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THE LABOUR PARTY



*Reports on*  
HOW WOMEN FARE  
UNDER REACTIONARY  
GOVERNMENT  
*and*  
TARIFFS AND THE  
HOUSEWIFE

*To be presented by the Standing Joint Committee of  
Industrial Women's Organisations to the*

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF  
LABOUR WOMEN, BRIGHTON

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# How Women Fare under Reactionary Government

Report to be presented at the National Conference of Labour Women, 1932

## WOMEN AS WAGE-EARNERS

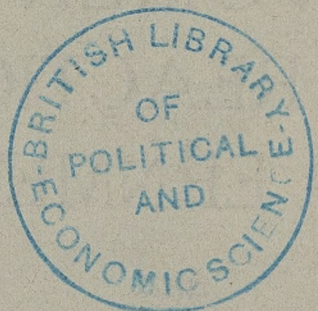
1.—The women of the working class are the worst sufferers under a reactionary government. The men suffer directly as workers, by the policy of wage-cutting initiated and helped wherever possible by such a government, and by the unjust administration of the Unemployment Acts if they are out of work. Women suffer in this way, too, but in addition they bear the worst effects of the economies in the social services. A government which wants to economise in order to reduce the direct taxation of the rich finds that in cutting down the services which help the working-class homes, it has the easiest and quickest way to retrenchment.

Men and women have suffered terribly under the working of the Anomalies Act, which has been stretched to cover cases which the Labour Government, when introducing it, specifically declared were not meant to be included. During the three months previous to February, 1932, out of 200,496 cases considered, over 165,000 were disallowed Unemployment Benefit. Under the Means Test cruel suffering is caused throughout the country especially in Lancashire, where 44 per cent. have been *totally* disallowed; while in Great Britain as a whole 15 per cent. of all the claims were totally disallowed.

## MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS

2.—This is significant. There is a higher percentage of women workers in Lancashire than in other parts of the country. Far more women remain at work after marriage as a matter of course. But under the present administration of Unemployment Benefit, it has become the custom not to regard the woman as an independent wage-earner on the same basis as a man, but to comb carefully through her relatives to see whether the responsibility of keeping her cannot be placed on someone.

Married women who are seasonal workers have been





turned off benefit almost completely, however great their need. Wives who have been separated from their husbands for a considerable period are told to return to them without any consideration being given to the feelings of the women who may have left their husbands through their misconduct or cruelty.

Married women have been turned off by hundreds as "not being normally in insurable employment," even when they have been workers all their lives and are as much in need of work and seeking it as any man could be. Still more unfair is the procedure that is being adopted in places where there is a dead set against the married woman worker. It has become the fashion for numbers of Chambers of Commerce and Employers' Associations to circularise their members suggesting that "in view of the prevailing depression married women should no longer be employed." Where this has been done, notoriously in certain towns of the Midland counties, the Labour Exchanges are ruling that married women have thus no reasonable prospect of securing employment and are, therefore, ineligible for benefit. It is first made impossible for the woman to get the work, and then she is penalised as though this were her own fault.

Where a single woman is living with her family, although she may have been largely contributing to its upkeep, complete dependence is much more readily assumed than in the case of single men. Yet when she is in work, her earnings are invariably included in the calculation of the family income.

#### WOMEN IN CATERING TRADES

3.—Many women who are in work have cause to regret the fall of the Labour Government. Miss Bondfield, as Minister of Labour, was fighting hard to bring the catering trades under the Trade Boards Act. The case had been carried on appeal by the employers to the House of Lords. But before that decision had even been given, Sir Henry Betterton, the present Minister of Labour, announced that he does not feel "justified in applying the Trade Boards Act at the present time to the catering trades." The evidence collected under Miss Bondfield showed real conditions of sweating and bad conditions, and 210,000 women would have benefited had the Trade Boards Act been applied to this trade.

