

The Iron Act Arguments

Petition: Reasons for making bar, as well as Pig or Sow-Iron in his Majesty's Plantation (ca. 1750)

1. Except Bar as well as Sow-Iron be admitted, the Quantity in the Plantations will fall much short of what may be expected, it being hoped we may make more Sow-Iron than our Market at Home can take off.
2. The Iron Works in England not being able to supply near one Third Part of the BarIron demanded, must occasion the same Importation as hath hitherto been from Sweden, and consequently carry out our Bullion to purchase it, unless more Works be erected, which would still create a further want of Wood.
3. This will prevent the Exportation of our Manufactures of Woollen, etc., which would be sent to purchase it in our own Plantations; besides the Discouragement to our Navigation, and the employing of our Poor in the Plantations and at Home.
4. To have a Supply of Iron, in his Majesty's Plantations, in case of a Rupture with Sweden or Spain, would prevent the distressing our Manufactures; as hath so lately happened to the

Discouragement of Trade, and raising the Price of Manufactured Iron Wares amongst us.

5. To extend this Law only to Sow or Pig Iron, would in a great measure frustrate the good Design of the present Bill now before this Honourable House.

6. The Manufacturing Iron into small Wares in the Plantations can never be effected, till their Labour comes to one Fourth Part of the Price that it now is: Iron being made into Bars there for Forty Years past, and Nine or Ten Iron Works of many Years standing, and no Hindrance to our sending Iron Wares from hence; which is a clear Demonstration that we are in no Danger.

7. Making Bar, as well as Sow Iron, in the Plantations, will greatly increase the Quantity, and consequently the Riches of the Nation.

8. The want of Iron for this Two Years past, has created great Uneasiness in our Workmen, and put them under great Difficulties to subsist, and given Opportunity to our Neighbouring Countries to tempt them away.

Upon Examining the Imports for the Years 1714 and 1715, when a Free Trade was settled, we find imported in those Two Years above Forty Thousand Ton of Foreign Iron; which with the Swedish New Duties, and Tonnage on our Shipping, could not stand in so little as 12l. per ton.

That our usual Exports of wrought Iron is from 1900 to 2000 Ton yearly.

That about Six Hundred Ton thereof is exported to our Neighbouring Kingdoms of Europe.

That from 13 to 1400 Ton is annually exported to our Plantations; much about one Half thereof is sent to the SugarIslands, the rest to New England, Virginia, etc.

Those that are afraid of injuring our Manufacturies by making BarIron in America, will not pretend any Danger of our Trade to the SugarIslands, for they can make no Iron; therefore allowing that full 700 Ton is now exported to the Continent, and that this Nation should lose all the Manufacturing thereof, and allowing full 12s. per Hundred for the Workmanship, it comes but to ,8400l. For the first cost of the Iron must be deducted.

But 20,000 Ton of Iron at 12l. per Ton comes to 240,000l. and `tis well known, Sweden takes nothing from us for their Iron, but our Bullion. And therefore on a Supposition, that 8400l. worth of Labour in the Iron Manufactories may be injured, we must be necessitated to send out our Gold and Silver

Annually to supply us with Iron, which might be purchased with our Woollen and other Manufactures, and the Labour of our own People from our own Plantations, and keep us dependant on the Courtesy of Sweden, etc., for Iron and other Naval Stores, as we have been for many Years.

Reason against a general Prohibition of The Iron Manufacture in his Majesty's Plantations (ca.1750)

*** Quote * Context ***

1. If the Clause be taken in a strict Sense, all Iron Work for building Ships, Houses, Mills, and even what is necessary for Instruments to Till the Ground, will be for bid to be made there; whereby it will become impracticable to live in the Plantations, because this Sort of Iron Manufacture must be made on the Spot, that it may be framed and fitted to the Size of the Work.

2. To forbid his Majesty's Subjects the making any Sort of Iron Wares, when its for their own Necessary Use, and not for Exportation, seems to bear hard on the common Rights and Liberties of Mankind; especially, when the Ore is what their own Soil

yields, and what is found but in small Quantities comparatively in the Mother Kingdom.

3. If such a Prohibition be thought just to prevent the Plantations from interfering with the Iron Workers in this Kingdom, all other Tradesman may expect, in their Turns, to be forbid Working at their respective Callings. For, by the same Reason, the People may be forbid making Cheese or Cyder, for fear of prejudicing the Manufactures in Cheshire and Herefordshire.

4. It is humbly conceived, there is no Occasion for this Clause. All Labour is so excessively dear in the Plantations, that no Manufacture of the lesser Iron Wares can vend, or ever does there, but when it happens by Accident that there is a great Scarcity of the same Commodity made in Great Britain.

5. The Encouragement given in the Bill for the Importation of Bar Iron from the Plantations, by taking off the Duty, which is Three Pounds per Tun, is not sufficient to bring it in; of which there needs no other Proof, than that a Tun of Iron is worth Sixty Pounds in New-England, their money, and but Twenty Pounds here, to say nothing of the chargeable Freight thence; so that if the Clause pass, the Iron Ore in the Plantations will be of Use neither there nor here.

6. It seems a farther Hardship, that the Subjects Abroad should be permitted to forge their Ore into

Bars, but not to run or cast it into Pots and other Implements, because the same Fire, and even the same Heat, will suffice for both.

It is therefore humbly prayed, That the Clause prohibiting any Kind of Iron Wares to be made in the Plantations, tho' for their own Use, and not for Exportation, be left out of the Bill.