

## The Tamworth Manifesto

18 December 1834

To the Electors of the Borough of Tamworth.

Gentlemen,

On the 26th of November last, being then at Rome, I received from His Majesty a summons, wholly unforeseen and unexpected by me, to return to England without delay, for the purpose of assisting His Majesty in the formation of a new government. I instantly obeyed the command for my return; and on my arrival, I did not hesitate, after an anxious review of the position of public affairs, to place at the disposal of my Sovereign any services which I might be thought capable of rendering.

My acceptance of the first office in the Government terminates, for the present, my political connection with you. In seeking the renewal of it, whenever you shall be called upon to perform the duty of electing a representative in Parliament, I feel it incumbent on me to enter into a declaration of my views of public policy, as full and unreserved as I can make it, consistently with my duty as a Minister of the Crown.

You are entitled to this, from the nature of the trust which I again solicit, from the long habits of friendly intercourse in which we have lived, and from your tried adherence to me in times of difficulty, when the demonstration of unabated confidence was of peculiar value. I gladly avail myself also of this, a legitimate opportunity, of making a more public appeal - of addressing myself, through you, to that great and intelligent class of society of which you are a portion, and a fair and unexceptionable representative - to that class which is much less interested in the contentions of party, than in the maintenance of order and the cause of good government, that frank exposition of general principles and views which appears to be anxiously expected, and which it ought not to be the inclination, and cannot be the interest of a Minister of this country to withhold.

Gentlemen, the arduous duties in which I am engaged have been imposed on me through no act of mine. Whether they were an object of ambition coveted by me - whether I regard the power and distinction they confer as of any sufficient compensation for the heavy sacrifices they involve - are matters of mere personal concern, on which I will not waste a word. The King, in a crisis of great difficulty, required my services. The question I had to decide was this - Shall I obey the call? Or shall I shrink from the responsibility, alleging as the reason, that I consider myself, in consequence of the Reform Bill, as labouring under a sort of moral disqualification, which must preclude me, and all who think with me, both now and for ever, from entering into the official service of the Crown? Would it, I ask, be becoming in any public man to act upon such a principle? Was it fit that I should assume that either the object or the effect of the Reform Bill has been to preclude all hope of a successful appeal to the good sense and calm judgement of

the people, and so fetter the prerogative of the Crown, that the King has no free choice among his subjects, but must select his Ministers from one section, and from one section only, of public men?

I have taken another course, but I have not taken it without deep and anxious consideration as to the probability that my opinions are so far in unison with those of the constituent body of the United Kingdom as to enable me, and those with whom I am about to act, and whose sentiments are in entire concurrence with my own, to establish such a claim upon public confidence as shall enable us to conduct with vigour and success the government of this country.

I have the firmest convictions that that confidence cannot be secured by any other course than that of a frank and explicit declaration of principle; that vague and unmeaning professions of popular opinion may quiet distrust for a time, may influence this or that election but that such professions must ultimately and signally fail, if, being made, they are not adhered to, or if they are inconsistent with the honour and character of those who made them.

Now I say at once that I will not accept power on the condition of declaring myself an apostate from the principles on which I have heretofore acted. At the same time, I never will admit that I have been, either before or after the Reform Bill, the defender of abuses, or the enemy of judicious reforms. I appeal with confidence in denial of the charge, to the active part I took in the great question of the currency - in the consolidation and amendment of the Criminal Law - in the revisal of the whole system of Trial by Jury - to the opinions I have professed, and uniformly acted on, with regard to other branches of the jurisprudence of this country - I appeal to this as a proof that I have not been disposed to acquiesce in acknowledged evils, either from the mere superstitious reverence for ancient usages, or from the dread of labour or responsibility in the application of a remedy.

But the Reform Bill, it is said, constitutes a new era, and it is the duty of a Minister to declare explicitly - first, whether he will maintain the Bill itself, secondly whether he will act on the spirit in which it was conceived.

With respect to the Reform Bill itself, I will repeat now the declaration I made when I entered the House of Commons as a member of the Reformed Parliament - that I consider the Reform Bill a final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitutional question - a settlement which no friend to the peace and welfare of this country would attempt to disturb, either by direct or by insidious means.

Then, as to the spirit of the Reform Bill, and the willingness to adopt and enforce it as a rule of government: if, by adopting the spirit of the Reform Bill, it be meant that we are to live in a perpetual vortex of agitation; that public men can only support themselves in public estimation by adopting every popular impression of the day, - by promising the instant redress of anything which anybody may call an abuse - by abandoning altogether that great aid of government - more powerful than either law or reason - the respect for

ancient rights, and the deference to prescriptive authority; if this be the spirit of the Reform Bill, I will not undertake to adopt it. But if the spirit of the Reform Bill implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper combining, with the firm maintenance of established rights, the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances, - in that case, I can for myself and colleagues undertake to act in such a spirit and with such intentions.

Such declarations of general principle are, I am aware, necessarily vague: but in order to be more explicit, I will endeavour to apply them practically to some of those questions which have of late attracted the greater share of public interest and attention.

