

# Trouble with Tariffs

**Before World War I**, British politician **Joseph Chamberlain** (1836-1914) stirred major controversy with his 1903 tariff reform campaign. Challenging Britain's long-standing commitment to free trade - dominant since the 1846 repeal of the Corn Laws - Chamberlain **proposed tariffs on imports to protect British industries** and promote "Imperial Preference," strengthening economic ties within the Empire. He argued this would counter growing competition from Germany and the USA, countries that imposed tariffs on British goods.

However, **the plan sparked fierce debate**. Critics warned tariffs would raise food prices and provoke trade retaliation. Manual workers feared higher living costs, and the issue split the Conservative and Liberal Unionist alliance. Some supported protectionism while others defended free trade to avoid alienating voters.

**The political fallout was dramatic**. In 1906, **the Liberals**, campaigning on a platform of cheap food and free trade, **won a landslide election**. The Conservative defeat - the worst until 2024 - led to the rise of a reformist Liberal government, heavily influenced by the growing Labour movement.

**Major social legislation followed** which culminated with the historic Parliament Act (1911), which limited the Lords' power and shortened parliamentary terms. **Chamberlain's campaign**, intended to strengthen Britain, instead **triggered a political realignment that reshaped early 20th-century British politics**.

Plan:

1 – 4. Chamberlain splits the Conservative Party by backing Tariff Reform

5. The 1906 General Election

6. The Liberal Government and Social Reform

7. The Elections of 1910

8. Reform, Strikes, Strife and War

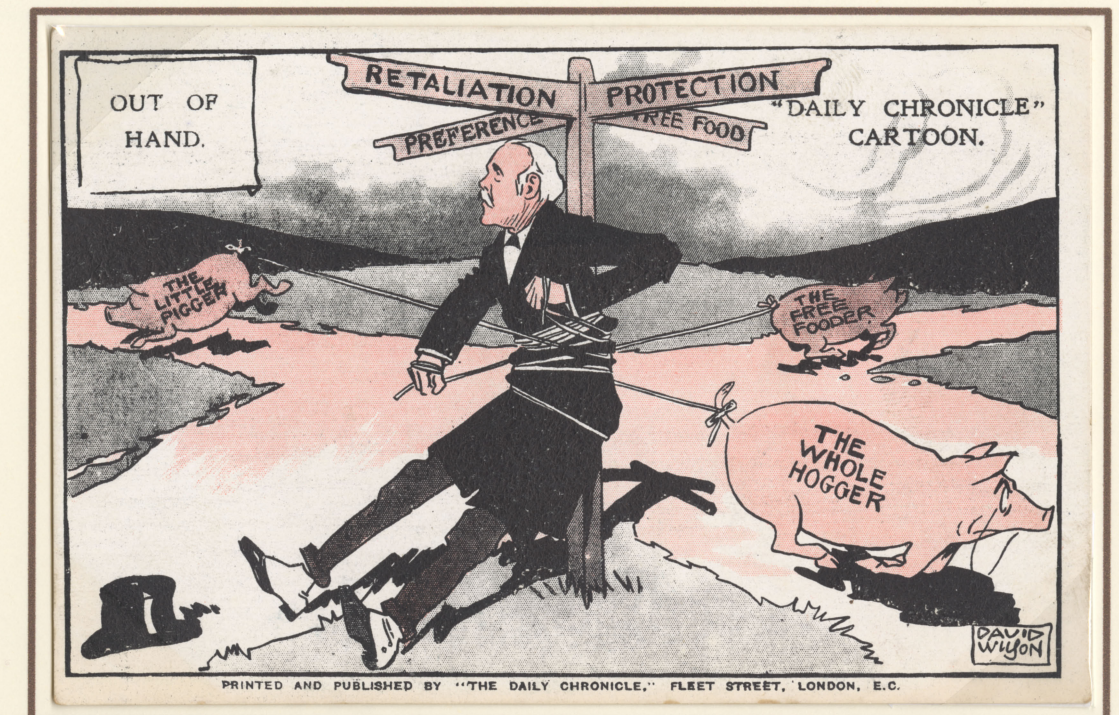
Chamberlain splits the Conservative Party by backing Tariff Reform



▲ **c. 1903**: Divided back postcard sent as a birthday greeting from Teignmouth to Dawlish. Pro tariff card showing Chamberlain and the ship of state, "He'll safely steer us into port, will "Good Old Joe." Published by William Lyon of Glasgow in the premier series No. 2105, drawn by George Fyffe Christie.



▲ **28 October 1903**: Divided back postcard published by C&C Leicester, marked Copyright Entered at Stationers' Hall. Chamberlain stands at his Baker's shop doorway eying a pair of sceptical workmen. The sender notes, "Customers seem few. Trade almost stagnant. Working man evidently needs much persuasion."



