

**THE CORN LAWS.**

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**SPEECH**

OF

**R. COBDEN, ESQ., M.P.**

IN THE

**HOUSE OF COMMONS,**

ON

**THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 24, 1842.**

**SIXTEENTH THOUSAND—REVISED.**

**MANCHESTER:**

**J. GADSBY, NEWALL'S BUILDINGS, MARKET STREET.**

**LONDON:**

**R. GROOMBRIDGE, PANYER-ALLEY.**

**PRICE ONE PENNY.**



# SPEECH.

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Mr. COBDEN rose and said: The hon. gentleman who has just sat down (Sir Howard Douglas) would have given still greater satisfaction to the house if he had assured us that he would, when he spoke, always keep strictly to the subject matter under discussion. I must be allowed to say, that my hon. friend the member for Wolverhampton has very just ground for complaining that in all this discussion, to which I have been listening for seven nights, while there has been much talk of our trade with China, and of the war with Syria, while there has been much contest between parties and partisans, there has been little said upon the question really in hand. (Hear.) I may safely say, that on the other side, not one speaker has grappled with the question so ably laid down by my hon. friend. That question simply is, how far it is just, honest, and expedient that any tax whatever should be laid upon the food of the people. (Hear.) That is the question we have to decide; and when I heard the right hon. baronet, Sir Robert Peel, so often express the deep sympathy he felt for the working classes, I did expect that he would not have finished his last speech without giving some little consideration to the case of the working man in connection with this question. (Hear.) I will venture to call the attention of the committee to the question of the bread tax as connected with the labouring classes, as it bears upon the wages of labour; and I call upon you all to meet me upon neutral ground while we discuss the interests of those working people who have no representatives in this house. (Hear, hear.) As I hear from the other side so many and so strong expressions of sympathy, I call upon them to give practical proof of the existence of that sympathy with the hard labouring population, and not to delay until they are reduced to that state when they can only receive the benefits of your legislation in the abject condition of pauperism. Sir, in reading, which I have done with great attention, the reports of the debates which took place in 1815, prior to the passing of the corn bill of that year, I have been struck with the observation, that all who took part in that discussion agreed on one point of the subject, namely, that the price of food regulated the rate of wages. That principle was not only laid down by one side of the house, but it met with the concurrence of both. Men the most opposite in political opinions I find agreeing upon that principle. Mr. Horner, Mr. Baring, Mr. Frankland Lewis, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Western, those who opposed the corn law, and those who strenuously advocated its principle, all alike agreed upon the single point, that the price of food regulated the price of labour. So completely did they agree, that one speaker laid down the principle mathematically, and framed a computation in figures to show the relative proportions in which the principle would work, and to what extent the payment of labour would rise or fall in ratio to the rise or fall of the price of food. (Hear.) The same delusion existed amongst the capitalists out of doors. There was a petition presented in 1815, signed by the most in-

