize, these changes sought to placate those of the agricultural interest who were derisive of the size of the duties, fearful of the spectre of increased colonial imports, and contemptuous of agriculture's subordinate role in Tariff Reform.

Hewins was jubilant at the 'magnificent reception' of the *Report*, informing W S Fielding, Canadian Minister of Finance, that it disproved the assertion that British farmers were hostile to preference.⁹⁵ The Chamberlain family joined in the air of celebration.⁹⁶ And there is little doubt that, though the advocates of bounties had been defeated, most Tariff Commission and Agricultural Committee members felt that, in the prevailing political climate, the *Report* represented a realistic extension of Tariff Reform proposals on agricultural policy.

But in the wider political world the Commission's agricultural policy was less successful. Though Balfour did progress

beyond his pre-1906 policy of retaliation on manufactures, Unionist Party consensus on a Tariff Reform policy including food taxes was unstable.⁹⁷ Even the Tariff Reform League was divided over the 1s duty on colonial corn, and early in 1907 T A Brassey's motion supporting it was lost to Sir Joseph Lawrence's defence of the original Glasgow policy. In 1908 Lawrence was to claim that taxation of colonial wheat had 'never been adopted by the League'.⁹⁸ Though some prominent Unionists such as Austen Chamberlain, Bonar Law, Viscount Ridley and Alfred Milner endorsed the 1s duty,⁹⁹ Tariff Reformers and Unionists were divided over it in the January 1910 election campaign.¹⁰⁰ After this defeat, even whole-hog Tariff Reformers came to doubt the advisability of the 1s duty. When Balfour, under increasing pressure, abandoned it in April 1910,¹⁰¹ his retreat was resisted by Chaplin and Hewins and blamed for 'a great revival of political activity among agriculturalists all over the country'.¹⁰² But (according to one hostile critic) the TRL was in full agreement,¹⁰³ and even Austen Chamberlain conceded, since 'We grow so little wheat in these days that even the farmer in most parts of the country is to be reckoned a consumer rather than a producer of wheat.'¹⁰⁴

Abandoning the 1s duty raised doubts about the place of the remaining food duties in Unionist policy. Balfour's conversion of 'what had been a radical approach to the problems of imperial unity into a conservative policy related primarily to domestic affairs',¹⁰⁵ particularly the fight against

⁹⁴ An estimated £0.75m pa to finance rate reductions, plus £1m pa to finance Collings's bill (say £0.33m pa recurrent cost plus £0.6m pa to service interest charges at 5 per cent on the outlay of £12m) would have constituted 0.6-0.7 per cent of total government expenditure in 1905-13.

⁹⁵ Hewins to Chaplin (telegram), 26 November 1906; C-76(II), TCP. Also Hewins to Fielding, 20 November 1906; Hewins Papers.

⁹⁶ Mary Chamberlain to Hewins, 24 November 1906; Neville Chamberlain to Hewins, 25 November 1906; Hewins Papers.

⁹⁷ For the best treatment of Tariff Reform within the Unionist Party after 1906, see A Sykes, *op cit*, chs 5-12.

⁹⁸ Lawrence to Caillard, 15 May 1909; Lawrence to Hewins, 21 February 1908; C-7350, TCP.

⁹⁹ 'Minutes of Committee Proceedings'; TCP.

¹⁰⁰ W E Dowding, *The Tariff Reform Mirage*, 1913, p 108.

¹⁰¹ N Blewett, *The Peers, The Parties and The People*, 1972, p 160.

¹⁰² G L Courthope, cited in Sykes, *op cit*, p 217.

¹⁰³ W E Dowding, *op cit*, p 108.

¹⁰⁴ Chamberlain interpreted the retreat on the 1s colonial duty as applying only to wheat, not necessarily to oats and barley. See his *Politics from Inside*, 1936, p 227.

¹⁰⁵ A Sykes, *op cit*, p 217.

socialism and the need for revenue, left food taxes vulnerable to modification on pragmatic grounds, and in November 1910 he accepted the widespread pressure from within the party for a referendum on Tariff Reform. Bonar Law, his successor as leader from November 1911, succumbed in stages to steadily rising pressure centred in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and abandoned food duties as official party policy on 7 January 1913, to give traditional party concerns such as Union with Ireland a greater chance of success.¹⁰⁶

Though small and vague, the Agricultural Committee's 'non-fiscal' measures did pave the way for a radical Tariff Reform policy on agriculture without food taxes. But they became weaker without the raising of new revenue through food taxes. Furthermore, subsidies had the same radical connotation as protection. Perfectly acceptable to social imperialists like Milner, they were less congenial to those who saw Tariff Reform as an expedient counterpoise to socialism and collectivism. By 1912-13 Unionist policy on agriculture had been reduced to the hope that industrial protection would improve urban markets for farm produce; its appeal to farmers reduced to the plea that agriculture traditionally fared better under the Unionists than the Liberals.¹⁰⁷ There was anger in farming circles over the turnround, much of it orchestrated by Chaplin. As Hewins informed the Unionist Central Office, agriculture would be harmed by 'a purely urban policy of industrial protection'.¹⁰⁸ The Tariff Commission's attempt to rescue Cinderella had been cast aside.

