

# Edict Protecting the Brandenburg Woolens Industry (March 30, 1687)

## Abstract

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Before the Industrial Revolution, when cotton grew in importance, sheep's wool was the basic raw material for the clothing trade. With this edict, Frederick William's government aimed to discourage the export of raw wool. The edict also sought to minimize imports of finished cloth, except for luxury wares (which the propertied elites were used to buying from foreign producers), so as to maximize opportunities for local textile artisans. Other initiatives by Frederick William imposed similar restrictions on salt, glass, and metalware. Such legislation typified the mercantilism of the age.

## Source

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### **Edict on the Prohibited Purchase and Sale of Wool Importation of Cloth and Stuffs from Abroad, and Improvement of the Woolens Industry**

*March 30, 1687*

*We, Frederick William, by grace of God Margrave in Brandenburg, Imperial High Chamberlain and Elector, etc.*

do hereby convey and make known to all and every of Our loyal subjects, to the Prelates, Counts, Lords, Knights, Captains and Crown Agents, Commissioners, assessors, tax collectors, clerks, Burgomasters and Councillors in towns and villages, directors of customs and collectors of excise, also receivers of customs and mounted police, also employees, clerks, and bailiffs on the lands of nobles and others, and to all and every inhabitant of Our Electorate and Mark of Brandenburg whom it may concern:

Although Our forefathers now at rest and in particular His Highness, Our father of glorious memory did, in reply to the repeated submissive representations and complaints of the clothmakers and wool weavers of Our Electorate and Mark of Brandenburg over the pre-emption and buying up of wool which has for a considerable time gone on there, to their great detriment and loss, in that certain merchants, tailors and others, and even in part persons without fixed abode who do not even bear part of the national burden, and also speculators possessed of foreign currency and likewise Jews, have presumed to journey about the country and to preempt the wool, even before the shearing, from nobles, priests, village mayors and clerks, peasants and shepherds and afterward to smuggle it illicitly out of the country, strictly forbid this, as long ago as the Monday after Trinity, 1611, by Edicts published throughout the land, and afterwards issued all manner of other salutary enactments for the improvement and development of the cloth industry, which We also, being desirous that such malpractices should cease, have on various occasions, such as on the twenty-fourth of May, 1641, the thirtieth of May, 1660 and the sixth of May, 1676, expressly repeated and ordered to be brought to the universal notice –

Yet since We have experienced that the application of such paternal solicitude has not achieved the desired end, but that the buying up and pre-emption of wool has steadily increased, through the connivance and negligence of Our officials appointed to control it, in particular the customs officials, controllers, and police, the wool has been sorted, the best taken out of the country, and the bad sold to the clothmakers, in consequence whereof the cloth made out of it has been unserviceable, and the merchants have turned to neighboring countries, the cloths manufactured in foreign towns out of the

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exported wool has been reimported into Our Lands, and very great sums of money have gone out in return, unaccompanied by any other commodities, and further, the previous number of clothworkers (especially up to 1680) has gradually and perceptibly diminished and dwindled, to the patent detriment of Our towns, and this branch of manufacture totally ruined.

Consequently, We, out of paternal solicitude for the conservation and promotion of Our subjects, have considered such measures as We feel Ourselves entitled to take in virtue of natural and other right, and first must find means whereby the good wool, wherewith Divine providence has so richly endowed Our Land, may as far as possible be processed in Our Electoral Lands, and the cloths, fabrics, and stuffs made out of it consumed and used not only there but also in Our other Duchies, Principalities, Provinces and Lands, and also that other foreigners may be encouraged by its good quality to purchase and export it.

Accordingly, We do hereby most graciously and earnestly command, enact, and will, of Our sovereign Power and Highness, that none of Our subjects, military or civil servants, burghers of towns or landmen, but in particular no merchants, peddlers, tailors, clothworkers, or any other persons who have hitherto had any dealings in foreign cloth, shall as from the beginning of next July bring into the land or the towns any cloths manufactured in neighboring or other foreign places of which they cannot at once prove that the ell cost them to buy more than 1 thaler, 12 groschen, under pain of confiscation of the cloth for the first offense and a further punishment at Our discretion, in case of repetition. We do not, however, wish free trade in such cloths between foreigners and foreigners, or between Our subjects and foreigners, wholesale, or if the purchasers collect a quantity of pieces and have them made up into bales—this only at the fairs—to be in any way prohibited or impeded, but wish it to go on unimpeded as heretofore, but subject to the condition that the merchants report all foreign cloths to Our tax officials, have them made up into bales by a sworn packer, and sealed on the spot at which the bales or packages are made up with a seal of lead bearing a scepter and round it the words, “Foreign cloths in transit”; neither foreigners nor Our subjects may then open such bales in Our Lands, and Our customs officials—and in the case of native merchants, the tax collectors—are to see carefully whether the seals have been broken or opened.