#### WOMEN AS HOUSEWIVES

4.—The woman whose main duties centre round the housekeeping purse and the shopping basket has read with dismay the duties that have been put on practically every article in daily use, and the food so desperately needed, for which the family income always seems inadequate. Another report deals with the question of tariffs, so there is no need to repeat here their effects on the housewife. But a word of warning must be given with regard to the official index figure of the cost of living issued by the Ministry of Labour. This only deals with a small number of selected articles of food and clothing which a working-class family might have been expected to buy out of an income of 35s. a week in 1913. Nothing is allowed for fresh fruit or any vegetables other than potatoes. No account is taken of the changes in social habits since then. But as Professor T. E. Gregory of Manchester University, has pointed out, up to the middle of March a rise of almost 20 per cent. had taken place in seventeen primary commodities. The general index number of the *Economist* showed a rise of 10 per cent. in the same period.

#### HOUSING AND RENTS

5.—The index figure of the Ministry of Labour assumes controlled rents, plus the allowed statutory increase of 40 per cent. But the percentage of "controlled" tenants grows less every year as the controlled houses fall vacant. Rents in all the big centres of population are rising rapidly. More is now being paid for one room than would have secured a decent house before the war.

The only remedy for this state of things, and for the terrible overcrowding which is one of the legacies of the war and the years of lost opportunity since, is a big programme of housebuilding at rents the working class can afford to pay. The Labour Minister of Health concentrated on this problem, and his Housing and Slum Clearance Bill, together with the tightening up of administration, had produced in most areas a five-year plan of slum clearance and housebuilding that would have done a good deal towards clearing off the arrears.

All this work was ruthlessly scrapped, partly because of the announced economy programme of the new government,



and partly by reactionary local authorities who had had to be goaded by the Labour Government into producing any programme at all, and who eagerly seized on the "economy hysteria" to scrap the new programmes and slow down on the building already in hand. The master builders themselves computed that at least fifty million pounds worth of building was being held up in this way. The government issues, rather half-heartedly, a circular stating that it did not desire that housing should be held up unduly, but the slackening of pressure on local authorities by the Ministry of Health is a more potent factor than any number of circulars.

### TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT

6.—The statistics which the Labour Minister of Health collected show the terrible effect on health and efficiency of the overcrowding that exists. The need for the clearing of our foul slums is desperate, and equally so is the need for preventing more slums being created. The Labour Government's Town and Country Planning Act was, unfortunately, only in its committee stage when the election occurred. The Conservative Opposition had held up for weeks what on the floor of the House had been declared a non-controversial Bill. As soon as the Conservatives triumphed, the representatives of the land-owning interests determined that the Bill was to be so emasculated as to be of no practical effect. They concentrated especially on the compensation clauses, their amendments to which in practice wreck the Bill. The killing of this great measure is nothing less than a crime against posterity. It removes the safeguards against the ugly ribbon development, and the cheap get-rich-quick and get-rich-anyhow methods which have made our industrial towns the most hideous in Europe.

### HEALTH SERVICES

7.—Not content with saving on the vitally necessary housing and town planning schemes, the Ministry of Health has become a force for restricting the health services instead of an influence for improving them. The maternity services have been cut down, and all new developments stopped, although the £1,500,000 spent on them is ludicrously inadequate in face of the horror of the growing statistics of maternal mortality. New health experiments are being

frowned upon, and the weapon of the block grant system under the Local Government Act passed by the previous Tory Government is now a powerful weapon in the hands of reaction.

### WOMEN AS WIVES

8.—The effect of wage reductions, of the cuts in unemployment pay, and the cutting down of relief work though bearing directly upon the man, are ultimately shouldered by the wife who has somehow to fit her expenditure into the altered circumstances. The burden she has to bear is greater than can be measured in terms of the money actually saved. How many of the comfortably circumstanced people on Public Assistance Committees who administer the Means Test ever take into account the effect on the housewife's nerves and health of the continual bullying and uncertainty?

If the unemployed man is summoned for an interview by the Public Assistance Committee, his wife generally has to go with him because he alone is unable to answer all the questions asked about the most intimate circumstances of their family life. Inquisitions in these circumstances often take on the character of "third degree," and the women come out of such an ordeal frightened and nervously exhausted.