telligent merchants and manufacturers in Manchester, praying that the corn law should not pass, because it would so raise the rate of wages that the British manufacturers would no longer be able to compete with those abroad, who had to pay wages so much less in amount. That delusion certainly did then exist; but I have been struck with the deepest sorrow to observe that the minds of many men who bear their part in the discussion now should still be labouring under the same erroneous impression. The great body of those who legislated in 1815 passed their bill in the honest delusion that the operation of the law would be such as I have described. I believe that if the fact, if the true state of the case had been then known, if they had known what now we know, that law would never have been passed in 1815. Every party in the house, and many out of doors, were deceived; but there was one party which was not deluded—the party most interested in the question—namely, the working classes. They were not deluded, for they saw with instinctive sagacity, without the aids of learning and education, without the pretence of political wisdom, what would be the operation of the law upon the rate of wages. Therefore it was, that when that law was passed your house was surrounded by the excited populace of London, and you were compelled to keep back an enraged people from your doors by the point of the bayonet. (Cheers.) When that law passed murder ensued. (“Oh!” and laughter.) Yes, I call it murder, for the coroner’s jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against the soldiers. The disturbances were not confined to London; but throughout the north of England, from 1815 to 1819, when the great meeting took place on Peter’s-field, there never was a meeting in the North of England in which banners were not displayed with inscriptions of “No corn laws.” There was no mistake in the minds of the multitudes upon this question. It was always understood by them. Do not let honourable gentlemen suppose that there is any mistake in the minds of the working classes upon this topic. There never was, and there is not now. They may not indeed cry out exclusively for the repeal of the corn laws; they have looked beyond the question, and they have seen, at the same time, other evils greater even than this which they are now calling upon you to remedy; and when they raise the cry of universal suffrage and the people’s charter, do not let hon. gentlemen opposite suppose, because the Anti-Corn-Law League may, perchance, have run into collision with the masses upon some points, that the people are consequently favourable to the existence of the corn laws. (Hear, hear.) What has surprised me more than anything, is to find that in this house, where lecturers are, of all men, so much decried, there exists on the other side such an ignorance upon this subject. (Laughter, and cries of “Oh, oh,” from the ministerial benches.) Yes, I say an ignorance upon this subject that I never saw equalled in any body of working men in the North of England. (Oh, oh.) Do you think that the fallacy of 1815, which, to my astonishment, I heard put forth in the house last week, namely, that wages rise and fall with the price of food, can prevail with the minds of the working men after the experience of the last three years? Have you not had bread higher during that time than during any three years during the last twenty years? Yes. Yet during those three years the wages of labour in every branch of industry have suffered a greater decline than in any three years before. (Hear, hear.) Still honourable gentlemen opposite, with their reports of committees before you, which, if they would take the trouble to consult them, would prove

the decline of wages within those three years, are persisting in maintaining the doctrine that the price of food regulates the rate of wages under the belief that this new law will keep up the price of labour. Then I am told that the price of labour in this country is so much higher than the wages abroad, that the corn law must be kept up in order to keep up labour to the proper level. Sir, I deny that labour in this country is higher paid than on the continent. (Hear, hear.) On the contrary, I am prepared to prove, from documents on the table of your own house, that the price of labour is cheaper here than in any part of the globe. ("Oh, oh," and Hear hear.) I hear an expression of dissent on the other side, but I say to honourable gentlemen, when they measure the labour of an Englishman against the labour of the foreigner, they measure a day's labour indeed with a day's labour, but they forget the relative quality of the labour. (Hear.) I maintain that if quality is to be the test, the labour of England is the cheapest in the world. (Hear, hear.) The committee which sat on machinery in the last session but one, demonstrated by their report that labour on the continent is dearer than in England. You have proof of it. Were it not so, do you think you would find in Germany, France, or Belgium, so many English workmen? Go into any city from Calais to Vienna, containing a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants, and will you not find numbers of English artisans working side by side with the natives of the place, and earning twice as much as they do, or even more? Yet the masters who employ them declare, notwithstanding the pay is higher, that the English labour is cheaper to them than the native labour. Yet we are told that the object of the manufacturers in repealing the corn laws is to lower wages to the level of the continent. It was justly said by the honourable member for Kilmarnock that the manufacturers did not require to lower the rate of wages in order to gain higher profits. If you want proof of the prosperity of manufacturers, you will find it when wages are high, but when wages drop the profits of the manufacturer drop also. I think manufacturers take too intelligent and enlightened a view of their own position and interest to suppose that the impoverishment of the multitudes they employ can promote or increase manufacturing prosperity. Sir, by deteriorating such a vast population as that employed in manufactures, you run the risk of spoiling not the animal man only, but the intellectual creature also. It is not from the wretched that great things can emanate: it is not a potato-fed population that ever led the world in arts or arms, in manufactures or commerce. (Ironical cheers from the ministerial side.) If you want your people to be virtuous or happy, you must take care that they are well fed. Upon this assumption, then, that the manufacturers want to reduce wages, and upon the assumption that the corn law keeps up the price of labour, we are going to pass a law to tax the food of the hard-working, deserving population. (Hear, hear.) What must be the result? You have heard, from the right hon. baronet, Sir R. Peel, an answer to the fallacy about our competing with foreign manufacturers. He has told you we export forty or fifty millions. We do then already compete with foreigners. You tax the bones and muscles of your people. You put a double weight upon their shoulders, and then you turn round upon them and tell them to run a race with Germany and France. I would ask, with Mr. Deacon Hume, who has been before quoted in this house, "To whom do the energies of the British people belong? Are they theirs, or are they yours?" (Cheers.) Think you that these energies were given to the English people that they might struggle for a bare existence, whilst you take from