With the same regard for the public welfare, We further equally forbid the importation of all foreign-manufactured serges, baizes, etc., for cutting or consumption in this country, under pain of confiscation, and with the same possibility as above of further penalties.

And since it is highly necessary to supplement the above prohibition with careful and adequate provisions for making good the exclusion of foreign cloths under this prohibition by improving the manufacture of them in this country and providing the tailors, drapers, and others of Our subjects with good cloths, baizes, etc., of various grades, We not only repeat all the above-mentioned Edicts published by Our father of glorious memory and confirmed by Ourselves, but also extend, precise, and elaborate them in the following respects:

*[There follow thirty detailed enactments, providing:*

- 1. Every year before the shearing, an official warning is to be given to all sheep farmers that they are not to export their wool, nor to sell it except at annual fairs to any person not directly engaged in the woolens-manufacturing industry.*
- 2. No wool is to be offered for sale at the annual fairs before 11 a.m. After that it can be bought by all weavers, tailors, etc., who have registered with their guild; but not for export.*
- 3. Crown agents and nobles may still export their own wool, but it must be weighed and provided with a permit before export. Foreign buyers may not buy directly from nobles, etc., but only from merchants in the towns, after the wool has paid excise.*
- 4. Traders authorized to sell abroad may for that purpose buy wool from nobles, but not from other*

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growers, and must keep registers of what they buy.

5. Villages, etc., where no weavers' and tailors' guilds exist must take their wool to a place where there is such a guild.

6. A clothworker who has bought more wool than he needs may not sell it abroad; he must distribute it to other members of his guild.

7. Wool must be washed and cleaned before being offered for sale.

8. The wool of wild rams must not be mixed with that of the farm sheep; the animals are to be destroyed.

9. Similarly, goats' hair is not to be mixed with sheep's wool. To ensure this, goats are to be pastured with swine.

10. Growers may spin, full, and weave cloth for their own consumption only, not for sale.

11. They may not sell homespun wool to anyone except tailors and clothworkers.

12. No one may sell clothes manufactured out of cloths, etc., the importation of which is prohibited.

13. An inspectorate of cloths is to be established.

14. Special attention is to be paid to promoting the manufacture of types of cloth formerly imported.

15. Cloth weavers must not sell inferior goods.

16. [This regulation] deals with relations between cloth weavers and tailors.

17. [This regulation] forbids the peddling of cloth.

18. Merchants must provide weavers with materials on credit, and, where necessary, cash advances; the terms are to be left to free bargaining, but must not be oppressive.

19. On the other hand, weavers, clothworkers, etc., must not, as has notoriously been their habit, spend the sums received by them as payment in advance on their cloth in gorging and carousing. The paragraph lays down safeguards to ensure that the advances are used properly.

20. Deals with details of the procedure to be followed in importing and exporting cloths.

21. Loose-living and unattached journeymen who refuse to take employment with the spinning mills, and attempt to work independently, are to be compelled to take wool from the weavers and clothmakers and to spin it properly; they must, however, be paid a regular and adequate wage.

Paras. 22 to 25 lay down provisions for ensuring the supply of dyestuffs, and of livelihoods for dyers. Native clothworkers may not send cloths out of the country for dyeing. Paras. 26 to 29 deal with details of guild organization.

30. The order is to be given the widest publicity, and any infringement of it or failure by customs officers, etc., to enforce it is to be severely punished.]

Frederick William

(L. S.)

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Source: C.A. Macartney, ed., *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, in *Documentary History of Western Civilization*. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 265-69. Introduction, editorial notes, chronology, translations by the editor; and compilation copyright © 1970 by C.A. Macartney. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Source of original German text: Christian Otto Mylius, *Corpus Constitutionum Marchicarum, Oder Königl. Preußis. und Churfürstl. Brandenburgische in der Chur- und Marck Brandenburg, auch incorporirten Landen publicirte und ergangene Ordnungen, Edicta, Mandata, Rescripta [et]c. : Von Zeiten Friedrichs I. Churfürstens zu Brandenburg, [et]c. biß ietzo unter der Regierung Friederich Wilhelms, Königs in Preußen [et]c. ad annum 1736. inclusivè / ... colligret und ans Licht gegeben von Christian Otto Mylius*. Berlin und Halle, Zu finden im Buchladen des Waysenhauses, [1737]-1755, [Part 5, Sec. 2, Chapter IV, No. XXIV], pp. 237-50.

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