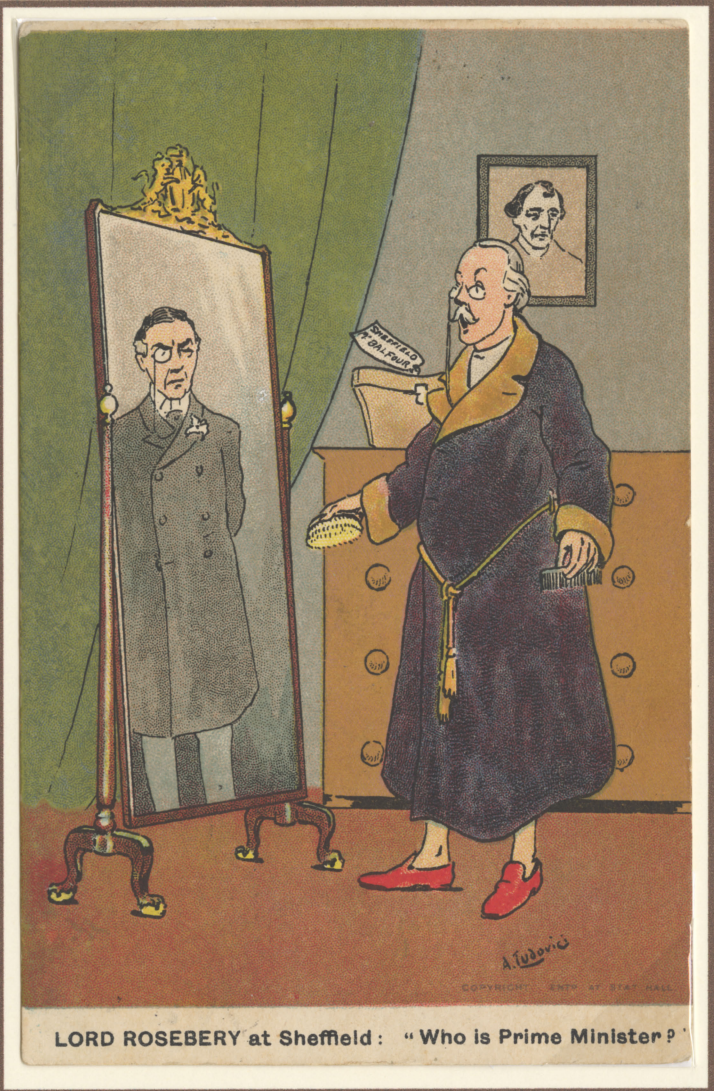
▲ **c. 1903**: Divided back postcard drawn by David Wilson (1872-1935), published by the Daily Chronicle, Fleet Street, showing Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister, tied to a signpost with his disunited MPs – portrayed as pigs running off in different directions. The "whole hoggers", a phrase coined by Lord Rosebery, were supporters of Chamberlain and for protection.



▲ **c. 1903**: Postcard drawn by Albert Ludovici (1852-1932), published by Davidson Bros. of London, trading c.1902-1950. Chamberlain resigned as Colonial Secretary on 14 September 1903, and on 8 October delivered a major speech in Glasgow. Balfour, seen here arm in arm with Chamberlain, remained on friendly terms.



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▲ **21 June 1905:** Divided back postcard sent from Waterbeach to Bury St. Edmunds. Drawn by Albert Ludovici (1852-1932), published by Davidson Bros. of London, trading c.1902-1950. Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister, is looking at himself in a mirror but seeing Joseph Chamberlain. The Earl of Rosebery, Prime Minister 1894-1895 in a speech in Sheffield on 13 October 1903, asked "Who is Prime Minister?"

► **c. 1903:** Divided back postcard published by C. W. Faulkner & Co. Ltd., incorporated 1905. Drawing by Arthur Moreland (1867-1951), political Cartoonist of *The Morning Leader*, a Liberal newspaper, showing Balfour with an out of date railway ticket and golf clubs with Chamberlain hiding ... or waiting ...under the seat...

**c. 1904-1905:** Three more divided back postcards published by C. W. Faulkner & Co. Ltd., incorporated 1905. Charles William Faulkner traded from 79 Golden Lane, London E.C., and was in business from the 1870s to the 1930s.

Drawings by Arthur Moreland (1867-1951), political Cartoonist of the *Morning Leader*. Closed 1912.

► **c. 1904-1905:** Chamberlain and Balfour in a three-legged race, the former representing Protection, and the latter Retaliation. "We don't seem to fit", notes the caption. They were certain to fall in the three-legged race.

►► **3 May 1904:** John Bull - representing Britain - irritated by Chamberlain's protectionist fireworks, makes it clear where he stands in the Free Trade argument.



# Chamberlain splits the Conservative Party by backing Tariff Reform



► **c. 1904-1905:** A rather cold and dishevelled Balfour walks side by side with Chamberlain in a wintry street scene, apparently singing.

It's all too much for John Bull who has had quite enough of Conservative disharmony, and notes that, "I never in my life heard such a horrid noise, they're each singing a different tune." Then as now, political dissonance goes down badly with the electorate.





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▲ Divided back postcard showing Joseph Chamberlain delivering his speech on 'The Tarriff Question' in Bingley Hall, Birmingham on 4 November 1903. He used two loaves of bread to illustrate the difference the tax would make on the loaf - which in his opinion was none, or at least very little. This image resonated throughout the campaign being used frequently by both sides of the question.

► **22 October 1904:** Two cards posted on the same day locally in Cathcart, Glasgow published by W. Prosser, Supply Stores, Cathcart.

**BRITISH INDUSTRIES AS THEY ARE** - The British lion restrained by the Free Trade net, and tormented by a mouse, with British industry being dismembered by foreign competitors, and the whole edifice facing the Dutch axeman (clogs again!). The companion card showing **BRITISH INDUSTRIES AS THEY OUGHT TO BE** - the tree is flourishing, its branches representing the British Empire, and the happy colonists dance around the tree led by John Bull and Joseph Chamberlain, with the smiling lion looking on.