The Government by their so-called Means Test have reduced those on transitional benefit to the pauper status. To lay down that the standards of the poor law are to be observed, means the taking of all savings, property, co-operative dividends, &c., into account, for such is undoubtedly by statute law the poor law standard. The slender props on which she relied for such emergencies as sickness and the replacing of absolutely necessary household gear are taken from her. That might not be so bad if in return she had any security as to the income which would come into the home for her to feed her husband and children. But the carefully-followed policy of the Public Assistance Committees is to keep their victims in an atmosphere of uncertainty. It is believed that by so doing the unemployed man will somehow find the non-existing vacancy. The effect of all this worry and uncertainty following on a long period of under-nourishment is seen in the rising statistics of mental breakdown among married working women.



## WOMEN AND HEALTH INSURANCE

9.—In this connection the economies in the administration of the Health Insurance Fund should not be overlooked. True the most direct economy has been made at the expense of doctors and chemists, but the efficiency of the service is bound to suffer thereby. Already there is a long list of things, such as malt and cod liver oil, that the doctor may not prescribe. Some of these are not technically "medicines." When it is a case of a poor panel patient they are described as recuperative "foods" and forbidden, although no doctor would ever dream of such differentiation in private practice. These "medicines" are all the more necessary to women whose bodies are suffering more from the effects of under-nourishment than actual disease.

This economy ramp puts back once again the reform which Labour women have long advocated, that of giving medical benefit to the dependents of insured men. The ill-health of the mother in the home is so notorious that it is said that to include her would wreck any insurance scheme. But this is surely an argument for seeing that at least she gets proper medical attention, rather than seek to deprive her of this prime necessity. A further measure of retrenchment is announced, which may still further reduce the benefits of women under the National Health Insurance Acts.

## WOMEN AS MOTHERS

10.—It is the ambition of every good mother to give her children a chance in life. She dreads to think that her boy or girl may fall into the ranks of completely unskilled labour. The sacrifices made by many working class parents to give their children a good education are immense, but they are now to receive no encouragement from the State. A total yearly saving of ten millions is to be made in the expenditure of the Board of Education. Of this amount £7,500,000 is to be saved in elementary education. The 50 per cent. minimum limit for grant has been abolished, which means in practice the slowing down of every kind of educational improvement. Schools that have long been scheduled not merely as necessary but as absolutely essential are not being built. Children will remain crowded into dark and insanitary buildings that were condemned years ago. The needs of the new housing estates are not being adequately met.

The teachers, in addition to suffering a 10 per cent. cut in wages, have the added strain and difficulty of larger classes and crowded premises. A large number of schools are definitely dangerous to the health of both teachers and scholars. It is a scandal that they should have been allowed to continue so long in use.

The reduction in grants for higher education means a curtailment of scholarships and places for non-paying pupils from the elementary schools. In addition, local education authorities are being urged to increase their fees for tuition in secondary schools. Up to the end of February of this year no less than twenty-one secondary schools maintained by local authorities or aided by grant from the Board of Education have had their maintenance grants reduced. A number of others have the matter under consideration by their managers.

## WOMEN AS RATEPAYERS

11.—There are, unfortunately, a number of women who can bear the troubles of their sisters with some equanimity so long as they themselves are not hit. We have all had experience of the lodging-house keeper, the small business woman, the suburban householder, "who doesn't see why she should pay rates and taxes to keep the unemployed or educate other people's children." This type of woman will have to make sacrifices under the new regime, and the poorer she is, the larger will be her share of the burden.

The first effect of the unemployment economies has been to throw a large number of men and their families on the local rates. To take one example out of many. The policy of the late Labour Government in taking unemployed men off the rates and making their maintenance a national charge reduced the rates of a devastated area like Middlesbrough by no less than 2s. 6d. in the £, and this was by no means an extreme case. In all these areas the rates are now rising rapidly because the burden is being thrown back on them by this policy of "making the poor keep the poor," which the Labour Government so emphatically repudiated.

Most of this extra rate will have to be borne by cottage and residential property and the small shopkeeper, for under the Tory De-rating Act of 1929 industry is relieved by three-quarters of the rate burden. The amount received from the petrol tax and other grants from the Exchequer



only re-imburses the local authority for the rates in operation at that time. So the small ratepayers will have to bear not only the extra burden of the new rates, but the extra three-quarters of the rates that should be borne by the productive industry of the place. Truly the Tories know how to look after the interests of the rich! When the woman who lets lodgings talks about the extravagance of the late Labour Government on the poor, it might be as well to acquaint her with these facts about rating.