them half of what they earn? (Cheers.) Is this doing justice to this "high-metted racer?" (Hear, hear.) Why, you don't treat your horses so. (Cheers.) You give your cattle food and rest in proportion to their toil, but men in England are now actually treated worse. Yes, tens of thousands of them were last winter treated worse than your dogs and your horses. (Cheers.) What is the pretence upon which you tax the people's food? We have been told by the right hon. baronet that the object of the law is to fix a certain price for corn. Since I have been listening to this debate, in which I heard it proposed by a prime minister to fix the price of corn, I doubted whether or not we had gone back to the days of our Edwards again, and whether we had or not travelled back some three or four centuries, when they used to fix the price of a tablecloth or a pair of shoes. What an avocation for a legislator! To fix the price of corn! Why that should be done in the open market by the dealers. (Loud cheers.) You don't fix the price of cotton, or silk, or iron, or tin. But how are you to fix this price of corn? Going back some ten years, the right hon. baronet finds the average price of corn is 56s. 10d.; and therefore, says he, I propose to keep up the price of wheat from 54s. to 58s. The right hon. baronet's plan means that or nothing. (Hear, hear, hear, and an expression of dissent.) I have heard something about the prices which it has been proposed by legislation to affix to wheat. I remember that Lord Willoughby D'Eresby said the minimum price ought to be 59s., and I see by the newspapers that the Duke of Buckingham has just announced his opinion that 60s. ought to be the lowest. (Cheers and cries of Hear, hear, hear.) There is one hon. gentleman in this house who, I hope, will speak on this subject, (for I have seen him endeavouring to catch the speaker's eye,) and who has gone a little more into particulars respecting the market price he intends to procure for commodities by act of parliament. I see in a useful little book called the "Parliamentary Pocket Companion," in which there are some nice little descriptions given of ourselves, (Laughter,) under the head "Csyley," that that gentleman is described as being the advocate of "such a course of legislation with regard to agriculture as will keep wheat at 64s. a quarter, (Hear, hear,) new milk cheese at from 52s. to 60s. per cwt., wool and butter at 1s. per lb. each, and other produce in proportion. (Hear, hear, and laughter.) Now it might be very amusing that there were to be found some gentlemen still at large, (Hear, hear, and great laughter,) who advocated the principle of the interposition of parliament to fix the price at which articles should be sold; but when we find a prime minister coming down to parliament to avow such principles, it really becomes anything but amusing. (Great cheering from the opposition.) I ask the right hon. baronet, and I pause for a reply; is he prepared to carry out that principle in the articles of cotton and wool? (Hear, hear.)

Sir ROBERT PEEL said it was impossible to fix the price of food by legislation. (Loud cheers from the ministerial side.)

Mr. COIDEN: Then on what are we legislating? (Counter cheers from the opposition.) I thank the right hon. baronet for his avowal. Perhaps then he will oblige us by not *trying* to do so. Supposing, however, that he will make the attempt, I ask the right hon. gentleman, and again I pause for a reply,—will he *try* to legislate so as to keep up the price of cotton silk, and wool? No reply. Then we have come to this conclusion—that we are not legislating for the universal people. (Tremendous cheers.) We are openly avowing that we are met here to legislate for a class

