

Brighton. February 4 1831

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The King has too long been deeply impressed with the extreme importance of the Question of Parliamentary Reform, which has so long engaged the Attention of the Public, and has recently been the subject of the serious deliberations of His Confidential Servants, not to have looked forward with great anxiety to the Results of Their deliberations, in the communications which were made to Him on the 31st Ult. by Earl Grey of "the Report on the State of the Representation, with a view to its thorough and effective Reform" and of the Three Bills attached to that Report "amending the Representation of England, Scotland, and Ireland" with the accompanying Explanatory Documents. —

Although The King had felt willing to admit the necessity of engaging

Earl Grey

See

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in this Question, His Majesty would desire
Earl Grey, and His other Confidential Servants
if he were to disguise from them that His
anxiety was not free from uneasiness, or
that the apprehension of innovations, fraught
with danger and proposed to be introduced
at a period which other circumstances ren-
= dered so critical, did not greatly outweigh
His Expectations of advantage to the State, and
to the Country, from Measures of which He
had yet to learn the Nature, and the Extent. —

3 These having indeed been produced, or
at least hastened into Discussion, more
or less by Popular clamours, might prove
of such a Character as to call upon The King
for an opposition to them of which the
possible Results would have been decidedly
at variance with His general Inclinations
and with His sense of the necessity of

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stability, and of cordial Union, in the
Councils of the Nation. —

Earl Grey cannot possibly be
surprized that such should have been
His Majesty's feeling, nor consider it as
betraying any want of that confidence
which induced Him, to call upon Him,
for His able and valuable Services, and
to entrust Him with the formation of
the Administration at a period of
extreme National, and general Importance. —

That confidence has continued
unimpaired, and it has been amply
justified. —

But His Majesty had, little more
than Four Months after His accession to
The Throne, been under the necessity of
changing His Government, — a Government
to which He had given His strenuous, and
unqualified

unqualified support, - in consequence of the
Influence of that very House of Commons
of which, as the Popular Branch of the Legislature,
it was to be understood that the Power, and
Influence should be further increased. -
He could not be ignorant, and was not
ignorant, that some of those who had,
in consequence of that change in the
Government, been called to his Councils
were, more, or less, committed in Pledges
on Popular Questions, and it was therefore
natural, that He should dread, independantly
of other sources of objection, the Introduction
into the House of Commons of such
measures of Reform, as would be likely
to be rejected in the House of Lords, whence
must arise a Quarrel between those Two
Branches of the Legislature, not upon a
mere matter of Form, not upon the Enactment
of a common Law, but upon a matter affecting

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a main feature of the Constitution of the Country, upon a great Popular Question, and therefore to be viewed as a Great National, and Political Calamity. —

Nor were these apprehensions groundless, either as they regard the objections which The King would have felt it His Duty to maintain, or the opposition He would have anticipated in the House of Peers, supposing the Election by Ballot to have formed part of the Bill proposed to be introduced, — for its adoption was actually proposed in the Report presented to Earl Grey, though positively rejected by Him before He submitted it to His Majesty. —

The King does not deny that He hails that Rejection, as removing an insuperable Bar from His assent to the proposed Measure, and He is induced thus pointedly to notice the Proposal.

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Earl Grey afterwards
 claimed that it
 had not been
 proposed but
 only stated as
 being urged by
 a class of the
 Convention for
 explanatory
 purposes

of Introducing Election by Ballot, in order
to declare that nothing shall ever induce
him to yield to it, or to sanction a practice
which would, in his opinion, be a Protection
to concealment, would abolish the Influence
of Fear and Shame, and would be inconsis-
-tent with the manly Spirit, and the free
avowal of opinion which distinguishes the People
of England. —

His Majesty need scarcely add that
his opposition to the Introduction of another
yet more objectionable proposal, the adoption
of Universal Suffrage; one of those wild Projects
which have sprung from Revolutionary
Speculation, would have been still more
decided. —

In a question of such vital importance,
possibly of greater moment and more deeply
affecting the general Interests and Welfare of
the State than any (with the exception of the
Emancipation of the Roman Catholics) upon

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which The Sovereign of this Country has for Centuries past, been called upon to determine, The King feels, that He would not do justice to Himself if He were to omit stating His general view of the Question as a subject of Public Discussion, and without immediate reference to the shape in which it is now submitted for His sanction, and to the Explanations given to Him by Earl Grey which His Majesty acknowledges to have been ample and satisfactory on every point, and to have been offered without reserve or hesitation. —

The King trusts that His General conduct will secure Him against any Inference that His opinions have ^{arisen from an arbitrary Disposition,} been conceived in the Spirit of Party, or that they have resulted from Prejudice, other than that possibly which is produced from attachment to old Institutions, under which England has so long enjoyed, and still enjoys the Benefits

Benefits, for which other Countries are contending.
But He wishes by thus recording His opinions,
to establish a clear understanding of the
Limits which a sense of His duty, and
the Principles by which He considers He
ought, as Sovereign of this Country, to be
governed, must affix to His admission of
any Proposal that may be made to Him.