### WOMEN AS WORLD CITIZENS

12.—The interest of women as wives, and mothers, and lovers in the peace of the world is direct and immediate. None of the so-called glory of war can compensate any woman for the loss of her loved ones. The work of the late Labour Government for peace was acknowledged even by those who hated its home policy. It was detested by its enemies. Now those enemies are in the saddle. We have seen Sir John Simon replace the wise statesmanship of Mr. Arthur Henderson, and the timid handling of the Japanese war on China has shown the difference.

Under the present Government the whole foreign and imperial policy of Great Britain has simply been reversed. We have returned to the old campaign of terrorism and oppression in India. We have made no move to stop Japan invading China and forcing war upon her, and as for our attitude towards peace and the League of Nations, no more eloquent comment can be made on the attitude of the Government than the fact that Lord Cecil, Conservative though he is, cannot, because of his passion for peace and international agreement, form part of the delegation sent by this Government to the League Assembly.

Our contribution to the League Budget comes to about one halfpenny per head of our population, and yet the Conservative papers, not content with attacking the League on every possible occasion, have been mean enough to grudge even that small amount in the cause of Peace; but they ignore the fact that out of every pound in taxation fourteen and fivepence is used to pay for past and future wars.

## Tariffs and the Housewife

Mr. Chamberlain told us that his policy was a return to the policy of thirty years ago; he a little under-rated the matter for his policy is more like a reversion to the "hungry 'forties," when the consumer was burdened by an infinite number of duties, when the mass of the people were in the bitterest poverty, when (before 1842) the great instrument of direct taxation, the income tax, was not in operation. It is not for nothing that everyone is confidently talking of a reduction of income tax, for the essence of tariffs is to relieve the direct taxpayer and spread his burden over every consumer.

But you will say "the hungry 'forties" are a long way behind us; we live in "the unemployed 'thirties"; it is of the unemployed 'thirties that we have to think, and tariffs are offered us as a cure for unemployment. Those who oppose tariffs tell us that Protection will raise the cost of living, that tariffs will raise the cost of the protected article, whether food or goods, and that the consumer will pay more.

But the protectionist answers, "It may be so, but tariffs will make work, and it is much better that wages should not go so far than that there should be no wages at all." And he adds, if he is wise, that the circumstances of the world have changed so much that the old free trade policy, out of which we did so well, has become obsolete.

There are thus two points to be considered: the sacrifice demanded from the consumer, and the hopes of benefit to employment. Let us first see what the Government's proposals are and then look at the price to be paid, and what we are likely to get for the price. It will be seen that the price is a reality, but that the gain will be literally much less than nothing.

### THE GOVERNMENT SCHEME

1.—The main points of the Government's scheme are as follows:—

A 10 per cent. revenue duty on all imports except meat (including bacon), British-caught fish, raw cotton



and wool, and goods already taxed under the McKenna, Safeguarding, and Abnormal Import Duties.

No duties are to be levied on goods from the Dominions until the conclusion of the Imperial Conference.

Goods from the Colonies are to be exempt.

A Tariff Committee to be set up to consider whether additional duties shall be placed on "non-essential" articles.

The Board of Trade is to have power to impose 100 per cent. tariffs on goods from countries that discriminate against Great Britain.

On recommendation from the Board of Trade, the Treasury will be able to reduce a tariff in return for reduction from a foreign country.

The regulations came into operation on March 1, 1932.

And since the Budget was passed there is an additional tax of 4d. a pound on foreign tea and 2d. a pound on Empire tea. Added to which the Tariff Committee has now imposed new duties on a large number of imports, including condensed milk and tinned vegetables.

The housewife is particularly interested in food. Let us, therefore, look at the articles of food which are taxed 10 per cent. as a beginning. Sir Herbert Samuel, in criticising the proposals in the House of Commons on February 4, said: "I turn to the tax upon foodstuffs. . . . The range which is to be taxed is enormous." The housewife will be forced to pay more for bread, butter, margarine, potatoes, fruit, rice, eggs, condensed milk, sardines, tinned salmon, fish not of British taking, cured and salted fish, poultry, tinned meat, barley, oats.