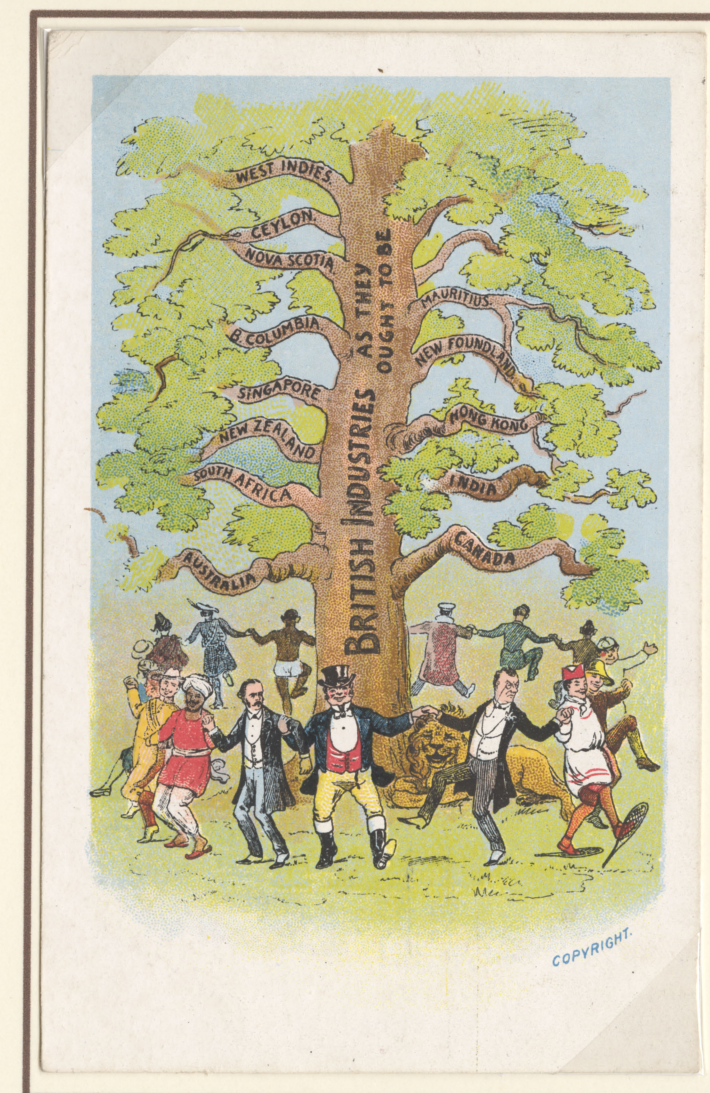
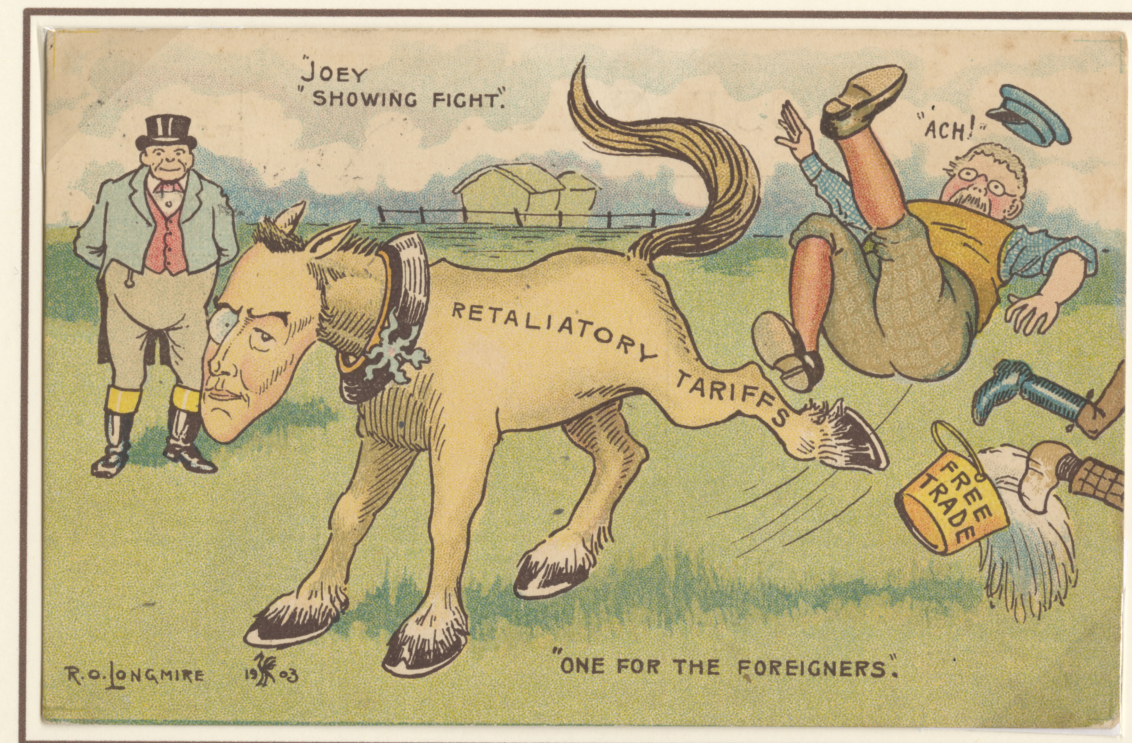


▲ **c. 1904-1905:** Cartoon by Harry Furniss (1854-1925) published in The People, a Sunday newspaper founded 1881. Furniss was a British illustrator who established his career on the *Illustrated London News* before moving to *Punch*. Chamberlain with his loaves of bread. Prosperity to the left with Joe's tariffs, and industrial poverty to the right – the result of free trade. Note the trademark orchid in Chamberlain's lapel.

## Chamberlain splits the Conservative Party by backing Tariff Reform

► **8 February 1905:** John Bull looks on in admiration while Joe Chamberlain's horse uses his hooves - and retaliatory tariffs - to see off the Germans (Ach!), the Dutch (A clog) and another foreign competitor.

Postcard from the Herriot Series drawn by R. O. Longmire and dated 1903. Note Chamberlain's orchid on the horse's collar.