12/ His Majesty is not disposed to
deny the existence of Defects in the System
of the Parliamentary Representation, nor
that it is natural, when Defects exist, to
wish to remove them, but He believes
the Evils to be more in Theory than in Practice,
as shown by the mode in which the Machine
has worked, and the Question is, whether in
such a Constitution as that of these Realms
the dangers of change be not more to be dreaded,

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and deprecated than the existence of defects,
and whether the preservation of blessings
we enjoy be not preferable to the prosecution
of that which, when acquired after much difficulty
and struggle, may grievously disappoint
our Expectations. —

Great stress is laid upon
the General opinion of the People, as being
in favor of an extensive Reform, but His
Majesty very much doubts whether there
be sufficient ground for the conclusion.

He cannot consider Public Meetings
as a just Criterion of the sentiments of the
People. The objects of those Meetings have
in general been the Promotion of
Discontents, and the disturbance of the
Public Peace, and those who have not
felt inclined to encourage those objects,
have absented themselves from them, and
have viewed with alarm, Proceedings
which

which might affect their Security, and their
Property. Those, on the other hand who
have little, or nothing to lose, naturally
look for advantage to themselves from
any change, and are callous to the
Prospect of its ruinous effects on the mass,
as the Prejudice cannot reach them.

But even when such be not the motive
of agitators, it may be questioned, whether
in a Country where so much Freedom, already
exists, Reform, which contemplates Election
by Ballot, and Universal Suffrage, be not
a specious Cloak for the Introduction
of Republicanism. —

The Influence which has been exercised
by Peers in the Representation, and which
has become so much the object of
vituperation, attaches to Property,

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and it appears reasonable that it should, on that score, be exercised by Individuals who, having the larger Stake, have the greatest Interest in the maintenance of the security, and Prosperity of the Country, and of the established order of things. — It is natural that they should possess influence over those to whom their Property enables them to give Employment and Subsistence, and it is desirable that an useful Union should thus be promoted between the Upper and the Lower Classes of Society, more especially as the means by which Revolutionists chiefly strive to attain their ends is, by the Destruction of those Links. Experience has indeed shown that their attacks are almost invariably levelled at the Existing Aristocracy.

Aristocracy, altho the Destruction of
Monarchy may not always be their
object. —

The King conceives that the most
strenuous Advocates for Reform, those
whose object it may be to introduce
a preponderance of Popular Influence,
will not attempt to deny that the Influence
of the House of Commons has increased
more than that of the Crown, or of the House
of Peers, and the Question is whether
greater danger be not to be apprehended
from its Encroachments than from
any other Evil which may be the subject
of Speculation, and whether it is not
from this source that the mixed form
of Government of the Country has to
dread annihilation. — Even now, the
House of Commons may at once disable

the whole Machine; they may, by a factious combination, stop the Supplies, they may produce by a similar combination a degree of Assistance which has been gradually placed more & more beyond the Influence of the Crown and of which the effect, in the Dissolution of the Government, may be insidious and unexpected: these Manœuvres may be brought into play in rapid succession, and may totally deprive the Executive Authorities of their Power of action, or suspend it, at most critical periods, when the safety of the Empire may depend upon the support to be given to that power of action. —

All this would seem to point out the Inexpediency, not to say the Insecurity, of rendering the House of Commons
more

more Popular, than it already is in
the materials of its Composition, by the
Substitution of a Representation of
Numbers for one of Property. -

That Equilibrium of the Three Estates
which it is so essential to preserve in their
just and proper Bearings, relatively
upon each other would be destroyed,
The House of Commons would acquire
an undue Preponderance in the Scale, and
the consequence, sooner or later, would
be a Democracy in its worst form. -

The King has thus stated at length,
and without reserve, the feelings, and
the Sentiments with which He approached
this perilous Question, and He has been
induced to do so from a desire that He
should not be considered as having
lightly or inconsiderately given His

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His Majesty having
in the Indenture
in which Lord
Grey submitted
the plan to Her
Majesty, whereby His
Majesty's consent
sanction to it.

consequence to the measure which has
been submitted to Her, and also
because He felt that this full statement
of the opinion He had entertained and
still entertains would give greater
value to His sanction of what has
been proposed to Her by Earl Grey,
inasmuch as it would shew that,
serious as were His apprehensions, and
His objections, they have been removed
by the nature, and character of the
proposed measure, and because the
declaration of a sanction, so obtained,
must convey to Her Government with
it, the assurance of His Majesty's
Determination to afford to Her
His utmost Countenance, and support
in the furtherance of this arduous
and important undertaking.

