In February 1806, after the defeat of the Third Coalition by France at Austerlitz and the death of Pitt, a new Ministry was formed in Great Britain. This ministry was labelled the ‘Ministry of All The Talents’; it was a coalition government, and it owed its distinctive name to the presence in its ranks of some of the most prestigious characters in British politics. The Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury of this new ministry was Lord Grenville, who had served for many years in his cousin Pitt’s Ministry, both as Home Secretary from 1789 to 1791, and as Foreign Secretary from 1791 up to 1801. In that year Pitt’s first Ministry was replaced by the Addington Administration.

Grenville had started to distance himself from Pitt, because his cousin had supported the Peace of Amiens, sponsored by the Addingtonians, and because of Pitt’s unwillingness to join forces with Fox in order to consolidate a union of parties, which Grenville considered indispensable for the country, in view of the current crisis in Europe and the French menace. He had begun to move closer to the Foxites and had refused to form part of the new Pitt administration in 1804, despite the pleas of both Pitt and George III. Grenville’s main ambition was to resist French expansion, and he thought that the best way of achieving this consisted in supporting the efforts of determined allies with modest subsidies and auxiliary campaigns to restore the European equilibrium.¹

Charles James Fox became Foreign Secretary in this new Ministry. He was the most prestigious member of the Administration. For
more than twenty years he had been at the head of the Whig party and he represented the main opposition to the Pitt Ministry. He had remained completely out of favour with King George III after he had supported the principles of the French Revolution, and also because of his close association with Prince George, who he influenced towards the Whig faction and against his father’s and Pitt’s policies. For these reasons, and because of his excessive gambling and increasing personal debts, Fox’s public appeal had also declined considerably. The combination of these factors had kept him out of office for a long time. Nevertheless, his support for such progressive causes as the abolition of the slave trade and Catholic emancipation, his undoubted political talents, and his notorious charm, still maintained him as a popular figure on the British scene. His main objective as Foreign Secretary was to reach a peace agreement with France, although this line of policy was not the most popular among the majority in the Government. 2

Other prominent members of this Ministry at the War Office were William Windham, a disciple of Edmund Burke and a former member of Pitt’s first Government; Lord Howick (the future Earl Grey of the Reform Bill), an ardent supporter of Fox’s Whig principles; Lord Sidmouth (previously Addington, the man responsible for the peace of Amiens); Tom Grenville, brother of the Prime Minister; and Lord Holland, nephew of Fox.

As we have said, this was a coalition Government. The mix of the different factions inside the Cabinet is well explained by Trevelyan:

> It was composed of two sorts of Tories and two sorts of Whigs: The Foxite Whigs; the Grenvillites, Whig and Tory; and the Addingtonian Tories. The last-named could scarcely claim to add to the Talents of the Ministry, but they served to give it a broader bottom, and so left its enemy the King no immediate chance of sending for a different set of servants. 3

This was therefore a predominantly Whig Administration; the major counter-balance was the Tory element inside the Grenville faction.

Nevertheless the differences between the two main figures of the Government were not so great, and even though Fox was more sceptical than Grenville about continental alliances and was more