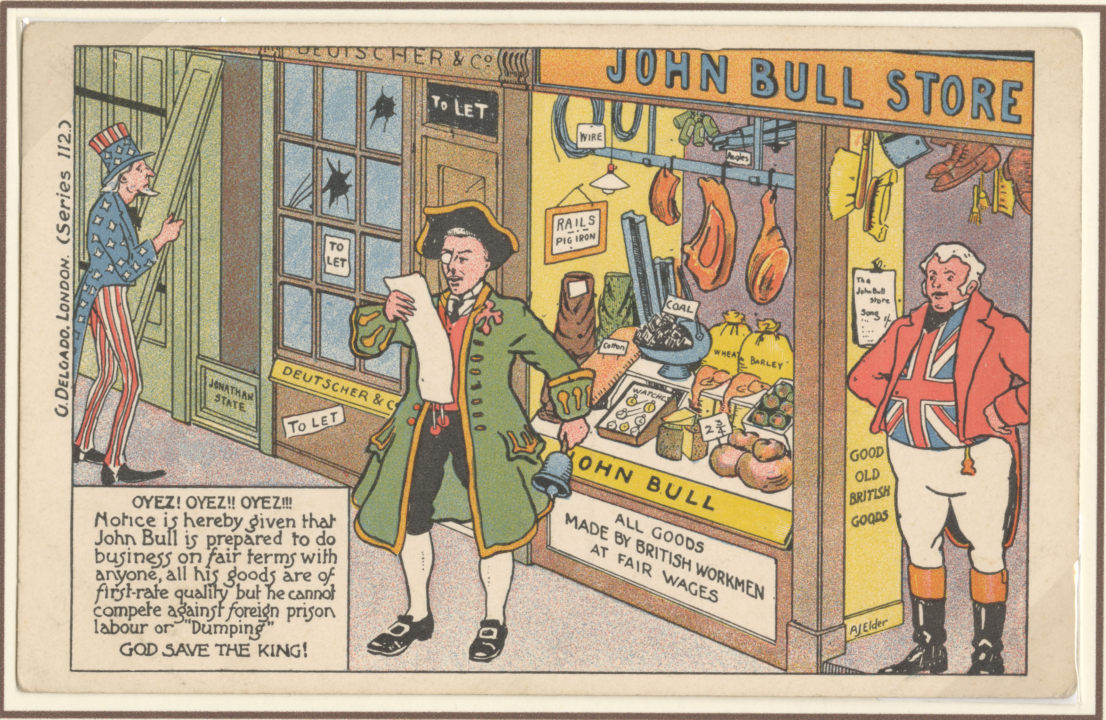


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Chamberlain splits the Conservative Party by backing Tariff Reform



◀ c. 1905-1906: Divided back postcard drawn by Arthur Moreland (1867-1951), published by C. W. Faulkner & Co. Ltd. I say this is getting serious remarks John Bull while contemplating boxes of foreign goods dumped on Britain's shores. Moreland was the political cartoonist for *The Morning Leader*.

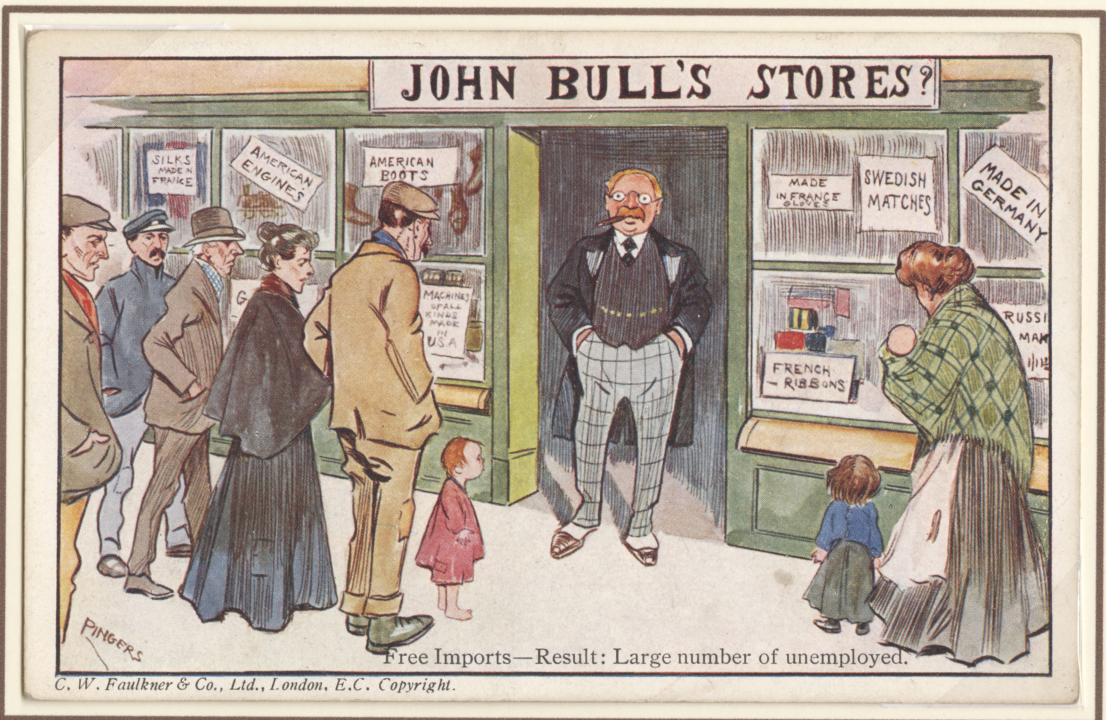


c. 1904-1905: The shop front was a popular motif for these propaganda cards and three are shown here. ▲ Chamberlain as town crier announces that Britain is open for business on fair terms as John Bull, wearing a Union Jack, stands proudly in his doorway with British made goods from boots and brushes to watches and pig iron for sale. The German shop is vacant and Uncle Sam is boarding up his premises. Postcard by G. Delgado, London, a publisher of Christmas cards and games trading from 53-55 East Road, City Road, London. Drawn by A. J. Elder.

▼ A postcard published by C. W. Faulkner & Co. Ltd., drawn by "Pingers", an artist who drew other contemporary political cards on subjects such as Irish Home Rule, but remains unidentified. The well dressed and well off proprietor of John Bull's Stores sells only foreign goods while the unemployed look at the window display without the wherewithal to buy French ribbons or American boots.

◀ Postcard by C. W. Faulkner & Co. Ltd., drawn by Arthur Moreland with J. Bull General Merchant standing glumly at his door with German, French, American and Russian traders at their market stalls blocking his customers from entering.

