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## September 12, 2009

### Obama Shows Protectionist Colors

Pres. Obama [made](#) free traders' fears come true last night, by slapping import tariffs on tires produced in China:

In one of his first major decisions on trade policy, President Obama opted Friday to impose a tariff on tires from China, a move that fulfills his campaign promise to “crack down” on imports that unfairly undermine American workers but risks angering the nation’s second-largest trading partner.

The decision is intended to bolster the ailing U.S. tire industry, in which more than 5,000 jobs have been lost over the past five years as the volume of Chinese tires in the market has tripled.

It comes at a sensitive time, however. Leaders from the world’s largest economies are preparing to gather in Pittsburgh in less than two weeks to discuss more cooperation amid tensions over trade.

The tire tariff will amount to 35 percent the first year, 30 percent the second and 25 percent the third.

Although a federal trade panel had recommended higher levies — of 55, 45 and 35 percent, respectively — the decision is considered a victory for the United Steelworkers union, which filed the trade complaint.

As expected, China [strongly rejected](#) Obama’s decision:

China decried a U.S. decision to impose added duty on Chinese-made tires, saying the move sent a dangerous protectionist signal before a G20 summit and could stoke reactions impeding global recovery.

...China’s minister of commerce, Chen Deming, indicated he took this latest trade dispute with Washington especially seriously.

“This is a grave act of trade protectionism,” Chen said in a statement put on his ministry’s website ([www.mofcom.gov.cn](http://www.mofcom.gov.cn)) on Saturday.

“Not only does it violate WTO rules, it contravenes commitments the United States government made at the G20 financial summit, and is an abuse of special safeguard provisions that sends the wrong signal to the world.”

The tire duty was the first time Washington has applied special “safeguard” provisions Beijing agreed to before joining the World Trade Organization in 2001.

...The Chinese Ministry of Commerce spokesman, Yao Jian, said the U.S. move could spark a “chain reaction of trade protectionist measures that could slow the current pace of revival in the world economy”, according to the ministry website.

...Fan Rende, the president of the China Rubber Industry Association, said his group will appeal against the U.S. decision and “propose the government needs to adopt mandatory retaliatory measures against U.S. agricultural products and motor vehicles,” the China News Service reported.

The President has opted to risk igniting a trade war and driving China to levy tariffs on vital American exports in the midst of arguably the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. I won't equate the tire tariff with the infamous Smoot-Hawley Tariff, but it disheartens me to see how little our elected officials learn from history.

Daniel Ikenson of the Cato Institute [offers](#) some analysis:

Well, we at Cato and elsewhere have warned repeatedly of the dangerous consequences of this outcome (June 18, July 24, August 13, September 9, September 11). Former Cato colleague and coauthor Scott Lincicome has an excellent analysis on the ramifications right here.

The good news is that we now have clarity about where the president stands on trade. The bad news is that his stance reflects his isolationist primary election campaign rhetoric and not the post-election messages of avoiding protectionism and repairing the damage done to America's international credibility by unilateralist Bush administration policies. Short of armed hostilities or political subversion, no state action is more provocative than banning another's products from entering your market. I guess this paper was too audaciously hopeful. We're chastened.

Technically, the Chinese are not legally entitled to retaliate because the United States has legal recourse to restrictions under this so-called "China safeguard" law until 2013. But plenty of American exporting interests have been worried enough to write numerous letters to Obama urging restraint—but to no avail.

Restrictions have never been imposed under this law because in all previous cases — all during the previous administration — President Bush exercised his discretion to reject the recommended duties because of the likely cost of those restrictions on the broader economy. Thus, the Chinese know the decision is a matter of presidential discretion, unlike the antidumping and countervailing duty laws, which are on statutory autopilot and don't require the president's attention. Accordingly, the tire restrictions are the edict of the American president, and thus carries more profound meaning for the Chinese.

I fear the future implications of this disastrous action taken by Obama. Mr. President, you now risk turning this recession into something more devastating and frightening. Thank you for showcasing your courage to stand up to the "special interests" and "do what works".

by Anthony Dalke @ 8:59 pm. Filed under [Barack Obama](#), [Issues](#)  
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## 36 Responses to "Obama Shows Protectionist Colors"

1. [Doug Forrester](#) Says:  
[September 12th, 2009 at 9:07 pm](#)

It's not a good idea to anger your lender.

If the Chinese want to play hardball they can end Obama's administration by acting as bond market bullies.

Further evidence we have an arrogant fool in the Oval Office.