I take first the inquiry into Municipal Corporations:

It is not my intention to advise the Crown to interrupt the process of that inquiry, nor to transfer the conduct of it from those to whom it was committed by the late Government. For myself, I gave the best proof that I was not unfriendly to the principle of inquiry, by consenting to be a member of that Committee of the House of Commons on which it was originally devolved. No report has yet been made by the Commissioners to whom the inquiry was afterwards referred: and until that report be made, I cannot be expected to give, on the part of the Government, any other pledge than that they will bestow on the suggestions it may contain, and the evidence on which they may be founded, a full and unprejudiced consideration.

I will, in the next place, address myself to the questions in which those of our fellow-countrymen who dissent from the doctrines of the Established Church take an especial interest.

Instead of making new professions, I will refer to the course which I took upon those subjects when out of power.

In the first place I supported the measure brought forward by Lord Althorp, the object of which was to exempt all classes from the payment of Church-rates, applying in lieu thereof, out of a branch of revenue, a certain sum for the building and repair of churches. I never expressed, nor did I entertain, the slightest objection to the principle of a bill of which Lord John Russell was the author, intended to relieve the conscientious scruples of dissenters in respect to the ceremony of marriage. I give no opinion now on the particular measures themselves: they were proposed by Ministers in whom the Dissenters had confidence; they were intended to give relief; and it is sufficient for my present purposes to state that I supported them.

I opposed - and I am bound to state that my opinions in that respect have undergone no change - the admission of Dissenters as a claim of right, into the universities; but I expressly declared that if regulations, enforced by public authorities superintending the professions of law and medicine, and the studies connected with them, had the effect of conferring advantages of the nature of civil privileges on one class of the king's subjects from which another was excluded - those regulations ought to undergo modification, with

the view of placing all the King's subjects, whatever their religious creeds, upon a footing of perfect equality with respect to any civil privilege.

I appeal to the course which I pursued on those several questions, when office must have been out of contemplation; and I ask, with confidence, does that course imply that I was actuated by any illiberal or intolerant spirit towards the Dissenting body, or by an unwillingness to consider fairly the redress of any real grievances?

In the examination of other questions which excited the public interest, I will not omit the Pension List. I resisted - and, with the opinions I entertain I should again resist - a retrospective inquiry into pensions granted by the Crown at a time when the discretion of the Crown was neither fettered by law nor by the expression of any opinion on the part of the House of Commons; but I voted for the Resolution, moved by Lord Althorp, that pensions on the Civil List ought, for the future, to be confined to such persons only as have just claims to the royal beneficence, or are entitled to consideration on account either of their personal services to the Crown, or of performance of duties to the public, or their scientific or literary eminence. On the Resolution which I thus supported as a private Member of Parliament, I shall scrupulously act as a Minister of the Crown, and shall advise the grant of no pension which is not in conformity with the spirit and intention of the vote to which I was a party.

Then, as to the great question of Church Reform. On that head I have no new professions to make. I cannot give my consent to the alienating of Church property, in any part of the United Kingdom, from strictly ecclesiastical purposes. But I repeat now the opinions that I have already expressed in parliament in regard to the church Establishment in Ireland - that if, by an improved distribution of the revenues of the Church, its just influence can be extended, and the true interests of the Established religion promoted, all other considerations should be made subordinate to the advancement of objects of such paramount importance.

As to Church property in this country, no person has expressed a more earnest wish than I have done that the question of tithe, complicated and difficult as I acknowledge it to be, should, if possible, be satisfactorily settled by means of a commutation, founded upon just principles, and proposed after mature consideration.

With regard to alterations in the laws which govern our Ecclesiastical Establishment, I have had no recent opportunity of giving that grave consideration to a subject of the deepest interest; which could alone justify me in making any public declaration of opinion. It is a subject which must undergo the fullest deliberation, and into that deliberation the Government will enter, with the sincerest desire to remove every abuse that can impair the efficiency of the Establishment, to extend the sphere of its usefulness, and to strengthen and confirm its just claims upon the respect and affection of the people.

It is unnecessary for my purpose to enter into any further details. I have said enough, with respect to general principles and their practical application to public measures, to indicate the spirit in which the King's Government is prepared to act. Our object will be - the

maintenance of peace - the scrupulous and honourable fulfilment, without reference to their original policy, of all existing engagements with Foreign Powers - the support of public credit - the enforcement of strict economy - the just and impartial consideration of what is due to all interests - agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial.

Whatever may be the issue of the undertaking in which I am engaged, I feel assured that you will mark, by a renewal of your confidence, your approbation of the course I have pursued in accepting office. I enter upon the arduous duties assigned to me with the deepest sense of the responsibilities they involve, with great distrust of my own qualifications for their adequate discharge, but at the same time with a resolution to persevere, which nothing could inspire but the strong impulse of public duty, the consciousness of upright motives, and the firm belief that the people of this country will so far maintain the prerogative of the King, as to give to the Ministers of his choice, not an implicit confidence, but a fair trial.

I am, Gentlemen,

With affectionate regard,

Most faithfully yours,

Robert Peel.