

Lord William Wyndham Grenville

Corn Exportation Bill
(1814)

CORN EXPORTATION BILL

HL Deb 7 June 1814 vol 28 cc1-4

Lord Grenville said he was far from ob[2]jecting to the Bill before the House, or wishing to prevent the farmer, or any other body of men, from deriving the advantages which their capital and their industry might give them, by any restraint on the freedom of commerce ; but he wished to be understood, that his consent was not given to this measure as forming any part of, or as being connected with the other measure relative to the same branch of trade, which had for some time been agitated in another place. It was not regular to debate that measure which had been debated in another place, and which happily had been postponed, at least for the present session, and which he thought-whether rightly or not-would if passed, be most detrimental to the manufacturing interest, but above all, most detrimental to the landed interest of this kingdom. But he had taken the first opportunity of declaring his opinion that it was impossible that the measure could be a fit one for the adoption of parliament during the present session ; at least, if not for other reasons, for this most conclusive one-because the foundation and substance of the measure was a scale of duties varying according to the price of the article, while the circumstances of the country were such, that although it was not explained in the Bill whether the price referred to was that paid in gold or paper, the price in one of these currencies might be 80s. in the other 60s. If their lordships did not first apply a remedy to this most preponderant of all the evils which oppressed the country, it was impossible to fix any scale for the duties payable on imported corn. He was [3] moreover, convinced that it was not for the interest of any class of men, and most injurious to the interest of the country, to oppose any obstacle to the free importation of the chief article of the subsistence of its population. It was needless for him to say, that in thus freely delivering his opinion, he was not courting vulgar prejudice; or that because he differed from men, who well knew how much he esteemed them, on a question which had divided the most able practical statesmen, he had any wish of imputing to them an intention to support one class to the injury of others. He disclaimed any such intention for himself; he disclaimed any such imputation on others. Though such intention was far from the proposers of the measure, he thought its effect would be equally injurious; its present effect was to raise the price of corn; he did not believe its effect would be to render it lower in future, or more steady at any time. If the present evil was necessary, with a view to permanent future good, the House should look it steadily

in the face; but to raise the price of corn was a measure which, of all others, their lordships would adopt most reluctantly, and never but after a most full enquiry, attended by an absolute certainty that such benefit would be produced in future as to out-balance the present evil. That the price would be at present raised appeared most clearly; for as price was regulated by the proportion of the demand to the supply, how could the price fail to be raised, if, while the demand remained the same, a great source of the supply was stopped? With such a certain evil before him, he distrusted a speculation which depended for the benefits of a measure on future years or centuries; and he the more distrusted it, because it was in opposition to known facts, and those generally acknowledged principles of commercial freedom, a contradiction of which should always be supported by a great weight of proof. It was argued, that because there were many departures (he lamented there were so many) in our laws from the principles of commercial freedom, by the restrictions on foreign and the bounties on domestic manufactures, which he doubted not had been injurious to the commercial prosperity of the country by turning capital and industry into the channels least advantageous to the country, that the violation of this principle should be extended to the corn trade; but it would be a better course in the supporters of the principle gradually to abolish the violations of it than to extend them. His lordship then remarked, that the system of bounties which the Bill went to abolish, was a system for enabling the poor of other countries to eat their bread cheap at the expence of taxes levied on the people of this country, and concluded by saying, that the Bill before their lordships met with his most hearty concurrence, and that the other Bill, which he hoped would not come before the House this session, should, if it were brought before them, meet with his most decided opposition.