

## GOLD EXPORT DUTY BILL.

## PETITION.

*Ordered by the Council to be printed 27th. October, 1851.*

TO THE HONORABLE THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA, IN COUNCIL ASSEMBLED.

*The Petition of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce,*

SHEWETH—

THE Melbourne Chamber of Commerce called a Meeting of the Members to take into consideration the "*Export Duty on Gold Bill*," now before the Legislature of the Colony. The Meeting was held accordingly, and attended by a greater number of Members than had met on any former occasion.

On the question whether Gold is in itself a proper object of taxation, the Meeting was not unanimous, and, therefore, on that point, the Chamber will not express any opinion. But all those who attended the Meeting, and it is believed, all the other Members of the Chamber, are unanimously of opinion that the proposed Export Duty is highly objectionable, and that for the following reasons:—

No Tax or Customs' Duty is paid voluntarily; therefore, in discussing the propriety of imposing an Export Duty on Gold, it is necessary to enquire whether it is practicable to collect the duty on the whole of the gold exported,—whether it can be collected in a manner not to trammel overmuch the operations of trade, or to offend the feelings or the prejudices of the people, and whether the expense of collection will be a small enough per centage on the gross revenue.

It appears to your Petitioners that it would be utterly impossible to collect the duty on the whole, or even on any considerable proportion of the gold exported. It is well known to all engaged in the Shipping Trade of the Port, that now large quantities of gold are exported by sea to the adjacent Colonies and to Britain, none of which is entered at the Customs, or pays freight, or is insured. It is known that one vessel conveyed on one trip to Adelaide upwards of 10,000 ounces unentered, and, it is believed, there have been many similar cases. When parties convey now, unentered gold, their chief inducement to do so is the saving of fourpence an ounce freight; and, if the saving to be effected were eight or ten times as much, no doubt much more gold would be shipped unentered. Again, the gold could be so easily carried across the frontiers to New South Wales or South Australia, that, in the absence of an Export Duty at the Ports of those Colonies, it cannot be doubted immense quantities would be so taken away. It is true that if an Export Duty on Gold, not less than that to be imposed here, were imposed in New South Wales, South Australia, and Van Diemen's Land, the inducement to convey gold to those Colonies for the purpose of evading the duty, would be removed. Still gold is so easily concealed, that there can be no doubt a very large proportion would be shipped direct to Britain without paying duty.

But supposing the duty could be collected on all the Gold exported, it could only be by empowering Officers of Customs to search the persons and the luggage of every person, male or female, leaving the Colony, by land or sea. Not only persons and luggage might be searched, but every bale of wool, cask of tallow, and package of merchandise being shipped, would be liable to be broken open and examined at the caprice of a Custom-house Officer. Such a power it would be most dangerous to confer upon any body of men. It would be most repugnant to the feelings of all classes of people to submit to it, and it would be found a most vexatious interference with the operations of trade. Were it for no other reason than this, your Petitioners would deem the proposed duty most objectionable.

The expense of collecting such a duty would of necessity be very great. Where a duty is extremely unpopular, as the proposed duty would certainly be, and where evasion of it is not difficult, it is well known that when expenses are deducted, the amount paid into the Treasury is very much less than that paid by the public.

The Colony of Victoria, has, perhaps, the simplest and the best Tariff in the world; the introduction of such an unpopular and objectionable impost as the proposed duty, cannot be too strongly deprecated, and your Petitioners therefore pray, that your Honorable House will not pass any Bill imposing an Export Duty on Gold.

(Signed) WILLIAM M. BELL,  
Chairman.

Melbourne,  
4th October, 1852.