2. *craigs* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 10:09 pm](#)

Frankly, having spent 40 years in international sales, Obama is right on target with this one. Free trade is a two way street and the Cato Institute doesn't have a branch office in Beijing. The Chinese play America for fools with this "free trade dialogue." This is the first instance where America has actually said "No" to our bankers. It's about time.

3. *Anthony Dalke* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 10:38 pm](#)

2,

Can you blame American businesses and consumers for importing lower-cost tires from China? The labor unions have largely caused the huge discrepancy of labor prices between Chinese and American tire manufacturers. Now, manufacturers in other American industries (the Chinese official in one of the articles cited above specifically mentioned agricultural products and auto manufacturers) and American consumers will suffer from the looming trade war.

4. *Jonathan* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 11:08 pm](#)

Protectionism doesn't work, it is a proven fact. The McKinley Tariff hurt the economy in 1889-1890. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff prolonged the Great Depression, increased anti-Americanism, and helped lead to WWII. Free trade helps foster peace between nations. Even if nations don't like each other, if they trade, the odds of those nations going to war is much slimmer. Consumers and producers are far less likely to go to war with each other if it will disrupt their ability to make money.

5. *Anthony Dalke* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 11:19 pm](#)

Jonathan,

Well said! How are things down in the Sunshine State?

6. *craigs* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 11:21 pm](#)

What happens, obviously, is that all the jobs are in China and all the debt is in America. Wake up, folks. This isn't a textbook academic argument. If you have rules and theories, the rules have to be the same for everyone. McKinley was 100+ years ago. People should spend less time in dusty old textbooks and more time overseas actually dealing with Governments that couldn't give a rat's butt about Smoot-Hawley or some Professor's academic history. I used to sign a Foreign Corrupt Practices Act affidavit every month, while I bribed my own Congress with a PAC donation and my competitors bribed everybody in every Government overseas.

When no one is working in this country any more, union or non-union, we can blame our naive economic smarts that we are not protecting these jobs any more. They are all gone, that's why!!!

7. *Jonathan* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 11:28 pm](#)

#5:

Things are good for me. Our state, not so much. The housing market is still in the toilet, our state's unemployment rate is still double-digits, Charlie Crist is our Governor, and George LeMieux is our Senator.

Other than that, everything is great 😊

8. *JA Pruce* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 11:31 pm](#)

We need Free Trade! We need to move our economy away from the old manufacturing model to a consumer, services driven free trade model. A “Mark to Market” model would be ideal.

9. *Anthony Dalke* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 11:32 pm](#)

Johnathan,

At least you didn't have Blago for a gov. 😊

10. *Jonathan* Says:

[September 12th, 2009 at 11:34 pm](#)

#6:

The fact that the McKinley Tariff was over 100 years ago, and Smoot-Hawley was 78 years ago is irrelevant. The basic laws of trade remain the same. Consumers want the best quality of goods at the cheapest price possible, and if that good comes from overseas, than the consumer will buy the overseas good. Closing our markets to goods from overseas will limit competition, which will cause an increase in prices for the consumer. These rising prices will result in lower demand for the good which will in turn hurt the very producer that increasing tariffs was supposed to protect.

11. *Kevin* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 12:26 am](#)

Good move by Obama. Not enough restrictions though.

12. *DSkinner* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 1:17 am](#)

Obama's done for in 2012. If China

The economy is just starting a jobless recovery that will ensure he almost loses the House in 2010 and loses about 4-6 seats in the Senate (CT, CO, IL, DE, PA, NV and if candidate recruitment goes well, ND, AR and CA are within reach.)

Then inflation will start to kick in at double digit rates, or the Fed will try to mop up all the excess liquidity and kill the economy that way. Either way, Obama will have doubled the national debt quadrupled inflation and lost 5 million or so jobs and socialized huge portions of the economy broken almost all his campaign promises and most important of all, raised taxes on the middle class.

13. *DSkinner* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 1:19 am](#)

Oops, hit submit too soon. Should read if China gets involved in a trade war it will only add to what Obama will already be facing in 2010 and 2012.

14. *Kristofer Lorelli* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 1:35 am](#)

setting aside the evidence that this will cost our manf. sector jobs and stifle economic growth, the fact that it will result in higher prices for consumers will be another contribution to the double-digit inflation we will experience in 2010.

15. *FredrikI* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 4:05 am](#)

If i am not mistaken, i seem to recall that the Fuehrer ( Hitler ) was a protectionist....

16. *FredrikI* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 4:07 am](#)

Here in my homecountry , Sweden, the crisis is beginning to bottom out. There is even talk that next year, 2010, is going to show modest growth in GNP numbers.

17. *lkv* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 5:27 am](#)

It's decisions like this that is going to prolong this recession. He has to know that this is wrong, and if he doesn't his advisors do....

