

Lord William Wyndham Grenville

Corn Laws  
(1815)

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## CORN LAWS

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Lord Grenville rose for the purpose of submitting to their lordships a motion in some degree connected with the petitions which had been presented by the noble earl. No man was more desirous than he was that the claims of those petitioners should receive due consideration. No man was more sensible of the difficulties under which they laboured: and if he had the misfortune of differing totally from [717] them as to the sources from which those difficulties had arisen, it was not from any insensibility to the magnitude of the distress which pressed upon the agriculturists of the country. He could not agree with the noble earl that no necessity existed for the renewal of the committee which had been occupied in the last session with the investigation of the subject of the corn laws. Although many persons had been examined before that committee, to explain the variation between the prices of foreign and British corn, yet the information on that branch of the question was very imperfect; and the evidence annexed to the report contained a very partial and limited view of the whole subject, and was not at all calculated to enable their lordships to proceed with confidence to legislate anew as to the means of subsistence of the country. It was incumbent on those who were of opinion that some measure was necessary, to lay before their lordships the ground on which that conviction was founded; but he should not interfere with the shape in which they wished to submit it to the House; if it should turn out to be satisfactory, it was enough; but he had not met with any thing which had at all varied the strong opinion which he had entertained last year, that the measure which for two years past had been proposed to parliament, was not only unjust, by shifting the weight from those who ought to bear it to those who ought not to bear it [hear, hear], but had a tendency to aggravate the evils under which the country suffered. The present was not the time to discuss the question, nor should he attempt to enter on it; and he had been induced thus early to express his opinion on the subject, from the apprehension which he had formerly entertained, and which was then stronger, that when argument might be supposed to have a weight there would be no time allowed for debate. The noble earl had expressed a satisfaction, in which he (lord G.) could not concur, when he had stated that the measure which had been hitherto unsuccessfully proposed was to receive the support of the executive government of the country. The measure would have been much better in other hands, and would have stood a better chance for fair discussion when proposed by

an individual, than when brought forward, supported by all the influence which was attached to every measure proposed by the executive government.[718] At any rate, he hoped, if the measure was to be discussed, that it would not be brought forward when the noble lord on the woolsack, and one temporal and one spiritual lord composed that third part of the legislature, but at a time when it might receive that full consideration which a matter of such vital importance, as a law affecting the food of the community required, and which it would obtain in that House, if brought before their lordships at a time when attendance might be expected. He took no interest in the question, but that which as an Englishman he felt in the peace and welfare of the country; and he was convinced that if the measure in question was taken up by the executive government, they never had proposed a law more calculated to injure both. His lordship then moved for an account of the importation and exportation of grain between Great Britain and Ireland, in the several years from 1807 to the latest time to which they could be made up, according to the books of the customs in England and Ireland. His lordship then observed, that as on a former occasion, when accounts of the trade between the two islands had been presented, there had been a difference to an extent which could not be explained, between the accounts presented from the custom-house books of the two countries, the exports from one country not agreeing with the imports into the other, even making the due allowance for the non-arrival in one country, at the time when the accounts had been closed, of vessels which had sailed previously to the termination of the accounts in the other country ; and as the same difference might still exist, he should move for the same accounts stated according to the books of the customs in Ireland.