

England against Napoleon

① John William Ward (1781-1833), speech in the House of Commons, 23 January 1810.

In 1809, the 5th coalition was organised to defeat Napoleon. Austria made the main effort, while England intervened in Portugal and Spain. John William Ward was criticising the government for not helping Austria efficiently, thus causing her defeat in the battle of Wagram.

- We all remember [...] the neglect of administration to send assistance [to our allies]. To that neglect [can be] attributed the loss of the battle of Eylau¹, the peace of Tilsit², the alienation of Russia and the final submission of Europe. [...]. Austria resolves to make a last effort; the people of the North of Germany only wait for our arrival as
- 5 the signal of insurrection and what is the conduct of his Majesty's ministers? They consult some persons who actually are smugglers, and some others who have at one time been engaged in that honourable profession, and guided by their advice and authority, they send half our army and half our navy to the swamps and sandbanks of Holland³, and in the meantime Austria perishes⁴, without a single Englishman
- 10 having appeared in arms on any spot where he could render her the smallest aid.

② English cartoon by Thomas Rowlandson about Napoleon's abdication in 1814 : Captions : "The tyrant of the continent is fallen. Europe is free. England rejoices". Napoleon shown with his throne overturned, being grasped about the knees by the devil. He looks at the sword of justice in the sky, and a voice that says: "Thou'rt doom'd to Pain, at which the Demn'd will tremble, And take their own for Joys".



➤ Using the documents and your knowledge, explain why England fought Napoleon and why it was difficult to win that war.

¹The Battle of Eylau on 7 and 8 February 1807 between Napoleon (the winner) and the Russians.

²The treaties of Tilsit (July 1807) created a Franco-Russian alliance. The ensuing situation was detrimental to the UK, with Europe united under Napoleon's continental system.

³Beginning on 30 July 1809, a British expeditionary force of 39,000 men landed on Walcheren, intending to assist the Austrians in their efforts against Napoleon. The expedition turned into a disaster, as the Austrians had already been decisively defeated at the Battle of Wagram.

⁴The battle of Wagram (5-6 July 1809).