against the people. (Renewed cheering, and cries of "No no.") When I consider this I don't marvel, although I have seen it with the deepest regret, and, I may add, indignation, that we have been surrounded during the course of the debates of the last week by an immense body of police. ("Oh, oh," and much laughter from the ministerial side, mingled with cries of "Order, order.") I will not let this subject drop, even though I may be greeted with laughter. It is no laughing matter to those who have got no wheat to sell, nor money to purchase it from those who have. If the agriculturists are to have the benefit of a law founded on a calculation of ten years' average, to keep up their price at that average, I ask, are the manufacturers to have it too? (Hear, hear.) Take the ironmongers of the midland counties, the manufacturers of the very articles the agriculturists consume. Their goods have depreciated 30 per cent. in the last ten years. Are they to continue to exchange their commodities for the corn of the landlord, who has the benefit of a law keeping up his price on a calculation of a ten years' average, without the iron manufacturer having the benefit of the same consideration? (Hear, hear.) I have great doubts whether this is legislation at all. I deny that it is honest legislation. It is no answer for the right hon. baronet to say that he cannot, even if he wished, pass a law to keep up the price of manufactures. It is no satisfaction for being injured by a prime minister, to be told that he has not the power, even if he has the will, to make atonement. I only ask him to abstain from doing that for which he cannot make atonement, and surely there is nothing unreasonable in that request. I have but touched upon the skirts of this subject. ("Oh," and laughter from the ministerial side.) I ask the right honourable baronet whether, while he fixes his scale of prices to secure to the landowners 56s. a quarter, he has got also a sliding scale for wages? (Cheers.) I know but of one class of labourers in this country whose interests are well secured by the sliding scale of corn duties, and that class is the clergy of the Established Church, whose tithes are calculated upon the averages. But I want to know what you will do with the hard working classes of the community, the labouring artizans, if the price of bread is to be kept up by act of Parliament. Will you give them a law to keep up the rate of their wages? You will say that you cannot keep up the rate of wages; but that is no reason you should pass a law to mulct the working man one-third of the loaf he earns. (Cheers.) I know well the way in which the petitions of the hand-loom weavers were received in this house. "Poor, ignorant men," you said, "they know not what they ask, they are not political economists, they do not know that the price of labour, like other commodities, finds its own level by the ordinary law of supply and demand. We can do nothing for them." But I ask, then, why do you pass a law to keep up the price of corn, and at the same time say you cannot pass a law to keep up the price of the poor man's labour? (Cheers.) This is the point of view in which the country are approaching this question; and the flimsy veil of sophistry you are throwing over the question, and the combinations of figures put together and dovetailed to answer a particular purpose, will not satisfy the people of England, till you show them that you are legislating impartially for the advantage of all classes, and not for the exclusive benefit of one. (Cheers.) What are the pretexts upon which this corn-tax is justified? We have heard, in the first place, that there are exclusive burdens borne by the agriculturists. I heard one ex-

planation given of those burdens by a facetious gentleman who sits near me. He said that the only exclusive burdens upon the land which he knew of were mortgages. (Laughter.) I think the country has a right to know, and indeed I think it would have been no more than what was due to this house if those burdens of which we have heard so much had been named and enumerated. The answer I heard from the right hon. gentleman (Sir R. Peel) opposite was, that there was a great variety of opinions on the subject of these burdens. That I could myself have told the right hon. baronet. As a law is to be framed, founded expressly upon these alleged burdens, it would have been but fair at least to tell us what they are. I shall not enter upon the subject now; but this I will tell the right honourable gentleman, that for every particular burden he can show me as pressing upon the land, I will show him ten exemptions. (Hear, hear.) Yes, ten for his one. There is one burden that was referred to by the hon. member for Renfrewshire, which is the land tax. I am surprised we have not yet got the returns moved for many months since relative to the land tax of other countries. (Hear, hear.) What are our ambassadors and diplomatists about, that we cannot have the returns of the revenue and expenditure of foreign countries? Our own *bureaux* must be badly kept, or we ought to have this information already here in London. Being without official information, however, I will not run the risk of making a general statement, lest I should fall into error. I have, however, one document which is authentic, as it is on the authority of M. Humann, the finance minister of France; and he states that the land tax in that country is 40 per cent. on the whole revenue, and 25 per cent. on the revenue of the proprietors of the soil; so that in France the landowner pays 5s. in the pound, while, in this country, you have a land tax of nineteen hundred thousand pounds, not five per cent. of the income, and you call for a fresh tax upon the poor man's loaf to compensate you for the heavy burden you bear. I will tell the prime minister that, in laying on this tax without first stating his views on this point, he is not treating the house and the country with proper respect. (Cries of "Oh, oh!") I have seen, with some satisfaction, that admissions have been made, (and, indeed, it has not been denied,) that the profits of the bread tax go to the landowners. Now, in all the old committees on agricultural concerns, it was alleged that it was a farmers' question, an agricultural labourers' question; and never till lately did I hear it admitted that the bread tax did contribute to the benefit of the landowners, on account of those exclusive burdens that are set up as a pretence for its continuance. Ought we not to know what those burdens were when this corn law was passed? Having patiently waited for twenty-five years, I think we are entitled at last to a clear explanation of the pretext upon which you tax the food of the people, for the acknowledged benefit of the landowners. The right honourable baronet tells us we must not be dependent upon foreigners for our supply, or that that dependence must be supplementary, that certain years produce enough of corn for the demand, and that we must legislate for the introduction of corn only when it is wanted. Granted. On that point the right hon. baronet and I are perfectly agreed. Let us only legislate, if you please, for the introduction of corn when it is wanted. Exclude it as much as you please when it is not wanted. But all I supplicate for on the part of the starving people is, that they, and not you, shall be the judges of when corn is wanted. (Cheers.) By