► 28 September 190?: A postcard published by C. W. Faulkner & Co. Ltd., artist unknown. John Bull gritting his teeth and carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders to British Markets. Germany, the United States, France, Turkey, Russia, and the East are freeloading on his misplaced goodwill.





Trouble with Tariffs



On 5 December 1905, increasingly unpopular Arthur Balfour resigned as Prime Minister. Instead of calling a general election, Balfour hoped that the incoming Liberal government would split - to the advantage of the Conservative Party. Instead, they called a general election one month later, on 12 January 1906, which resulted in a crushing defeat for the Conservatives, and the loss of Balfour's seat.



▲ 26 January 1906: Raphael Tuck & Sons "Oilette" postcard, "The General Election". Either a moment of electoral "treating" as the hoi polloi are encouraged to vote for Wilkins. Alternatively, a foretaste of what might be to come if the party of the hoi polloi is elected to government.

The 1906 General Election

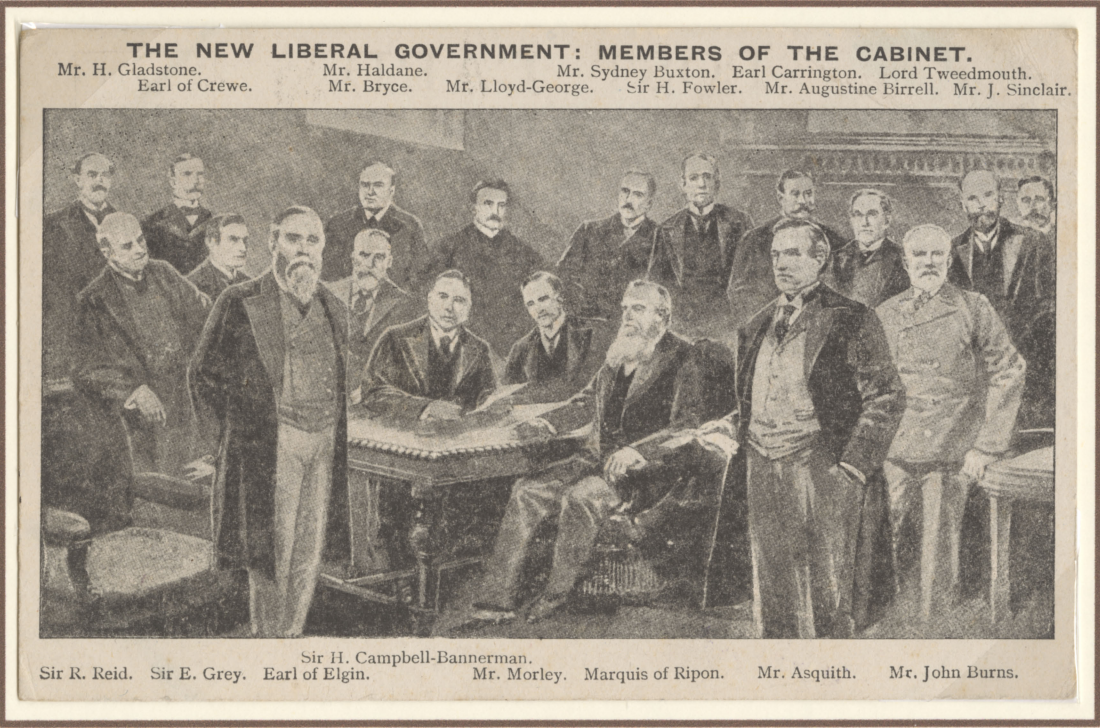
◀ 26 January 1906: Postcard printed on blank postcard stock from George H Radford (1851-1917), newly elected as the Liberal Member of Parliament for Islington East where he served until his death on 5 October 1917. He defeated the Conservative, Sir Benjamin Cohen, who had held the seat since 1892.

► c. 1906: Postcard by Cynicus Art Publishing Co., Leeds showing Liberals and Conservatives asking the working man for his vote.

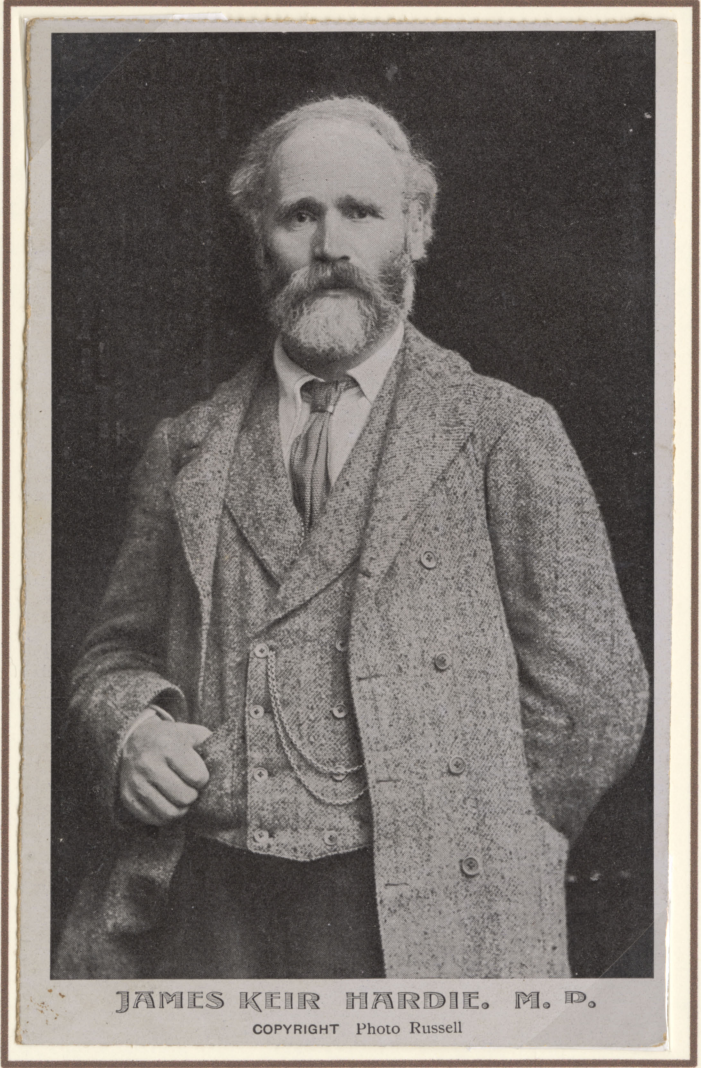
Cynicus was a pseudonym for Scots cartoonist Martin Anderson (1854-1932). who both designed and published postcards from 1902 when he decided to form his own company. The "Cynicus Publishing Company" began publishing colour postcards by the second half of 1902.