It must convince Her that He
is

is dealing fairly by them and that he does not shrink from the Responsibility of avowing his Sentiments, before his Decision shall be called for by the Results of the Discussion which is approaching, when it might be supposed to rest upon the opinions and views of others. — His Majesty's assent, being given upon due and mature consideration of all the Bearings of the Question, ought, in his opinion, to be given in so unreserved a manner as to secure to His Ministers its full Benefit. —

The King does not consider it necessary to enter into the Detail of the various Provisions of the Bills, but will confine what he still has to say, to some Remarks upon the Reports

made to Earl Grey which accompanied
those Bills. —

His Majesty admits the correctness
of the Principle and the Policy of "not
conceding so much only as might
for the moment evade or stifle the
Demand for a more extensive alteration
in the existing System"; and He
considers it desirable "to effect such
a permanent settlement of the Question
as will no longer render its agitation
subservient to the Designs of the
factions and discontented." —

His Majesty concurs in the opinion
offered in the Report that "the Plan of Reform
ought to be of such a scope, and description,
as to satisfy all reasonable demands, and
remove at once, and for ever all rational
grounds of complaint from the minds of
the Intelligent and independent Part
of the Nation."

"Protection of the Community," and he considers
it most important that — "an effectual
check should thus be opposed to that
restless Spirit of Innovation which aims
in secret at nothing less than the overthrow
of all Institutions, and even the Throne
itself." —

His Majesty approves of the Disfranchise-
ment of all Boroughs, the Population of
which amounts to less than 2,000 Inhabitants,
and ^{that} those whose Population amounts to
less than 2,000 Inhabitants, should be
deprived of One Member. —

The King approves, for the Reasons
assigned in the Report, of the Extension
of the Elective Franchise, to all House-
holders, within the Town, or Borough,
& Parish (in the latter class of Boroughs
as well as in those Cities and Boroughs
where the Right of Voting is enjoyed by

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by close Corporations) who are entitled by the late Act to serve on Juries, those who are Rated to the Relief of the Poor, or to the Inhabited House Tax at £20 per cent: It being also understood that no person shall in future acquire a right of Voting for a County by virtue of any Property situated in any Borough sending Members to Parliament. —

He approves of granting Representations to all large, and Populous Towns, of more than 10,000 Inhabitants; the right of Voting to be vested in Householders of

Twenty (over) £20 per ann: —

His Majesty approves of giving additional Members to Counties, whose Population amounts to more than 150,000 Inhabitants

dividing them into Districts, leaving The Forty Shilling Franchise, as it now exists, but enfranchising Leaseholders of £50 per annum, and Copyholders of £10 per ann.

His Majesty approves of the Proposal which

Twenty (over)
do as respects
his Majesty's
pleasure being
frequently taken
in the Reduction
of the Qualification
£10.0.0

which have in view a Diminution of
the Expense of Elections, namely
The Enforcement of Residence.
The Registration of Votes.
The Increase of the Number of Polling Booths.
The Shortening of the Duration of the Poll.
Retaking the Poll in Hundreds, or Divisions;
and His Majesty is induced to waive
His objection to shortening the Duration
of Parliament from Seven, to Five, years
in consideration of the Shortening the
Duration of the Poll, and of the
arrangement proposed in the Bills
which are calculated not only to reduce
the expense, of Elections, but to
lessen the Evils which have hitherto
resulted from them. —

But altho the Establishment
of Septennial Parliaments is of
recent Introduction as compared
with

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with many other Enactments, connected with the Representation, His Majesty would not be sorry to learn that His Government had not found it necessary to persist in the proposed change of Period. —

The King is of opinion that, in an arrangement of which the foundation is the amount of Population, it would be very desirable to remove all possibility of objection, and Doubts with respect to the correctness of the returns of that Population, and therefore that a New Census should be taken, as the Changes which may have occurred in the Relative Population, more especially of Boroughs, and Cities, within the
last

last 10 Years may, in some Cases,
cause a material Alteration of the
Numbers stated in the Returns
on which the Arrangement is founded.

A new Census would also be
desirable with reference to Ballots
for the Militia. —

His Majesty has abstained from
objecting to one part of the Arrang-
ment, that which leaves the Forty
Shilling Franchise as it now
exists, because He is aware that
there might be considerable difficulty
in raising it at once to £ 10, ^{Per Ann.}
which is proposed to constitute, in
Future, the Qualification for the
Vote, at any County Election, but
He

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He owns that he would have been better satisfied by the Introduction of a Provision which should have abolished the Forty Shilling Franchise.

Now could such a Provision be reasonably objected to as inconsistent with the Constitutional Principle on which the Representation was framed, as it must be considered that when the Right of Voting was vested in Forty Shilling Freeholders the value of that Sum far exceeded that, which £10. or even Four or Five times that Sum. bears in the present Day. —

At any rate His Majesty
trusts

trusts that the Rates proposed in
the Bills will not be lowered and
that it will be borne in mind that
in order to reconcile conflicting opinions
and to give due attention to the
Interests of all concerned, the Principle
adopted should embrace a
Representation of Property
as well as one of Numbers..

Signed. William P