what right do you pretend to gauge the appetites and admeasure the wants of millions of people? Why, there is no despotism that ever dreamed of doing anything so monstrous as this; yet you sit here and presume to judge when people want food, dole out your supply—when you condescend to think they want it, and stop it when you choose to consider they have had enough. (Hear, hear.) Are you in a position to judge of the wants of artizans, of hand-loom weavers; you, who never knew the want of a meal in your lives; do you presume to know when the people want bread? Why, in the course of the present debate the right honourable baronet opposite said, that from 1832 to 1836 sufficient corn was produced at home for the population; and yet, in his last speech, he told us that there were 800,000 hand-loom weavers who in 1836 were unable to supply themselves with the commonest wants and necessaries of existence, even though they worked sixteen and eighteen hours a day. (Hear.) Was it not also of that period that Mr. Inglis, the traveller in Ireland, wrote, when he wound up his account of that country by the emphatic and startling declaration, that one-third part of the population perished prematurely from diseases brought on by the want of the necessaries of life—(Cries of “Oh, oh!”) yet, in that state of things, the right honourable baronet gravely comes forward and tells us that the country produces a sufficiency of food. I have heard other admissions too; one in particular by the right honourable Paymaster of the Forces, who said that the landlords were entitled to the corn law to enable them to maintain a high station in the land.

Sir E. KNATCHBULL: To enable them to maintain their present station in society.

Mr. COBDEN: A noble lord also (Stanley) admitted that the price of food did keep up the rent of land, but did not raise wages. What does that mean but that the rent of land is kept up at the expense of the working classes who are unrepresented in this house? (Applause.) I say that the right hon. Paymaster of the Forces, and the noble lord, do not deal fairly with the people, for they are giving themselves an out-door relief which they deny to the poor in the union workhouses. It is not merely an extension of the pensions of the landed proprietors, as was said by the *Times* some years ago, when that paper stigmatised the corn laws as an extension of the pension list to the whole of the landed aristocracy; it was the worst kind of pauperism; it was the aristocracy submitting to be fed at the expense of the poorest of the poor. If this is to be so, if we are to bow our necks to a landed oligarchy, let things be as they were in ancient Venice; let the nobles inscribe their names in a golden book, and draw their money direct from the Exchequer. It would be better for the people, than to suffer the aristocracy to circumscribe our trade, destroy our manufactures, and draw the money from the pockets of the poor by indirect and insidious means. Such a course would be more easy for us, and more honest for you. (Cheers.) But have the honourable gentlemen who maintain a system like this, considered that the people of this country are beginning to understand it a little better than they did? And do they think that the people, with a better understanding of the subject, will allow one class not only to tax the rest of the community for their own exclusive advantage, but to be living in a state of splendour upon means obtained by indirect taxation from the pockets of the poor? (Hear, hear.) The right honourable baronet (Sir R. Peel) I apprehend knows more of the state of the country than most of his followers; and I would exhort him to bear in mind that there is a