► Photographic postcard of James Keir Hardie (1856-1915) by James Russell & Sons, a photographic firm based in London, established 1852. Hardie was re-elected to Parliament in 1900 for Merthyr Tydfil and helped to form the Labour Representation Committee, which became the Labour Party. After the 1906 election, Hardie was the Labour Party's first parliamentary leader with 29 seats - up from 2 in 1900.



▲ c. 1906: A postcard indicating neither publisher nor artist showing the Cabinet of the newly elected Liberal Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836-1908), the last Liberal leader to win a United Kingdom parliamentary majority. He died in office and was succeeded by Herbert Asquith (1852-1928).





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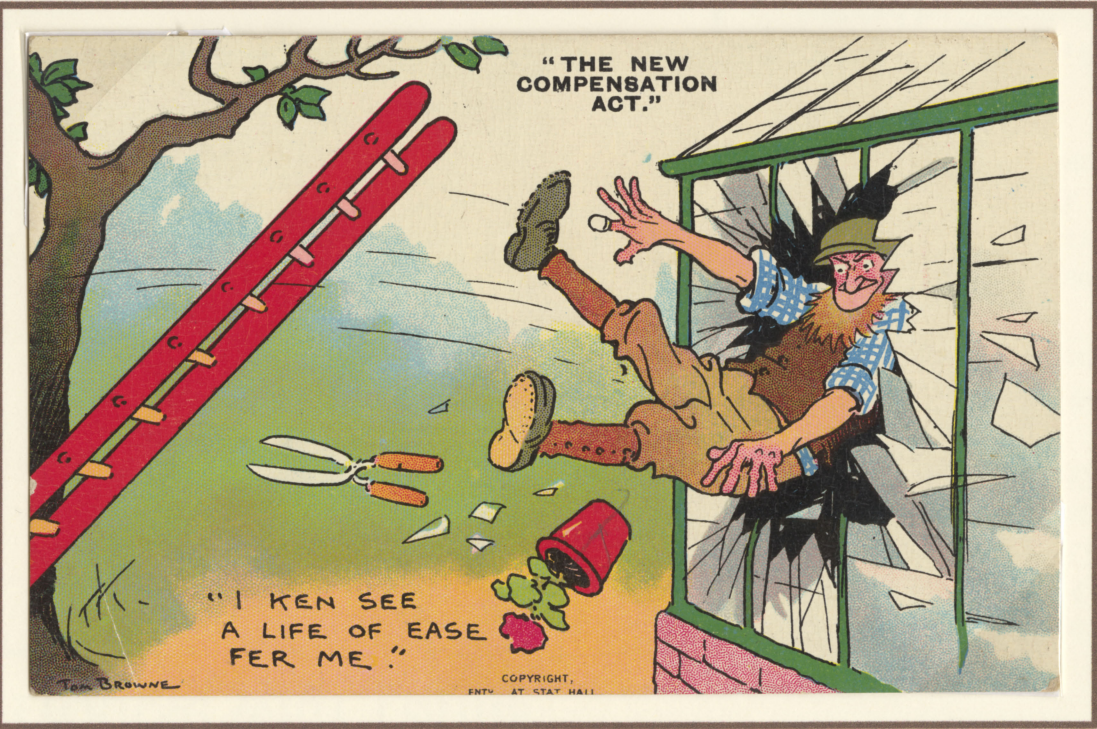


The new Liberal Government introduced the Trade Disputes Act which received Royal Assent on 21 December 1906. It protected trade unions from legal claims for damages by businesses affected by strikes. The Workmen's Compensation Act which granted compensation for injury at work came into force on 1 July 1907.

A National Insurance Act was mentioned in Lloyd George's 1909 Budget speech, but wasn't put before parliament until after the elections of 1910.



◀◀ **c. 1911:** Banforth & Co., Ltd. postcard, artist not credited, showing a distinctly shady character receiving 30/-, a curious sum since the benefit after one week of unemployment was receive 7 shillings per week for up to 15 weeks in a year. ◀: Millar & Lang Ltd., Art Publishers based in Glasgow and London, no artist details are visible. This card also refers to a Domestic Servants Insurance Act. There was no such Act, and insurance for domestic servants was part of the 1911 National Insurance Act. Nonetheless there was a feeling in some parts of society that it was a malingerer's charter. The servant says, "I am going to lie up for a month". ▲: **1 March 1909:** This Millar & Lang Ltd. postcard shows another servant taking a well earned rest to recover from her cut finger. The writer notes that "she hopes Albert is in work", so her sympathies are likely to be with the servant, rather than her mistress. Again, no artist is credited.



◀ **24 April 1908:** Postcard by Davidson Bros. of London, trading c.1902-1950. Tom Browne R. I. (1870-1910), Browne was an extremely popular English strip cartoonist, painter and illustrator of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. When he died after an operation for cancer in 1910 his estate was values at approximately £2m in 2025 equivalent pounds. The Workmen's Compensation Act of 1906 was greeted with a cynical sense of humour in some quarters.

▶ **27 February 1909:** Another card from the same publisher and artist shows the ambitious potential claimant anticipating a pound a week for life for the unlikely accident shown. With manual wages in 1910 at approximately 26 to 34 shillings a week (£1.30 to £1.70), the unlucky victim was being rather overoptimistic.

