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6 October 2014

Mr. Eddie Bergeron

Mr. Bergeron:

Thanks for your e-mail.

You ask why I cannot “be more practical about trade.” My answer is that unconditional support for unconditional free trade is the most practical policy that is practically available. Unconditional free trade is far more practical than your proposed alternative of empowering government officials to decide when, for how long, and to what degree trade should be free.

Free trade is simply consumers spending their money as *they* - rather than as government officials - wish. Yes: changes in the pattern of consumer demands destroy some jobs. But this reality is true *whenever* consumers change their spending pattern. It is as true, for example, when consumers shift their demands from domestically produced steel to domestically produced aluminum as when they shift their demands from domestically produced steel to foreign-produced steel. *Anytime* consumers change their spending pattern some incumbent producers suffer. There’s absolutely nothing about freedom to trade across political borders that uniquely “destroys” (or creates) jobs.

What is unquestionably *impractical* is your notion that politicians and bureaucrats can be trusted to superintend the spending decisions of millions of individual and diverse consumers. Do you honestly believe that government officials with such awesome power will consistently resist political pressures to use that power on behalf of formidable interest groups? And do you really suppose that even if such officials, by some miracle,\* rise steadily above politics, they can ever gather enough knowledge to distinguish correctly between changes in consumer demands that are (to use your term) “economically tolerable” and those that are not?

With respect, your fantastical confidence in the motives and competence of government officials leads you to endorse policies that are profoundly impractical in comparison to a policy of unconditional free trade.

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux  
Professor of Economics  
and

Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for the Study of Free Market Capitalism at the  
Mercatus Center  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA 22030

\* <http://cafehayek.com/2014/03/then-a-miracle-occurs.html>

11 October 2014

Editor, *New York Times*  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

Dear Editor:

Paul Krugman alleges that "deficit scolds" ignore two important facts: first, any net harm to human well-being generated by government deficits are "uncertain"; second, even if such harm does materialize, it won't occur for many years ("Secret Deficit Lovers," Oct. 10).

Whether or not Mr. Krugman is correct in his fiscal analysis, it's striking that in other of his writings he sides aggressively with those whom we might call "carbon scolds" - people who ignore two important facts: first, any net harm to human well-being generated by climate change is uncertain; second, even if such harm does materialize, it won't occur for many years.

Perhaps deficit spending really isn't a cause for grave concern while climate change really is. But the similarity between these two concerns ought at least to temper the scorn that Mr. Krugman infamously pours on those who assess the risks of both deficit spending and of climate change differently than he assesses these risks.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Boudreaux  
Professor of Economics  
and

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Mercatus Center  
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12 October 2014

Editor, *New York Times Book Review*

620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

Dear Editor:

Reviewer Latoya Peterson notes that one of the topics covered by the socialist-feminist author Laurie Penny is "the woes of the free market" ("A Vindication," Oct. 12). Never mind that Ms. Penny's latest book, *Unspeakable Things*, is retailed by for-profit private firms such as Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble and delivered to paying customers by for-profit private firms such as FedEx and UPS. Ignore the fact that her book is published by a for-profit private company (Bloomsbury) with net assets of \$186 million. Pay no heed to the additional royalties that Ms. Penny will receive by virtue of her book being reviewed in the pages of the for-profit private *New York Times*. And forget that no force on earth has done as much to liberate women from the domination of men and the tedium of housework than has free-market capitalism and the many time-saving consumer goods it has created - goods such as indoor plumbing, automatic clothes washers and dryers, automatic dishwashers, wrinkle-free fabrics, electric vacuum cleaners, kitchen ranges, microwave ovens, and prepared foods.

Overlook all of these facts. Instead, ponder the irony that feminists such as Ms. Penny insist that women are inept, helpless, and oh-so-terribly vulnerable without the constant aid and protection of Big Brother.

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux  
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and  
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the Mercatus Center  
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14 October 2014

Mr. Leon Panetta  
Former U.S. Secretary of Defense and  
Former Member of Congress

Mr. Panetta:

On today's Diane Rehm Show you proudly explained that you now devote your time to encouraging young people to pursue "public service." The implication is that

society needs more "public servants."

"Public service" is a lovely term. But it's a euphemism for government, and government - whatever its merits or demerits - achieves its ends overwhelmingly by ordering people about. So to be in "public service" is to be in the business of compulsion.

The opposite of "public service" enjoys no analogously lovely euphemism. But in a society based on private property rights, people operating in the private sector prosper only if, and insofar as, they *persuade* other people voluntarily to cooperate with them. In the private sector, no one *tells* anyone else what to do; rather, we each can only *ask* of others. People in the private sector are therefore in the business of mutually beneficial and peaceful *cooperation*.

Contrary to your belief, society would be better off the greater are the number of young people who pursue careers as peaceful persuaders - such as, for example, retailers who persuade shoppers to frequent their stores - and the fewer are the number of young people who pursue careers as armed and arrogant busy-bodies (i.e. "public servants").

Sincerely,  
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and  
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16 October 2014

Editor, *The Economic Times*

Editor:

The U.S. Treasury is jawboning Beijing to raise the price of the renminbi relative to that of the U.S. dollar ("Chinese currency significantly undervalued: US report," Oct. 16) ... which is to say that the U.S. government is pleading with Beijing to force Chinese producers to raise the prices they charge for the goods they sell to Americans.

Gee whiz, if ever I had cause to doubt what I learned from my high-school civics teacher about the glories of American democracy, I might start to suspect that Uncle Sam sometimes pursues policies that make ordinary Americans poorer.

Sincerely,  
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