Just as our econmony was beginning to see a ray of light, Obama puts roadblocks in the way of recovery.....I don't think he wants an economic recovery until he gets his social agenda in place. He wants to bring America to it's knees and make as many people as possible dependent on Government entitlements in some way or another. He's killing our spirit.

He makes this announcement on the same day Summers comes out and says unemployment will be at 10% for the foreseeable future. I'm stunned and frightened.

18. *craigs* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 8:12 am](#)

Just exactly how does a country benefit when everybody can chooses the cheapest goods..... but nobody is employed? Exactly what do you use to buy those cheap goods? Remember the economic argument for slavery, folks. The south needed cost free ( low wage ) employees to compete, so the European cotton buyers would buy their product. They couldn't actually pay slaves, because the public wanted low cost goods and that's the way the non protectionist market worked.

19. *Illinoisguy* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 9:48 am](#)

Guys, I'm far from an expert on this, but craigs brings up very good points here, and you are trying to argue against them by using text book examples, while he is using 40 years of international sales experience. Like craigs has very well pointed out, it does us no good to have low prices when non one has jobs producing money to buy things with. JA, those kinds of jobs, without a large manufacturing base backing them up is extremely risky to our very survival. The national security implications of not having our own manufacturing can not be overstated.

I don't know all of the answers, and I'm sure as heck not a protectionists, but as craigs said in his opening paragraph, this is a two way street. The fact is that China, and many other countries around the world have put in lace tariffs, (as well as other measures) that helps them and hurts us. Are we to stand idly by forever and allow this as our jobs disappear?

I hate Obama, and nearly everything he stands for, but I'm not sure he's completely wrong on this. Perhaps he's wrong on the particular approach...I don't know. But I am sure that the current situation is not free trade at all.....it has huge advantages for our trading nations and disadvantages for us. We do need to wake up to this and quit claiming 'free trade' when it's not free trade now, but greatly disadvantageous to our country.

20. [Obama Shows Protectionist Colors « Regurgitation](#) Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 12:15 pm](#)

[...] Obama Shows Protectionist Colors [...]

21. *Anthony Dalke* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 1:09 pm](#)

Craigs and IG,

I wholeheartedly agree that the U.S. needs to encourage and grant incentives to support domestic production (one of the reasons I support the FairTax, but that's a whole other conversation), but tariff do not provide the best means to do so. Like other commenters have noted, 100 years do not change the laws of economics. I don't understand what you

guys mean when you say low prices do not matter when we people have no jobs to give them money for consumption. Fortunately, over 90% of Americans in the workforce still have jobs (that number obviously drops to over 80% if you include underemployment). That leaves plenty of consumers who would very much like lower purchase prices in such strenuous economic times. And again, the tire tariff invites China to retaliate with import duties on products we export to their country. The last thing we need right now is a trade war.

22. *Illinoisguy* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 1:57 pm](#)

The Fairtax is one of the worst ideas I've ever seen discussed on here. It has so many obvious problem, I have no idea why they are not extremely obvious to everyone who thinks about it for a few minutes.

Anthony, like I said, I'm not sure this is a good approach, but my main point is that we should not be so naive as to believe that we are currently in a 'free trade' situation. The trade agreements some of our idiots have negotiated are extremely unfair to the American worker, and needs some kind of attention, preferably by those with business experience behind them; those that actually know something about the subject.

23. *Anthony Dalke* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 2:33 pm](#)

IG,

By nature, all taxation systems have problems (since they involve taxation), but from what I have read, the FairTax seems like the "least worst" system proposed. I would also enthusiastically endorse a flat tax, but I would worry that it would lose its flat structure over time (after all, our current income tax began as a flat tax).

With regard to the trade agreements, why do we blame them for the vast discrepancy between labor prices in China and the U.S. Again, the labor unions have largely accounted for the huge difference in wages. And then we have to consider the U.S.'s backbreaking corporate income tax rate (second-highest in the industrialized world). Bottom line: I just feel that labor unions and others shift the blame for the mass exodus of manufacturing jobs, when a great deal of the cause lies in structural inefficiencies in the American business environment.

24. *Illinoisguy* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 2:44 pm](#)

On the taxes thing Anthony, the fair tax shifts a huge amount of the tax burden onto the middle and even they lower class. The rich would pay a fraction of what they now pay. If that's ok with you, then I can see how you fight for it. It also has many, many problems!!

Regarding your second paragraph, there are many factors as contributors, but I thought we were talking about 'free trade'. Some of those that believe themselves to be die hard free traders seem to be oblivious to the fact that what we have now is not even close to a 'free trade' situation for American businesses. They seem to think it fine that other countries have put in place huge advantages for themselves to the detriment of American workers and businesses.