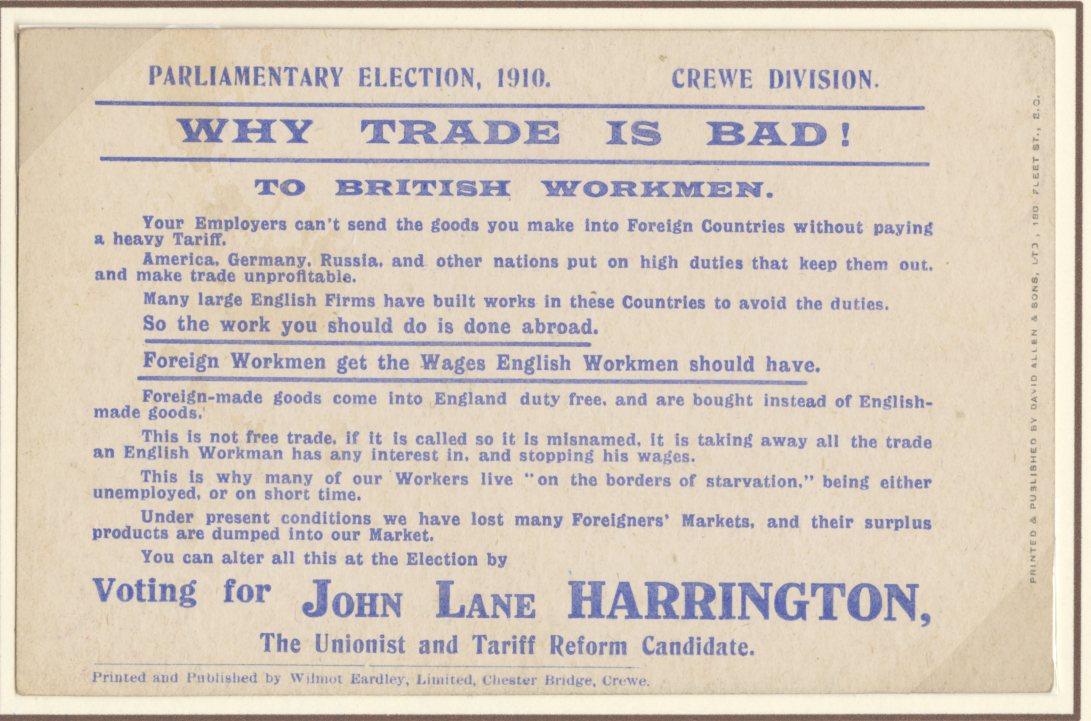




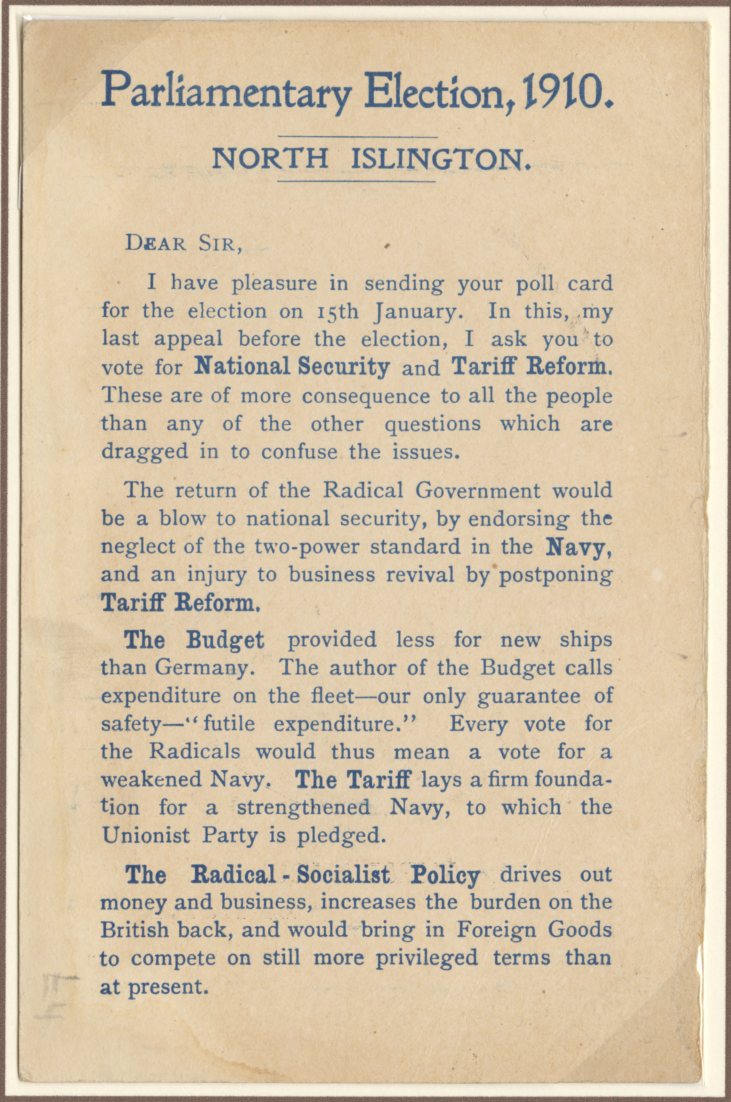
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- ▲ **Pre-1914:** Embossed National Series postcard with no designer or printing information. The political message is self-evident.
- ▼ **January 1910:** Anti Free Trade postcard printed and published by Wilmot Eardley, Limited, Chester Bridge, Crewe, in support of **John Lane Harrison**, the **Conservative and Unionist** candidate, who says - “Many large English Firms have built works in these [foreign] countries to avoid the duties”. Harrington lost to James Tomlinson, the Liberal. Both lost votes to the Labour candidate, Frank Rose, who was eventually elected in Aberdeen North at the 1918 general election.