### REDUCING THE WORKERS' STANDARDS OF LIFE

2.—The effect of these taxes upon the necessaries of life will be to bring down the workers' standards, and especially of the most unfortunate section of the working class population.

"We have in these days," said the Home Secretary, "a new feature which we had not a generation ago—2,500,000 of our working people unemployed and a vast number working short time. Upon this class this Government has felt itself compelled to impose fresh sacrifices."

Sir Herbert Samuel complained: "Of the flour which is to be taxed 10 per cent., nearly half comes from foreign countries; of rice, two-thirds; and of butter, cheese, and eggs, more than half comes from foreign countries. Of condensed milk, lard, margarine, canned fruit, fresh and dried fruits, four-fifths come from foreign countries.

"These are all new burdens placed upon the people. Not only that, but the importation of feeding stuffs for cattle and poultry directly affects, of course, the price of human food. Home-grown meat, pig products, milk, butter, poultry, and eggs—the price of these grown at home depends very largely upon the cost of feeding stuffs.

"All feeding stuffs not coming from the Dominions or Colonies are to be taxed 10 per cent. Of all our feeding stuffs, five-sixths of the barley, four-fifths of the oats, and four-fifths of the maize, comes from foreign countries."

As the *News-Chronicle* states (February 12, 1932): "The result will be the result of protection everywhere: to make harder and more bitter the lot of the very poor by raising the price of the humblest necessaries of life."

And now look again at the list of articles to be taxed—they include among others such necessities as:—

Stockings of all kinds.

Household pottery.

Domestic glassware.

Cutlery, including scissors.

Domestic metal spoons and forks.

Furniture.

Linoleum.

Wireless sets and all parts.

Overcoats, mackintoshes, and fur clothing.

Woollen yarn.

Rubber heels and soles for shoes.

Perfumery, cosmetics, including prepared Fuller's Earth.

Glazed wall and hearth tiles.

Electric light fittings and all accessories.



This is a formidable beginning, but it is only a beginning, only in fact a list of articles marked out for taxation. *Any one of these article may be taxed not 10 per cent. but 20 per cent. or 30 per cent. or 100 per cent.* without Parliament or the people being consulted at all; and in many of these cases this has now been done by the Tariff Committee.

### THE SUPERSTRUCTURE

3.—For there is a “superstructure” to the Bill. A Committee has been set up to consider the imposition of additional duties upon those “unessential” articles which are already subject to the duty of 10 per cent. Unessential is a soothing word, but according to Mr. Chamberlain it means not only articles of luxury, but articles which are not essential “in the sense that they either can be now or *could be* produced at home in substantial and sufficient quantities.” That “could be” is a very wide definition—it certainly includes *all* manufactured articles and a great range of food. It is rather difficult to say what it excludes in the list of articles subject to the 10 per cent. tariff.

The Committee may propose permanent or temporary or varied duties. And when the Committee has recommended a tax of any amount on anything which “could be” provided at home in sufficient quantities, the Government may impose that tax recommended, by Order of the Treasury after consultation with other Government Departments. This is defended on the ground that these matters should not be determined “politically” but by a “judicial” tribunal.

Now in the first place, it is always a danger signal when people talk of “removing” any matters from the “field of politics.” This is exactly what was said about Foreign Affairs before the war. It always means the same thing: that something is to be done of which the people would not approve and that, therefore, they must be kept in the dark.

### TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION

4.—And in this case, what is to be done is *to tax the people without their consent*, a sufficiently new and strange doctrine. The pretence that the Committee is “judicial” is the hollowest sham in the world, for the Government appointed it, and for three years only. We can be perfectly sure that there will be a firm majority of whole-hogging, dyed-in-the-wool protectionists.

The detailed provisions in the Bill are only a foretaste. The real business of taxing food, of taxing household goods, of taxing building materials, of taxing all the articles in the list is being done by Order in Council, because even this Parliament is not to be trusted to go far enough.

