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Trump's Tariff Question

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If Donald Trump fails to re-take the White House in November (and then for real in early 2025), his legacy may quickly devolve into a matter for historians, not live politics. After people calm down and the culture war stuff recedes (once again, if allowed by events), what will be left to argue over are a half-dozen major issues, which include war, mass migration ... and tariffs.

Tariffs have long been Mr. Trump's major hobby horse; he gets excited about 100 percent levies. The whole business about the "bloodbath" quote was his insistence that American auto industry will be destroyed if Trump himself doesn't get the chance to erect

ultra-high tariffs against automobiles from Mexico.

Trump looks at tariffs on foreign goods as harming foreign nations and helping us, the Americans.

But it is worth noting that economists from Adam Smith and David Ricardo onward have regarded tariffs as chiefly harming consumers within the country that erects them.

At *Reason* you can read Veronique de Rugy make the classic free-trade case, anew, in "[No, Trump-Style Tariffs Do Not Grow the Economy](#)." If Frédéric Bastiat didn't convince you, maybe de Rugy will.

But something's missing. Surrounding Trump's talk against free trade in general and China in particular there was always another element that neither Bastiat nor de Rugy emphasize: free-trading with China helps Chinese and Americans, sure; gotcha—but it also helps the Chinese state, and its ruling Communist Party.

"Trump is an avowed restrictionist on both immigration and trade," de Rugy writes. But both unchecked immigration and free trade present problems not economic so much as *political*. It's about *real* bloodbaths, *actual warfare*, not metaphorical ones.

Even if Trump misdiagnosed the domestic economy, he saw problems with China perhaps more clearly than anyone else.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.