25. *Anthony Dalke* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 3:27 pm](#)

IG,

If the FairTax did not include its prebate, it would indeed hurt the lower and middle classes. However, with the inclusion of the prebate, those individuals would not assume a greater burden of the taxation.

And the problems with free trade that you describe do not involve shortcomings of free trade itself. Rather, they reflect problems with the structure of American business. Again, labor union agreements that pay workers wages higher than market-competitive rates enlarge the difference between in labor costs between American and Chinese tire producers. Furthermore, the embedded taxes in the American economy (which the FairTax addresses) – employers' contributions to payroll taxes, corporate income taxes, etc. – further place American manufacturers at a disadvantage. Therefore, we should not blame free trade, we should blame our taxation system that our elected officials have failed to adjust to remain competitive with the global marketplace.



26. *Kevin* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 3:49 pm](#)

The arguments for free trade over fair trade are poor. I would gladly pay more for products if it means that there will be more people with jobs, who will spend the money they have at other businesses, creating more jobs, thus increasing tax revenue etc.

Now I know there's the alternative argument where people and businesses can buy things cheaper, so they can spend more or hire more people or lower prices...but I don't think it works nearly as well as the other one.

27. *Doug Forrester* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 4:15 pm](#)

#26 "The arguments for free trade over fair trade are poor."

This argument was proven to be entirely false 200 years ago. No one with an understanding of economic reality denies the dead weight loss from government imposed comparative disadvantage.

Dead weight loss is always present when you move production from an efficient producer to a more expensive inefficient producer.

Argentina's slide from 1st world to 2nd world is a perfect example of the high cost of protectionism.

28. *Illinoisguy* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 5:11 pm](#)

ANthony, unless you buy into the myth that the rich find loop holes and pay little taxes, the fair tax still has middle class paying more. why? because the rich will pay a lot less.

Case in point:

Let's say you have a man that makes 5 million taxable income today, and pays about 1.2 million taxes. This same guy only spends about .25 million per year, and invest the rest.

So, under a 25% fair tax, he would pay about %52,500 in taxes. Now, if these kinds of people pay a lot less, guess who pays a lot more to make up the difference?????

This is only one of numerous problems with this tax.

29. *Illinoisguy* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 5:14 pm](#)

Any on the 'free trade' argument, you're not acknowledging that what we have today is not 'free trade' and that it currently disadvantages American business and workers. Without that acknowledgement we have no basis for an honest discussion. Some of you want to act as if anything changing the status quo is against 'free trade'. It's not; it's rectifying problems already existing. Did you here Romney talking about that in the campaign?

30. *lkv* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 6:25 pm](#)

This is Obama paying back the Unions for helping him get elected. Union wages, benefits, and legacy cost is one of the reasons tire production moved to China in the first place in search of cheaper costs.

The Chinese have already threatened to stop importing U.S. chickens and cars in retaliation. This will be devastating to our economy...and Obama will not back down, Unions are an important part of carrying out his political ideology...

31. *Doug Forrester* Says:

[September 13th, 2009 at 6:29 pm](#)

#29 Tariffs are against free trade by their very nature.

The only things worse than imposing tariffs are quotas.

Our tax structure disadvantages our businesses and workers. The answer to that is to fix our archaic tax structure, not to turn towards stagnation and protectionism.

32. *Anthony Dalke* Says:  
[September 13th, 2009 at 6:32 pm](#)

Doug, well said!

33. *Anthony Dalke* Says:  
[September 13th, 2009 at 6:35 pm](#)

IG,

This admittedly comes from a biased source, but they publish studies on the effects of the FairTax at FairTax.org. This one measure tax burdens before and after implementation of the FairTax: [http://www.fairtax.org/site/DocServer/A\\_Distributional\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Adopting\\_the\\_FairTax.pdf?docID=781](http://www.fairtax.org/site/DocServer/A_Distributional_Analysis_of_Adopting_the_FairTax.pdf?docID=781)

34. *Illinoisguy* Says:  
[September 13th, 2009 at 7:03 pm](#)

Sorry Anthony, but I don't buy it.

35. *Anthony Dalke* Says:  
[September 13th, 2009 at 7:39 pm](#)

Fair enough, IG. Your loss!

36. *Illinoisguy* Says:  
[September 13th, 2009 at 7:45 pm](#)

I saw a lot there to substantiate my position. ANd we haven't even talked about all of the other reasons why it wouldn't work.

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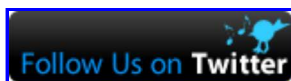
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