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## Ron Manners

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**Subject:** Cobden & Bright convinced PM Robert Peel to abolish tariff protection(on Grain) June 25 1846etc..see notes

**Start:** Wed 25/06/2014 8:00 AM  
**End:** Wed 25/06/2014 8:30 AM

**Recurrence:** Yearly  
**Recurrence Pattern:** every June 25 from 8:00 AM to 8:30 AM

**Organizer:** Ron Manners

The Letters Editor.

Free Trade and Prosperity.

It was not until June 25<sup>th</sup> 1846, that Richard Cobden and John Bright convinced Prime Minister, Robert Peel, and, with help from elder statesman, the Duke of Wellington, the British Government abolished tariff protection, (on grain).

Such were the obvious benefits, England went completely free trade by 1848, and little England went on, over the following fifty years to become Great Britain.

This rise in living standards is confirmed by historian Paul Johnson in his admirable book Enemies of Society:

“The achievements of the new economic civilisation became undeniable. In the end capitalism, [the free market system], brought much greater equality.

“Gregory King calculated in 1688 that Lords got 3,200 pounds per year, and gentlemen an average of 280 pounds per year; the mass of the poor got 2 pounds. There seems to have been little change between 1688 and 1800; thereafter the equalising process began to operate, and the gigantic disparities between rich and poor, so characteristic of all pre-industrial societies, slowly narrowed, a process which continues today.

“What, in material terms is more important is that, at the same time, the real wealth of all increased. In nineteenth century Britain, the size of the working population multiplied fourfold; real wages doubled in the half-century 1800-1850, and doubled again, 1850-1900. This meant that there was a 1,600% increase in the production and consumption of wage-goods during the century.

Nothing like this had happened anywhere before in the whole of history.

246 Words.

Ronald Kitching

Orig in e-kitching 17/8/10

**Richard Cobden & Anti Corn Law League** In the early/mid 19th Manchester was a centre of liberal economic theory. In particular much of the arguments leading to legislation and repeal of the Corn Laws were argued in and around Manchester.

Cobden was born in Midhurst, Sussex; he was the son of a small farmer and educated at a bad private school in Yorkshire. He started his working life as a clerk and became a commercial traveller in a commercial warehouse. In 1819 obviously ambitious, he set up in business on borrowed capital, 1828 he took part in Manchester municipal politics, and was one of the first aldermen of the city. He became an MP in 1841 but was nearly financially ruined in 1845.

Up to this time it was thought best to protect all home industry and agriculture from imports. However when the harvests were poor prices of the staple food's rose. The revival of the demand for the repeal of the corn laws took place after the summer of 1836. The league was formed in London but the initiative moved to Manchester and a larger movement was constituted in 1838 as corn prices reached new high's.

The purpose of the league was simple and stated in its title. The league appealed to the self-interest of the middle and working classes. The essential argument used was that imports of corn would be paid for out by increased export of textile and industrial goods. Robert Peel's ideology was moving towards the doctrine of FREE TRADE. Peel's decision to repeal the corn laws was made before the potato famine of Ireland 1845. The poor suffered in this country as well as Ireland from a lack of potato's and a poor harvest as many tons of potato's were shipped across from Ireland down the canals of England.

Food took up a much higher proportion of the family budget in those days. When the food prices went up there was no money to buy other goods so the whole economy was depressed. The two most important lights in the movement were Cobden & Bright. The repeal of the Corn Laws reduced the price of food so

Cobden & Bright were regarded as heroes; champions of ordinary folks rights.

Persuasive speakers they both staked their political futures on one piece of legislation and were successful. They were fanatical public speaking and educating the masses at public meetings, about breaking up the old order of landed gentry & monopolies. Politics was very under the control of vested interests. Cobden along with Bright was one of the great orators of the age. Bright was widely read; reading as though from the Bible or in the style of Milton. When he was speaking he left the sternness of his Quaker upbringing behind. He was full of sarcasm and irony not missing a trick to point out the hypocrisy of the aristocracy and political opponents.

Cobden was quick-minded, sensitive man; he was neither the first or the last opponent of aristocracy. He had experienced the charms of the good life: He wrote in 1846: "I am afraid that if I associate too much with the aristocracy, they will spoil me. I am already half seduced by the fascinating ease of their parties." It is doubtful that Cobden would have been nearly as successful without the help of his friend and ally John Bright (1811-1889)

Cobden & Bright in many ways were absurdly wrong in a reading of past history, which left out the economic motive in war, and in their forecast of the future development of industrial civilization. (The same flaws, as in the work of Thomas Malthus Essay's in Population growth underestimating the effects of science and technology on economic growth). They spoke to audiences who knew little of the past and certainly had even less vision of the future. However their arguments convinced the political masters such as Robert Peel.

Cobden was very popular and he was saved by public donations of £80,000. He was offered the Presidency of the Board of Trade by Palmerston. There are statues of Cobden in Manchester and Stockport and the fight for Free Trade was commemorated by the building of the Free Trade Hall.

Source: The Age of Reform 1815-1870 Sir Llewellyn Woodward. Oxford Clarendon Press.



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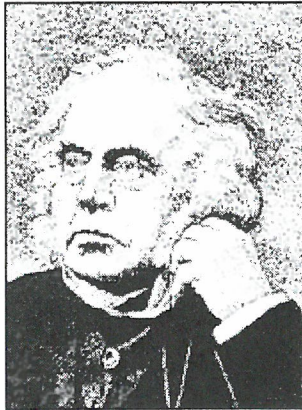
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## John Bright (1811-1883)

"As a nation of Bible Christians, we ought to realize that trade should be as free as the winds of heaven."



Son of an English self-made textile manufacturer, John Bright entered his father's business after leaving school. Upon the death of his wife in 1841, Bright and his colleague Richard Cobden began the Anti-Corn Law campaign (1838-1846) which ultimately succeeded in lowering import tariffs, producing freer trade. He became a Member of Parliament in 1843 and accepted appointment to the Board of Trade in Gladstone's administration in 1868. In contrast to Cobden, who favored the Southern free-traders, Bright supported the Northern states during the Civil War because of the slavery issue. Wary of tyrannical government, Bright opposed the manufacture of munitions by the state.

He devoted much of his public life to the agitation against church-rates. He supported Gladstone's efforts in 1868 to de-establish the church of Ireland. He did not believe in state subsidies for education and in state interference with the conditions of working adults. Because of this, Bright opposed the ten hours' bill in 1847 which intended to limit the work day. He was strongly opposed to war, convinced that it was the amusement of an aristocracy, but also because of its negative economic repercussions, particularly in the case of the Crimean war of 1854.

Bright's family moved in Quaker circles. In many respects he was a typical Englishman of his time. He was an active member of a local cricket club as well as a founder of a literary and philosophical society. A great orator, he read widely, and based his style upon the Bible and Milton. When speaking, he often neglected the seriousness, and even the charity, of his religious upbringing, and used a sarcasm and irony foreign to the religiosity of his letters and diaries.

Sources: *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* by E. L. Woodward (Oxford, 1938) and *Great Britain from Adam Smith to the Present Day* by C. R. Fay (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1929).

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