

Margarine and Butter: The Unvarnished Facts

*A Statement Presented Before the House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture Hearing on Oleomargarine Legislation*

By DAVID WESSON



MY NAME is David Wesson, residence 111 South Mountain Avenue, Montclair, N. J. I am an honorary member of the National Cottonseed Products Association and am appearing as their representative to protest against the passage of bill H. R. 15934. My profession is that of chemist and chemical engineer, and I have been identified with the cottonseed-oil industry ever since the year 1884. I remember when the oleomargarine bill was passed in 1886. I was at that time employed by N. K. Fairbank Co. of Chicago, who were interested in a margarine factory known as the Garden City Dairy Co. A sample of the first seizure made under the law of 1886 was sent to me by the collector of internal revenue in Chicago for analysis, as the Government had no analytical facilities anywhere at that time. The sample represented a shipment from Chicago to Atlanta, Ga. The analysis showed it was a sample of rancid butter quite unfit for food. This was the kind of material which people thought represented oleomargarine, whereas oleomargarine made at that time from oleo oil, neutral lard, and refined yellow cottonseed oil was a sweet wholesome product and indorsed by food experts then as now as a wholesome food, valuable in the dietary, especially for those people who could not afford butter at much higher prices. Shortly after the oleomargarine bill became a law, it was discovered that more lard came out of Chicago than the hogs which were slaughtered could ever have carried in. Investigation showed that cottonseed oil and also stearine



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were being added to pure lard and sold as refined lard.

Certain pork packers endeavored to stifle this competition by having Congress pass bills taxing refined lard in the same manner as oleomargarine was being taxed. I had the pleasure of appearing at the hearings of the Agricultural Committees of both the Senate and the House. The testimony produced at that time showed that the sanitary conditions under which hog lard was being manufactured were then far from desirable, and that the mixture of lard with pure vegetable oil and a selected animal fat was a better product than that of the packers. The refined lard people agreed for the sake of truth and fair play to call their product "lard compound" and neither of the bills ever passed. What has been the result? The manufacture of a wholesome food product, without the aid of congressional mollycoddling, has grown to be one of the leading industries of the South. When I first saw crude cottonseed oil the price of cottonseed was \$6 to \$8 a ton. It is now quoted around \$30 a ton, which has been its average price for several years. At this price it means an additional realization to the farmer of \$12 per bale for each bale of cotton grown during the last three or four years. During the war period the price of cottonseed went over \$80 a ton. The crops of 1929 and 1930 were in round numbers 14,000,000 bales of cotton each producing something like 7,000,000 tons of seed apiece. This at \$30 a ton meant \$210,000,000 annually to the southern farmer. This has been brought about by the continual work of the people composing the Cottonseed Products Association, and those working with them.

The chemist by improving refining methods of cottonseed oil has changed the product formerly used largely for soap and burning in miners' lamps, etc. into a valuable food material. As a salad oil it is used on millions of

tables, and in salads made by the housewife. It has formed the basis of a \$50,000,000 industry established by the mayonnaise manufacturers. The rest of the crop is used largely in shortening and in the manufacture of margarine. If it were not for the crop of refined cottonseed oil, there would be only half enough shortening to go around if the country had to depend wholly on the annual output of hog lard.

A few years ago a tariff was put on imported vegetable oils such as peanut, sesame, and soybean with the idea of helping American farmers. It may have helped some of them, but it killed the country's large exporting trade in cottonseed oils. It also prevented the refiners of vegetable oils in this country refining vegetable oils imported from abroad and selling them at a good profit in Europe. Where ships used to go loaded with cottonseed oil from New Orleans carrying entire cargoes of cottonseed oil, we now find empty wharves. Large office forces in the business end of the large foreign export trade have been closed. The cooperage plants making the thousands of barrels to carry this oil are now empty. Likewise, employes have sought other work or have joined the army of the unemployed. The cottonseed oil which formed a large proportion of the margarine made in Holland and Germany is now replaced by the oriental oils which go direct to Holland and Germany instead of giving employment to our own refiners.

Cottonseed oil will not be assisted by a tax on margarine containing palm oil. Palm oil needs the cottonseed oil to produce the proper texture of butter. Of course, peanut oil or soybean oil could be used for the same purpose but cottonseed oil is readily available and in some respects a better oil. As a cotton oil man, I say the more palm oil put into margarine, the better the cotton oil interests will be pleased. The treasury's reports for the last year show that over 30,000,000 pounds of cottonseed oil were used as against a little over 1,000,000 pounds of palm oil.

I have listened with great interest to the talk which has been going on before your committee about the matter of color in butter and in margarine. There are one or two points, however, which have not been brought out. The color of natural butter varies from white in the wintertime from cows fed on grain, cottonseed hulls, straw and hay, to a beautiful golden color which you find in the June butter coming from cows fed on green pastures. It is a well known fact and Doctor McCollum has also stated in

his writings that the white or nearly white butter of winter-fed cows is low in vitamins, whereas the rich yellow June butter is richest in these important constituents. It is also a well known fact that the buttery from Guernsey cows as a rule is richer in this golden color with which such vitamins are known to be associated than is the butter made from cows of scrub breeds fed on inferior food. Since I have been before this committee I have frequently heard the talk of a fraud, in connection with the use of yellow coloring used in oleomargarine. It has been stated by competent witnesses that leaving the nutrition question to one side, oleomargarine and butter from winter-fed cows in June has a high vitamin value and for that reason is a more valuable food than the butter from winter-fed cows. Why in the name of common sense and fairness should the latter product be colored to imitate the more desirable June butter any more than the equally deficient margarine? The American consumer is going to be defrauded in one case just as badly as in the other. I know from the questions I have heard the gentlemen of this committee ask that they are opposed to fraud. Why then do they not see that justice is done in a case like this by taxing all artificially colored products whether made by the margarine manufacturers or the dairy farmers? Perhaps the answer to the question is to be found in the remark of an Irishman who at the beginning of this machine age was watching the action of a steam shovel, "Yez can dig and dig and dig, but damn yez, ye can't vote!"

It is semi-officially announced that an Anglo-Dutch corporation is in negotiation with the Polish Government for the acquisition of quayside real estate at the port of Gdynia on which a vegetable oil plant will be constructed. The Anglo-Dutch group, it is further stated, will invest 15,000,000 zlotys* in the construction of this plant, which must be completed within 18 months, and have a production capacity of 60,000 tons of vegetable oils per annum. The Government has stipulated that Polish labor and materials must be employed as far as possible in this construction.

Under the general Customs classification of edible vegetable oils imports into Poland for the year 1930 are shown as 14,721 metric tons of a total value of 21,137,000 zlotys. The comparative figures for 1929 were 20,338 tons and 32,402,000 zlotys. About 70% of these imports were furnished by Germany last year.

*1.00 Zloty equal to \$0.1122.