It is debatable whether, in all this, farmers could have presented a more united and stronger protectionist front, or whether, if they had, it would have served any purpose in influencing the Unionist Party. Certainly

agriculture's voice, on a national level at least, was weak in the period 1880-1914. James Howard's Farmers' Alliance, founded in 1879, seems to have owed its demise to a split over the tariff issue,¹⁰⁹ whilst similar circumstances apparently prevented the Central Chamber of Agriculture from being more active in fiscal politics in the 1890s.¹¹⁰ Under the influence of the Earl of Winchilsea, the short-lived National Agricultural Union of 1893 forebore from lobbying for tariffs in spite of a protectionist majority among its members.¹¹¹ Indeed, when the Unionists abandoned food taxes in 1913, the party leaders were far more alarmed by expression of local grass-roots rebellion in the farming constituencies than by pressure from any national farming organizations.¹¹²

Michael Tracy has suggested two elements which led to division in agricultural circles. First, he cites the prevalence of the landlord-tenant system, an argument given slight support by B H Brown.¹¹³ Though there was some concern among farmers to ensure that tenants were adequately represented on the Agricultural Committee,¹¹⁴ the experience of the Tariff Commission otherwise provides little evidence to support the thesis that landlords and tenants were seriously divided over the tariff question on *principle*. But it is easy to agree with Tracy's more indirect argument that the landlord-tenant system made possible 'a sharing of the burden' through rent reductions and remissions, thus perhaps preventing tenants from realizing quickly the true impact of the opening of the New World, and delaying the clamour for protection.

Secondly, Tracy mentions the Fletcherite division between crop and livestock interests. Yet, if Ireland is included, 47.7 per

¹⁰⁶ See Sykes, *op cit*, and A M Gollin, *The Observer and J. L. Carvin 1908-1914*, 1960, chs 4-11.

¹⁰⁷ See Bonar Law's remarks in 1914, quoted in Sykes, *op cit*, p 284.

¹⁰⁸ Hewins to A D Steel-Maitland, 17 November 1913; Hewins Papers.

¹⁰⁹ A H H Matthews, *Fifty Years of Agricultural Politics*, p 7.

¹¹⁰ M Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe*, 1st edn, 1964, p 60.

¹¹¹ B H Brown, *op cit*, pp 150-2.

¹¹² A Sykes, *op cit*, pp 280-2.

¹¹³ Tracy, *op cit*, p 60; Brown, *op cit*, pp 144-5.

¹¹⁴ Marrison, thesis, pp 369-70.

cent of the replies to the Commission's questionnaires came from counties north-west of the Tees-Exe line. There is extremely little evidence of livestock farmers opposing a policy of agricultural protection in the Commission's enquiries. It may well be that they were less strongly in favour, but, where there was dissent, it was usually on the grounds of not wanting to be left out, as exemplified by the spirited stand of (non-farmer) Mitchell Harris.¹¹⁵ It should be remembered that Fletcher's corn-horn dichotomy probably exaggerates the separation of the two sectors, and neglects the various forms of arable-livestock or mixed farming systems prevalent in much of Britain in the late nineteenth century. As Perry remarks, 'Breeder and feeder may be a more significant coupling', but we should not ignore the 'degree of symbiosis' in British farming.¹¹⁶

Though agricultural division may have played some part in explaining the weakness of agricultural pressure in the 'Great Depression' period proper, probably more significant by the turn of the century was the common perception among farmers and landlords, breeders and rearers, alike, that their case was politically hopeless.¹¹⁷ The size of the urban electorate, the uncertain sympathies of farm labourers, and the biblical sanctity of 'cheap bread' all contributed to this perception. Also, farmers feared that industrialists wanted to exclude agriculture from Tariff Reform. This may well have been right, though less for Tracy's reason that manufacturers desired 'cheap food and cheap raw materials' than because they, too, perceived the impossibility of political victory if Tariff Reform included food duties.¹¹⁸

This being said, we should not underrate active support for Tariff Reform among

farmers. But, before 1903, such support frequently remained local. The often strong sentiment in favour of protection in the local chambers of agriculture and farmers' clubs, recognized by Brown and Sykes but rather overlooked by Tracy, seldom was translated into a central objective of the national farmers' associations. This may be because farmers were less reluctant to debate Tariff Reform among themselves than in a wider arena. Tariff Reform was a difficult debate, a chaos of complex and often baffling economic arguments in which it was easy to be made a fool of. Furthermore, the sixty years since 1846 had led to an ethos in which the Cobden Club and Free Trade League did not hesitate to question the morality, even the sanity, of the protectionist. Given that the poor spent a high proportion of their income on food, agricultural protectionists were particularly vulnerable to such propaganda. Agricultural protectionism flourished more easily in the 'Farmers' Parliaments', the innkeepers' rooms of Hodge's masters,¹¹⁹ than it did in the lofty debating halls and electrically-lit committee rooms of Westminster.