wide-spread feeling extending into every part of the country, that upon him, and him alone, will rest the responsibility of the manner in which he shall legislate upon this subject. (Hear, hear.) He has now been in the possession of a great power for many months; he had due warning when he took office of the course it would be necessary for him to pursue. He knows the existing state of commerce and manufactures. He has had ample opportunities of acquainting himself with the actual condition of the people. He is not legislating in the dark, and this I will venture to tell him, that bad as he finds trade now, he will live (if he follows out the course in which he purposes to embark) to find it much worse. (Cheers.) I hope, sincerely hope, that he is prepared for the consequence. He has undertaken to propose a law, which I am convinced he must be conscious is not calculated to give any extension to our trade or commerce. (Hear, hear, hear.) We have never heard of an honest English merchant coming forward to say that this law would give him a trade in corn. The corn traders alone have been appealed to. (Hear, hear.) The right honourable baronet tells us that we must force forward this discussion; that we must proceed at once to the settlement of this question, because, forsooth, he has heard from many corn traders that it is very important that the matter should remain no longer in abeyance. (Hear, hear.) If the trade in corn is still to be left in the hands of a peculiar class of dealers, in the hands of a class who are habitual gamblers, will that be an alteration of the law calculated to amend the situation of those who are engaged in the general trade and commerce of the country? (Hear, hear.) Why should there be corn merchants any more than tea merchants or sugar merchants? Why should not the general merchant be enabled to bring back corn in exchange for his exports, as well as cotton, tea, or sugar? (Hear, hear.) Until you pass a law enabling the merchant to make a direct exchange for corn, as well as for other commodities of foreign production, you will give no substantial relief to commerce. (Hear, hear.) Nor is your law calculated to lower the price of food. You will have people amongst you still maintaining the same wolfish competition to raise the price of bread, and you will have capitalists day by day struggling against bankruptcy. For this state of things the right honourable baronet (Sir R. Peel) will be responsible. (Hear.) I own, indeed, that I heard in the right honourable baronet's second speech something like an apologetic tone of reasoning; something deprecatory as to his present position, not being able to do all that he would do. That tone would be very well if the right honourable baronet had been forced into his present position by the people, (Loud cheers from the ministerial side,) or summoned there by the Queen, (Hear, hear;) then, with some shadow of fairness, he might resort to the plea that his position was a difficult one, and that he would do more if his party would permit him. (Hear, hear.) But let me remind the right honourable baronet that he sought the position he now fills, (Hear;) and, though I am no friend, no political partizan of the noble lord the member for London, (Lord J. Russell,) though I have no desire to see him again in power, governed by his old opinions, this I must say, that the measure which the noble lord proposed upon the corn law, though in itself not good, was still infinitely better than that of the right hon. baronet. (Cheers.) And I beg to call to the right hon. baronet's mind, that if he is now placed in a situation of difficulty, that difficulty was sought by himself, and, consequently, cannot now be pleaded in extenuation of his present measure. (Cheers.) He told us