### YOUR FOOD WILL COST YOU MORE

5.—Let us now look at some of the consequences. The housewife will be forced to pay more for bread, butter, margarine, potatoes, fruit, rice, eggs, condensed milk, sardines, tinned salmon, fish not of British taking, cured and salted fish, poultry, tinned meat, barley, oats. The tax on these things is at least 10 per cent. They may all be taxed to a much greater amount later on by Order of the Treasury. As Sir Herbert Samuel said: “Of the flour which is to be taxed, nearly half comes from foreign countries; of rice, two-thirds, and of butter, cheese, and eggs, more than half comes from foreign countries. Of condensed milk, lard, margarine, canned fruit, fresh and dried fruits, four-fifths come from foreign countries.” And what has been said of food is true of all the thousand and one goods which the housewife has to buy. Manufactured goods are included in the list given of articles to be taxed 10 per cent.—they may all, like the articles of food, be taxed higher, indeed many have been, by the Order of the Treasury. All these things taken together must increase the cost of living.

### MONEY WORTH LESS

6.—“Real” wages will be less; “Real” unemployment benefit will be less; “Real” old age pensions and widows’



pensions will be less. They will be reduced "invisibly." The Prime Minister put this very clearly in September, when he was arguing that unemployment pay should be cut. He said a direct cut was better than a tariff. He said, "You can, by invisible means, reduce the relief given to the unemployed. You can do it in various ways. You can do it by a tariff. Well, nobody ever said 'No.' You can impose a 10 per cent. or 20 per cent. revenue tariff on imports, and to that extent make a cut indirectly." The direct cut took place. In addition, the indirect cut by "invisible means" is now to take place.

If, therefore, the workers are to stand where they stand now, they must embark in a movement for the increase of money wages, the increase of money pensions, the increase of money unemployment benefit. Hard as times are now, it would be difficult for the Government to embark on a programme for the reduction or the further reduction of all these things. Public opinion might have something to say about it. They might incur well-deserved unpopularity. But all these things will be done "invisibly" by tariffs, and the workers will have to undertake to initiate a struggle to put them right.

It is not for nothing that the *Co-operative Movement* has always resisted tariffs. The Co-operative Party at their Annual Conference held at Portsmouth in 1932 carried the following resolution :—

"That this Conference declares its opposition to the Government's protectionist policy, and condemns the shameless exploitation of the national emergency for the purpose of riveting on to the economic structure of the nation a permanent system of tariffs. This Conference further declares its belief that this policy will increase the cost of living, depress the general standard of life, transfer an undue part of the burden of taxation from the rich to the poor, delay the much-needed reorganisation of the nation's economic resources, aggravate rather than relieve the glut of goods which is causing such widespread distress, remove Parliamentary control over national and international trade policy, and will embarrass our relations with foreign countries."

As the pressure of tariffs is felt by the housewives, they will realise more fully than they do to-day that the Co-operative Movement is fighting to keep prices down and so increase their purchasing power and the value of their wages.

### WILL TARIFFS CURE UNEMPLOYMENT?

7.—In the first place, the example of the other tariff countries is not particularly encouraging. The Trade Union returns given in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* in the Overseas columns shows that in Germany at the end of February, there were 44.1 per cent. wholly unemployed and 22.6 per cent. on short time which leaves only 33.1 per cent. wholly employed. Looking at the figures of the United States, we note that in March, 1932, there were 31 per cent. totally unemployed.

But now let us examine the case a little closer from our own figures. We are told that the balance of trade is rapidly turning against us; that exports are declining much faster than imports, and that something must be done about this. Is it true that exports are declining more than imports? The answer is "No," if we mean by exports and imports what the ordinary man or woman thinks of—*things* made abroad and sold here, and *things* which are made here and sold abroad.

The following figures of British imports and exports for 1930 and 1931 are illuminating :—

	IMPORTS		
	1930 (£ million)	1931 (£ million)	Decrease (£ million)
Food, Drink and Tobacco	475.1	417	58.1
Raw Materials ...	250.4	173.3	77.1
Manufactures ...	307.4	261.9	45.5
Miscellaneous ...	11.0	9.9	1.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,043.9</b>	<b>862.1</b>	<b>181.8</b>



## EXPORTS

	1930 (£ million)	1931 (£ million)	Decrease (£ million)
Food, Drink and Tobacco	48.2	35.5	12.7
Raw Materials ...	63.7	47.0	16.7
Manufactures ...	440.0	290.5	149.5
Miscellaneous ...	18.7	15.9	2.8
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	570.6	388.9	181.7
Re-exports	86.8	64.0	22.8
	-----	-----	-----
	657.4	452.9	204.5

Re-exports are neither exports nor imports. They are goods passing through this country from one foreign port to another. The profits earned on them are profits to business or to shipping, and these profits have shrunk most disastrously.