After 1903, many were doubtless heartened by Chamberlain's assumption of the movement's leadership, and comforted by the knowledge that, for negotiating with the colonies, the preferentialists needed food duties more than duties on manufactures. In London, late in 1903, at the Central Chamber of Agriculture and at the joint annual dinner of the Central Chamber and the Farmers' Club, resolutions were passed overwhelmingly in favour of Chamberlain's policy in spite of some misgivings as to its scope.¹²⁰ To all intents and purposes farmers were united. But though their disaffection might have been a source of regret to Unionist leaders as they vacillated on food duties after the 1906 election, the urban vote was the politicians' pre-eminent concern.

¹¹⁵ See above, p 174 fn 32, and pp 178-9.

¹¹⁶ T W Fletcher, 'The Great Depression of English Agriculture, 1873-96', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XIII, 1960-1, pp 417-32; cf P J Perry, *op cit*, pp 139-40.

¹¹⁷ See above, p 172 fn 8; also M Tracy, *op cit*, p 59.

¹¹⁸ Alfred Hickman to Hewins, 26 April 1906; Hewins Papers.

¹¹⁹ R Jefferies, *Hodge and His Masters*, 1979 edn, ch 1.

¹²⁰ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 November and 9 December 1903.

APPENDIX

Members of the Agricultural Committee

- R BARTER Dairy farmer and stock breeder, County Cork. Never attended.
- J BIGGAR Tenant farmer, Dalbeattie, and breeder of Galloway cattle; chairman of Galloway Cattle Society; vice-president of Scottish Chamber of Agriculture; gave evidence before Royal Commission of 1894-7 (800 acres, 400 in arable rotation, 320 under grass).
- P BLUNDELL Lancashire tenant farmer; member of council of Royal Lancashire Agricultural Society; chairman of Fylde RDC.
- T BROWN Managing director of West Norfolk Farmers' Manure and Chemical Co, King's Lynn.
- H CHAPLIN Conservative MP for Sleaford Division of Lincolnshire (defeated 1906); member of Royal Commissions of 1879-82 and 1894-7; president of Board of Agriculture 1889-92; president of Local Government Board 1895-1900; member of Royal Commission on Food Supplies in Time of War 1904-5; landowner until the 1890s; brother-in-law of the fourth Duke of Sutherland.
- W COOPER Wholesale meat salesman; chairman of Cattle and Meat Trades Section of London Chamber of Commerce; sometime tenant farmer.
- J W DENNIS Member of family partnership farming in Lincolnshire (4000 acres, 2000 under corn, 1500 under potatoes, 500 under grass) which subsequently diversified into distribution and marketing, Dennis himself opening the Covent Garden business.
- W FRANKISH Retired North Lincolnshire farmer (2000 acres, 1600 arable and 400 under grass); member of council of Royal Agricultural Society; vice-chairman of Lincolnshire Chamber of Agriculture; former chairman of William Foster and Co, agricultural engineers.
- J M FRASER Large landowner; chairman and managing director of a public company specializing in livestock auctioneering.
- Sir W GOULDING Chairman of W and H M Goulding Ltd, manufacturers of chemical manures and chemicals, Dublin.
- P R GRAY Farmer, County Kildare (232 acres, all tillage).
- W H GRENFELL (later Lord Desborough) Landowner (3200 acres); Conservative MP for Wycombe Division of Bucks, 1900-5; chairman of Thames Conservancy Board; president of Central and Associated Chambers of Agriculture 1907; member of a family of prominent merchant bankers.
- J M HARRIS Managing director of Charles and Thomas Harris and Co, bacon curers of Calne, Wiltshire.
- R W HUDSON Farmer of 2600 acres in Bucks and Berks; breeder of Aberdeen Angus, Berkshire pigs and shire horses; one of the largest livestock producers in southern England.
- G MALCOLM Factor on the Inverness estate of Sir J S Maxwell.
- A H H MATTHEWS Secretary of Central Chamber of Agriculture; sometime tenant farmer.
- F NEAME Kent hops farmer (1977 acres, 781 arable, rest under grass, hops, fruit and timber); agent for Earl Sondes's Kent and Norfolk estates.
- R ORLEBAR Landowner, Beds and Northants; chairman of Farmers' Club; member of council of Central Chamber of Agriculture; president of Bedfordshire Chamber of Agriculture.

- C PARKER Resident agent for Duke of Westminster's Cheshire estates; member of council of Royal Agricultural Society.
- C J PHILLIPS Deputy chairman of Watney, Combe, Reid and Co Ltd, brewers of London.
- O PRICE Welsh landowner and sheep and cattle farmer (1500 acres plus 'extensive sheepwalks'). Never attended.
- J STRATTON Tenant of 6000 acres in Hants and Wilts. His family farmed some 30,000 acres altogether.
- C D WISE Agent for the Toddington estates in Gloucestershire (1000 acres, mostly fruit with some under grass); member of council of the Fruit Growers' Federation.