

pointing out that while it is an easy thing, and quite consistent with the whole fabric and structure of a protective system, either to raise or lower a duty, with a view in the one case to punishment, and in the other case to preference, when you have, as we have, a Free Trade system in which we give everything equally to everybody, you cannot have preference without excluding somebody who at present enjoys the open market from the privilege which at present belongs to him.

In other words, in asking us to frame a preferential tariff, the Colonies are asking us to introduce into our system a set of duties which do not at present exist, and which have no analogy to anything which at present exists, for the purpose not of revenue but for ulterior purposes—the purposes of preference. That which is quite consistent with the framework and spirit of a protective system is a flagrant and undeniable departure from the very basis of our principle of Free Trade. It is all very well for Dr. Jameson to say, “Try it on a small scale; give our Cape wines or the potential tobacco supplies of the Cape a little preference; we do not care about the amount, but let us have some instalment as an earnest of the bargain.” What bargain? The abandonment of Free Trade. That is the bargain. It is not a question of greater or less—not a question of giving it on wine or wool.

Dr. JAMESON : Is not that coming back rather to the fetish of Free Trade?

Mr. ASQUITH : You call it a fetish, but for the reasons I have already given, I call it the principle deliberately adopted and approved by the people of this country, and which they regard, and we regard, as lying at the very foundation of our industrial prosperity. You can call it a fetish if you like, you can call anything a fetish, but with us it is a conviction, not based upon abstract argument, but upon solid experience of the economic conditions under which we live and move and have our being. I am not asking you to agree with it any more than you ask me to agree with what I might call the fetish of Protection. I do not like to use such words.

Mr. DEAKIN : There was once a fetish of Protection.

Mr. ASQUITH : I do not ask you to agree with me any more than you ask me to agree with you.

Mr. DEAKIN : English Protection 60 years ago was a fetish and nothing else.

Mr. ASQUITH : People then did not think so. It is just the difference when times move. It may be in time you will persuade the people of Great Britain that Free Trade is a fetish.

Mr. DEAKIN : We think it is so now

Mr. ASQUITH : Go and persuade the people of that, if you can persuade them, and we will have another Colonial Conference, and we will see what happens. But you have first to persuade the people, and so long as we sit here as their spokesmen, and whether you call it fetish or anything else, we have to express to the best of our ability their views. I do not like these questions of terminology which are apt to generate heat, but never conduce to light. We may be an absolute set of lunatics, wandering in

Tenth Day.
2 May 1907.
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PREFERENTIAL
TRADE.
(Mr. Asquith.)