The 1909/1910 People's Budget, introduced by the Liberal government, proposed taxes on land and high incomes to fund social welfare programs like old age pensions. Though passed in the House of Commons, it was blocked by the Conservative-controlled House of Lords, triggering a constitutional crisis. A general election in January 1910 resulted in a hung parliament. While Conservatives won more votes, the Liberals, led by H. H. Asquith, secured the most seats and formed a government with support from the Irish Parliamentary and Labour parties. The crisis led to major reforms to limit the Lords' power.



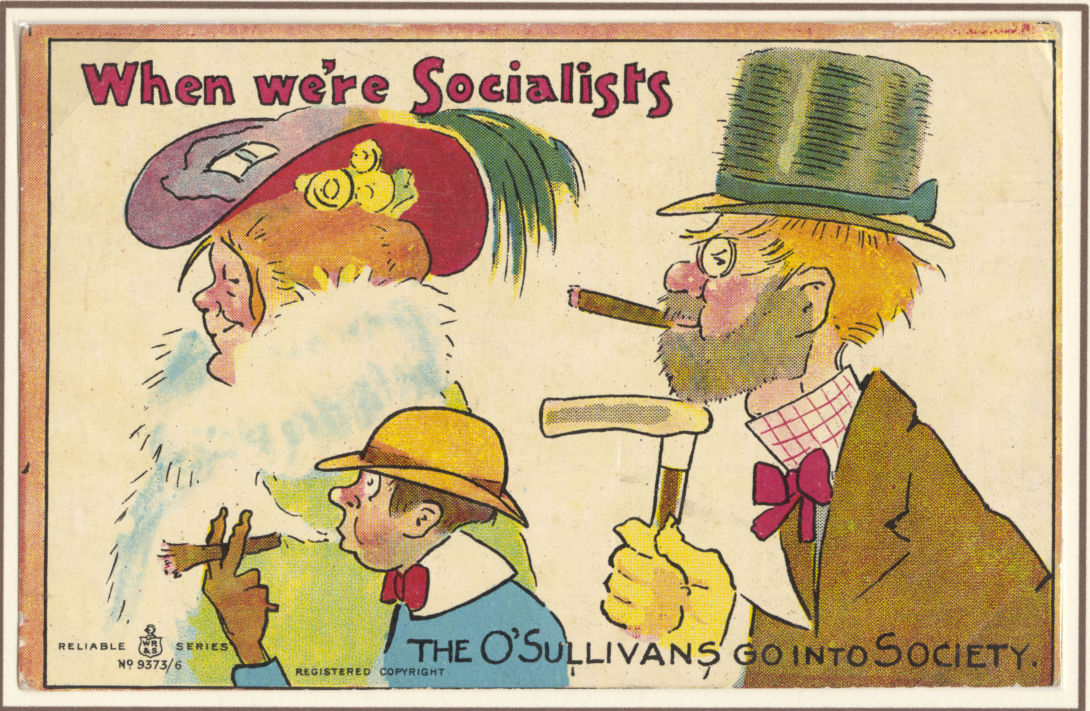
- ▲ **January 1910:** Postcard with photograph on the reverse of **George A Touche** by Russell & Sons, a supporter of tariff reform. He lost to the Liberal incumbent, David Waterlow (1857-1924), a scion of the printing family who became chairman of the company in 1922. Touche - an accountant - won the seat in the December 1910 election, and retired at the 1918 election.

# The Elections of 1910



- ▲ **18 January 1910:** Election postcard printed and published by Tilley and Son, Ledbury in support of **Captain Percy Archer Clive**, (**Conservative & Unionist** candidate for South Herefordshire who was the sitting member having been elected 1900-1906, and at a by-election in 1908. He was re-elected and retained the seat until he was killed in action on 5 April 1918.

- ▼ **Pre-1914:** Postcard published by WR&S Reliable Series. William Ritchie & Sons Limited, incorporated 1901, were based in Edinburgh. Stamp removed but sent to Tiensin, China. Socialism is a threat or an opportunity in this illustration.





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▲ c.1910: Postcard by Cynicus Art Publishing Co., Leeds showing the land controlled by a few very wealthy owners. Cynicus was a pseudonym for Scots cartoonist Martin Anderson (1854-1932). who both designed and published postcards.

▼ c.1910: Postcard with no publisher information, but drawn by H.P. - Henry Albert "Harry" Parlett (1881-1971. His father, Tom Parlett, was a comic postcard artist, as were his two sons.

The illustration comments on Lloyd George's 29 April 1909 budget which he described as "... a war budget; it is for raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness. It paid for pensions by increasing taxes on income - with a super tax for the wealthiest - introducing death duties, taxes on spirits, and on land.



▲ 1 May 1912: Postcard by J Salmon, Sevenoaks in Kent with no artist credited. The Coal Strike 1912 was the first national strike by coal miners in Britain, demanding a minimum wage. Nearly one million miners participated, After 37 days, the government intervened and passed the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act 1912.

◀ c. 1910: National Series postcard. Home Rule. As the price for their continued support, Irish nationalist MPs demanded that the Lords' veto blocking Irish Home Rule was removed.

Reform, Strikes, Strife and War

British postcards don't often show the Balkan War of 1912-13, nor the Anglo-German arms race. However, they do record the political tensions, demand for social and economic reform, trade competition, social discontent and to some degree, the hyper-nationalism of the time. These finally united in a toxic cocktail, leading to the outbreak of war in August 1914. Politics as usual took a backseat until the 1920s, but Britain was never the same again.



▲ 15 March 1915: Postcard probably published in 1914 by The Regent Publishing Company Ltd., London N.W. Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany is shown firmly gripped by the Triple Entente - Great Britain, France, and Russia, together with Japan - all of whom declared war during August 1914 on the Triple Alliance of Germany. Austria and Italy. Four years later, and after up to 40 million military and civilian casualties - deaths and injuries - came The Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, and US tariffs and isolationism.