### DECREASE IN EXPORTS AND IMPORTS

8.—But *things* coming in and *things* going out have decreased together. We are *buying* less food, less goods, less raw material. We are *selling* less food, less goods, less raw materials. Trade is very slack.

But if the exports and imports of actual physical things have fallen together, what is meant by the "balance of trade" having fallen against us? Is this not true? Unfortunately, it is only too true. For we have lost this year no less than £186,000,000 in what are called "invisible exports"; and that means that our shipping receipts and the interest we receive from foreign investments have gone down enormously. Our shipping trade is in a frightful condition. The actual figures of our income from shipping and investments is given by the *Economist* as follows:—

	1929	1930	1931
	(In million £'s)		
Estimated net national shipping income ...	130	105	80
Estimated net income from overseas investments ...	250	220	165

Foreigners are asking us to carry less goods; foreigners are buying less from us; foreign concerns are less profitable. Our customers are in a very bad way. And if we look at foreign trade returns, the conclusion drawn from our own trade figures is very greatly strengthened. There is a universal trade slump. In every country trade is in a bad way. It is not, therefore, strange that we, a nation of exporters, a nation of shippers, should suffer so much; the only strange thing is, that we have not suffered more than some of our competitors.

If British trade, employment and commerce is to recover, the commerce of the world must be re-established. If not, we can go on reducing imports until imports and exports balance at zero.

### WORLD DEPRESSION AND WAR DEBTS

9.—Now the main reasons for the depression of world trade fall under three heads—the burden of War Debts and Reparations, the increase of Tariffs, and the financial and monetary causes, of which the greatest is that the supply of fresh capital from the lending and borrowing countries has dried up.

There is no doubt with regard to the general effect of tariffs. The *Economic Conference* of 1927 reported emphatically against tariffs as "a matter not purely of domestic concern, but greatly influencing the trade of the world." They declared that the time had come "to put an end to the increase in tariffs and move in the opposite direction." The advice fell on deaf ears then, for in 1927 the great tariff countries had not fallen into difficulties. The situation is different now. A free trade or a free trade lead from us would now have a great chance of success. Our Government chooses this moment to embark in a tariff war, with the certainty of reprisals, and they sacrifice the real commercial advantage which we actually possess, what is known as the "most-favoured-nation" clause in our commercial treaties—which means, in short, that no tariff country can give us the low terms it gives to any other country.

### SUMMING UP

10.—To sum up, therefore, tariffs impose a great burden on the consumer, and as far as food taxes are concerned,



one which falls most heavily upon the poorer classes. Tariffs can do nothing whatever to remove the real causes of unemployment. They cannot give our exporters more customers or our ships more goods to carry. On the contrary, they increase one of the great hindrances to the recovery of world trade, and they do so at a time when the tariff countries are learning by bitter experience all the evils and mischiefs of a tariff.

And finally, this Government dare not even bring their main plan to the House of Commons. The whole of the "superstructure" of their Act—that is the whole amount of additional tariffs to be imposed—are being imposed not by Act of Parliament but by Orders from the Treasury.

And in reflecting on these things, let this Women's Conference remember what Mr. Ramsay MacDonald said to them at their last Conference: "Tariffs simply increased the cost of the means of livelihood and the person who bore that increased burden first of all was the workman's wife. Wherever they had been tried, wages had gone down, the hours of labour had gone up, social services had deteriorated and the struggle for life had been intensified. They were not going to adopt that quack cure for their present ills." Mr. MacDonald said these words last June; this June he is himself responsible for this "quack cure." But truth has not changed; the only change is in the man who said those words.

This report sums up the effects of Tariffs on the Housewife, but having considered these we should not lose sight of the fact that fiscal policy is not going to solve the problems of poverty and injustice. To cure these we must come back to the fundamental principles of Socialism; for it is the capitalist system which has caused great wealth on one hand and poverty on the other; and as long as this system exists we shall continue to have the wealth of the few and the poverty of the masses.