at Tamworth, that, for years and years, aye, even from the passing of the Reform Bill, he had been engaged in reconstructing his party. I presume that he knew of what materials that party was composed. I presume he was not ignorant of the fact, that it consisted of monopolists of every kind; monopolists of religion, monopolists of the franchise, monopolists of sugar, monopolists of corn, monopolists of timber, and monopolists of coffee. (Hear, hear.) These were the parties that gathered around him, and out of which he was to construct his new parliament. They were fully alive to the occasion; they set to work to revive the old system of corruption; they bribed and they bought. (Cheers and counter cheers.) Yes, they bribed, they bought, and they intimidated, (Renewed cheering from both sides,) until they found themselves in office, and the right hon. baronet at their head, as their leader and champion. (Cheers.) Did he expect that this party had expended their funds and their labour in the registration courts—for there, as the right hon. baronet himself has stated, I believe the battle of the constitution will henceforth be fought—did he think that they had expended this labour and this money in order that they might come into office and assist him to take away their monopolies? (Hear, hear.) The right hon. baronet must have known the party he had to deal with, for he had a very old connexion with them; and, therefore, I presume he was not disappointed when he came into office, having thrust out men who, with all their faults, were still far better than these who succeeded them. (Cheers.) Having thrown those men out of office, and being unable to carry the measures which they proposed, and were ready to carry into effect, I say that he has now no right to set up the difficulty of his position as a bar to the universal condemnation which his proposition must receive in the estimation of every just politician in the country. (Cheers, and cries of "Oh, oh.") He is the cause, yes, I say he is the cause of our present position, and upon his shoulders will the people rest the whole of the responsibility. (Hear, hear.) I will now say a word to the gentlemen on this side of the house who have such great difficulties, such boggings and startings (Great laughter and cheering) at the danger of giving their assent to the motion of my honourable friend the member for Wolverhampton. (Cheers.) I will say a word or two to the noble lord the member for London (Lord J. Russell), and to my noble and right hon. neighbours, as to the difficulties of conscience which they appear to entertain about a total and immediate repeal of the corn laws. (Cheers from the ministerial side.) I hear on this side of the house, in almost all directions, an acknowledgment of the principle for which I and others contend, that is, the principle of perfect freedom in the trade in corn. (Hear, hear.) But, there are some of my noble and right hon. neighbours who think that there should be a duty on corn for the purposes of revenue. (Hear, hear.) How can there be a duty for revenue unless it be a duty for protection? (Cheers.) I ask my noble and right honourable neighbours who entertain that view of the subject to reconsider it before they go to a division. (Cheers and laughter.) With that word of advice to those who sit near me, I proceed to make a remark in reference to the little word "now," about which many gentlemen on this side of the house seem also to feel a considerable difficulty. There are gentlemen here who think that the corn laws ought to be repealed, but they cannot reconcile themselves to the immediate repeal of them. They do not like to repeal them "now." "We admit," say they, "the injustice which these laws inflict upon upwards of 25,000,000 of the peo-

ple for the advantage of a select few; but inasmuch as some thousands of persons have a beneficial interest in this wrong inflicted upon the millions, we cannot suddenly deprive them of the advantage they possess." Now, with all due deference to gentlemen who use that argument, I must be permitted to say that I think they are showing a very great sympathy for the few who are gaining, and vastly little sympathy indeed for the many who are suffering from the operation of these laws. (Cheers.) I would put it to those gentlemen, whether, if it had been in their power, immediately after the passing of the corn law in 1815, to repeal that law, they would have given any compensation to the landed interest in the shape of an eight or ten years' diminishing duty upon the importation of foreign grain? No; they would have repealed them at once. (Hear, hear, hear.) Then, I ask, do they think that twenty-seven years' possession of the wrong—twenty-seven years of exclusive advantage—twenty-seven years of injustice to the rest of the community, entitles this interested and selfish party to increase its demand in the shape of compensation? (Cheers.) I give the honourable gentlemen who are near me credit for being quite sincere in their scruples. I have heard such scruples very often expressed before; but I once heard them met at a public meeting of electors, in what appeared to me to be a very satisfactory manner. There was great difficulty on the platform among the Whig gentlemen who were assembled there about the repeal of the corn laws, and they were arguing about the danger and hardship of an immediate repeal of them. They were at length interrupted by a sturdy labouring man in a fustian coat, who called out, "Whoi, mun! where's the trouble in taking them off? you put them on all of a ruck;" (Laughter and cheering;) meaning, that they had been put on all of a sudden. And so they were. The law was passed without notice in 1815, notwithstanding the remonstrances of the people. Then, I say, let us abolish this law, and the sooner the better. (Hear, hear.) I will not trespass further upon the patience of the house. I consider that this question is now drawn within such narrow limits as to depend upon these two points; "Are you, the landed interest, able to show that you are subjected to exclusive burdens? If so, then the way to relieve you is not to put taxes on the rest of the community, but to remove your burdens. Secondly, are you prepared to carry out even-handed justice to the people? If not, your law will not stand; nay, your house itself, if based upon injustice, will not stand." (Cheers.)

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