

SUMMARY: The complaint of the tanners of Cornwall, printed below in a modern spelling version adapted from Tawney, R.H. and Eileen Power, *Tudor Economic Documents*, (London: Longmans, 1924, pp.284-7), dates from 1595, and appears to reflect the situation described by Oxford in an undated memorandum (EL 2337), in which he says that once the group of suitors which had originally offered the Queen a mere 1000 marks [£666] a year for the tin monopoly in 1594 were forced by his own offer of £3000 to raise their offer to a point at which they no longer found it profitable, they found means to discourage the Queen from granting the monopoly to anyone. This complaint of the Cornish tanners would appear to have been one of the means by which they achieved that end, since it presents a phalanx of arguments against any 'innovations' in the tin trade. (See also SPD Eliz. Vol. CCLV., No.58.)

Reasons against any innovations either for engrossing of all the tin of Cornwall, or overburdening the same with new impositions.

The buying of the said tin is now sought much under the present value, whereas her Majesty's prerogative extendeth but to have the first buying thereof, paying always as the common price thereof shall be.

For the precedent alleged, that one Brockhouse obtained a grant of this prerogative, this man was found a deceiver, and departed without executing that patent.

Also Sir George Carey is said to have obtained consent of the best sort of the tanners to buy all their tin at £25 the 1000, at which time, or before, the usual price was but £21 or £22 the 1000, so as that offer of his at that time, with other reasonable offers on his behalf whereby he had their consents, tended to the advancing of their price and better encouraging of them to work their mines, whereas this offer is to the great abatement of their price, which cannot but provoke their great discontentments.

For if now when the price of tin is at £29 or £30 the 1000 the tanners should be enforced to sell the same at £25 the 1000, this abatement of their price will turn to their loss of £6000 a year or thereabouts.

If any allege that tin is like to fall again unto a lower price, the contrary may be proved by better reasons, for beside the decreasing of the tin in Germany, the tin of Cornwall is also like to abate in quantity, and the utterance of tin in foreign parts daily increaseth, for France by ceasing their civil wars will renew their ancient trade to utter the greatest part of their tin, by means whereof Turkey and divers other parts cannot be so supplied as they have been, which scarcity must necessarily increase the price.

There be also other reasons to maintain the good price of tin, as the great dearth of corn and all other provisions, the dearth of timber to bind the mines from falling, and of woods to make coals for melting the tin; also their charges increaseth much by drawing the

water yearly deeper and of greater quantity from the bottom of the mines. Therefore all such attempts to beat down the price of tin, or to increase more charges thereon, will be such a discouragement as will cause the greatest part of them to give over the working of their mines, and thereby give them great cause of griefs, discontentments, and murmurings, who with their families do consist of great numbers of poor people.

And notwithstanding the great difficulty of working the tin out of the mines and preparing and melting thereof, yet hath her Majesty for coinage and custom more than the 10th part of all the value, whereas of other commodities her Majesty hath but a 20th part for custom. Therefore to lay any greater imposition thereon will be an unequal burden which will enforce their humble petitions and complaints to be measured with such equity as other dutiful subjects, wherein, if they be not relieved, the best sort giving over their adventurers will cause the impairing of her Majesty's customs and the impoverishment of a great number of serviceable subjects.

It is granted in their charter that nothing shall be done to their prejudice without the consent of certain chosen members out of every of the stannaries.

It seemeth that the tin of Devon is not subjected to this prerogative of pre-emption, where her Majesty hath not for coinage of every hundred of tin little above a third part of that which is paid for coinage of the 100 in Cornwall; therefore if they be at liberty to sell after the high price, which if this prevail must be newly raised at least to £35 the 1000, and Cornwall enforced to sell their tin after the abased price of £25 the 1000, this loss will be so great and evident as it must excessively increase their great griefs.

For if the undertakers will pay her Majesty £10,000 yearly rent, they cannot sell their tin so bought and rented under £36, or wire £40, the 1000, whereby every family in the realm having use of tin in their houses shall feel the increase of charges by paying for their pewter vessel more by a third part than they were accustomed.

Neither will this offer of £10,000 yearly rent be so profitable or certain unto her Majesty as in show it seemeth, for where her Majesty doth now yearly receive for coinage and custom of tin about £3500 without disbursing any of her treasure or hazarding any casualty for laying out so great a quantity as is devised, if this intention should proceed to the dislike of the tanners, they will not work up so much tin as now they do by thone half, and then how can these undertakers perform their offered rent of £10,000 when the quantity shall be so much abated?

Where it is said that the merchants of London do greatly impoverish the tanners with excessive use for the loan of money, they are at this present wronged in that complaint, for they lend after 10 and some after 6 in the hundred pounds, and some other for no use at all, only to be repaid in tin after the common price; if any do pay greater use they are such as are not known to be makers of tin.