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THE BYRD AMENDMENT

The State Department has finally succeeded in its annual drive to persuade Congress to eliminate the Byrd Amendment. Passed by Congress in 1971, the Byrd Am ndment prohibited the President from placing an embargo on the importation of a strategic material from a free-world country if that same material is also being imported from a Communist country.

If chrome were not vital, the President could have gotten around the Byrd Amendment by declaring it nonstrategic. Of course he could not do this because chrome is essential for the production of stainless steel.

We have only a little indigenous chrome and it is of almost no commercial value. Chrome has not been mined in the United States since 1961.

An embargo on imports from Rhodesia will force us to get our chrome from South Africa and the Soviet Union. Senator Dick Clark, in advocating repeal of the Byrd Amendment, argued that the United States doesn't get much chrome from Rhodesia anyway.

However, U.S. reliance on Rhodesia is much greater than current import tonnage figures indicate because Rhodesia supplies the higher-grade metallurgical chrome and the ferrochrome. Rhodesia supplies 26 percent of ferrochrome and 17 percent of our chromite needs.

Newscasters reporting from the United Nations have a tone in their voice that implies the United States is doing something wrong by ignoring the UN embargo. But the rest of the world has ignored the embargo, too.

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Whereas before the UN embargo, American automobiles had 90 percent of the Rhodesian auto market, today Rhodesians are driving Italian Fiats, Japanese Toyotas, and German Volkswagons.

The idea that we can influence Rhodesia's racial policies by our embargo is not realistic. Rhodesia has 67 percent of the world's resources of chrome a scarce and high-quality commodity essential to all industrial nations. If we self-impose an embargo, we will be slitting our own throat, not Rhodesia's.

Before chrome can be used by specialty steel producers, chromite must be refined. The United States used to have six major ferrochrome producers, which relied heavily on Rhodesia for their ore. During the period when our embargo on Rhodesia was in effect, these producers had no guaranteed supply of ore and production of ferrochrome was on a day-to-day basis. About the same time, pollution control laws were passed requiring large expenditures for new environmental equipment.

As a result of this double whammy, half the ferrochrome industry went out of business. Several companies simply closed their doors; others shifted to other ferroalloy production. Rhodesia then built its own ferrochrome producing industry with Japanese technology and German and Italian equipment.

There obviously is no moral reason to embargo Rhodesia and buy instead from Russia, since the Soviet Union is one of the most repressive regimes in the world today. Neither is there any commercial reason. Russian chrome will be more expensive because Russia ignores the UN embargo, buys from Rhodesia, adds a middleman's markup, and then sells to us at a higher price.

The importance of stainless steel and the folly of relying on the Soviets for one of its essential ingredients indicate that the Congress has sacrificed American interests to a propaganda ploy.

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