

To for the defeat of the conservatives essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Although tariff reform was a major contributing factor to the defeat of the conservatives it was by no means the most important.

In my opinion, the factor that most widely contributed to the fall of the Tories was the bad leadership and poor social judgment of Prime Minister Arthur J. Balfour. The nephew of Lord Salisbury, Arthur Balfour is generally considered responsible for the turn around of fortune for the LRC and Liberal parties in the Tom Wild 1906 election. After Salisbury stood down due to ill health in July of 1902, the chair of party leader was left open, and with some amount of bias some thought, Arthur Balfour, his nephew, took responsibility of the role.

What followed during his reign was a series of events that can all in some way be linked back to his judgments. The first of these was the education act of 1902. This was an act that in theory was taking large steps towards compulsory secondary education. It stated that newly established Local Education Authorities were allowed to tax community residents as funding for the schooling.

This caused an enormous uproar among taxpayers of an ethnic minority as they rightly felt that they should not have to finance education when it would not benefit them. The majority of schools at the time were under the authority of the Church of England, who insisted upon daily prayers and the singing of Hymns. Any one of the Catholic, Jewish or Muslim faith (the later of which were a miniscule population) would now be supporting the education of Protestant families. At this time in history there was still a great need for religious belief, especially among the poor, for some it was all they had.

Although Britain had entered a new industrial era and was rapidly modernising, it still held firm to many of its more traditional beliefs.

It was the tampering of these beliefs by Balfour, and his strong support of this agenda that lost him many dedicated followers conservative voters who put their religion first. The next of Balfour's mistakes came shortly after the failure of the Education Act and is the theme of this essay. Tariff Reform, although not individually responsible for conservative down fall, is a link in a chain of events that were as a whole the fuel to Balfour's fire. Tariff Reform was originally a proposition by the secretary of state for the colonies, Joseph Chamberlain. His idea was to move away from the *lais saiz faire* approach to trade and make a return to protectionism, taxing incoming goods with imperial preference.

Balfour then pushed this to the House of Commons. He wrote to Chamberlain on the 18th of February 1905, explaining the flaws in the plan; ' it is a deep rooted prejudice, affecting a large mass of voters, especially the poorest class, which it will be a matter of extreme difficulty to overcome. It is obvious therefore, that Balfour spotted the inconsistencies, and it could therefore be laid on Chamberlain's head, but Balfour was prime minister and it was his responsibility to suppress the act if he felt it would not benefit their upcoming election. It was a very strange move to take to even suggest such a radical change in trade laws, as free trade was an incredibly popular idea among many classes. It had been the favoured method of trade for many years and was by no means facing hard times.

It was consistent and reliable, it offered equal opportunities for many and it was supported by the majority. Chamberlains argument, backed up by Balfour, was that after a while, the extra revenue generated by Tariff Reform could be used to improve national efficiency. The counter argument was that this would solve nothing, and all that would spawn from this idea would be inflation and high prices on British goods. Something that also arose from this situation was a rift in the party itself. It was initially split into three groups, those that were for, those that were against and those were indecisive. This uncertainty within the conservative party was something that the opposing parties used as a metaphor for national efficiency itself.

They said that if Balfour could not manage his own party, how could he unite an entire nation? It was of course partially true, as we will see next. What Balfour also managed to do was alienate himself from the working classes. He made it quite clear in his approach to the Chinese slaves and his ruling on the Taff Vale incident that he had mixed views on the lower class and their rights. The Chinese slavery incident was one that was played upon by the liberals to no extent.

It was an issue concerning the use of the Chinese; over 50, 000 were imported into many mining communities under the commission of Balfour and the terrible pay of mine owners. They were treated with little respect, given the minimum food they needed to survive and paid well below the minimum wage, if at all. It seemed to the public that Balfour's Government was ignoring the humanitarian issues just to extract minerals from the earth. This was seen as an outrage, and the brunt of the anger was aimed directly at Balfour, who did little to recompense and further cemented his image of <https://assignbuster.com/to-for-the-defeat-of-the-conservatives-essay/>

an incompetent and ignorant Prime Minister. Furthermore this was especially barbaric after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1886.

This did little to improve peoples already faltering view of Balfour, who was increasingly being portrayed much as George Bush is today by the LRC and Liberal Parties. The Taff Vale judging was one, which further estranged the working class. After the workers of the Taff Vale Railway Company went on strike in 1901, the Company demanded compensation from the Unions due to financial loss while the workers were away. Surprisingly, the court decided not to give to the workers what they wanted (better conditions, higher pay, shorter hours) and ruled that the unions would have to pay the compensation. Although this was a terrible development for Trade Unions, as they now felt ignored and under threat, it was very good for the LRC. They now had their first real issue in their short history that concerned the labourers.

It was something they built on and it was at this point that the conservatives lost many a working class vote, and a significant number of intelligent middle class liberals too. I personally feel that the ineptitude of Arthur Balfour was the main reason that the Tories lost the 1906 election. Before he came into power in 1900 many of the working class were voting either union or conservative, and I think it just goes to show how one mans terrible decision-making can bring down an entire party. The event that had a major impact on the public's view of the ruling party Tom Wild was Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign. Although, as I have mentioned, it was Balfour who eventually took the appropriate action and put it to parliament, it was Chamberlain who devised this plan and supported it so heartily. The main <https://assignbuster.com/to-for-the-defeat-of-the-conservatives-essay/>

reason this could be seen as a probable reason why the conservatives lost the election was because, as I have pointed out, it split the Unionist alliance and people began to sway more and more towards the Liberal movement.

Chamberlains idea can be justified as a sensible notion even though it was so unpopular. His belief was that the only way Britain could secure its economic future was to abandon free trade and replace it with a system of preferential tariffs. This was defensible by the fact that within the last three decades of the nineteenth century many of Britain's European competitors had begun to place high taxes on imports and had seen some increased revenue, which they put towards increasing the nations productivity. France, Germany, and even America could be seen placing higher tariffs on some goods.

Chamberlain thought that the only way to keep up with these other powers in the constant battle for industrial and economic supremacy was to follow in their footsteps.

This was obviously not the right move. Since Britain had been a *laissez faire* nation since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 it was far too extreme for the British public. Many drew from it that Balfour and his government had no original ideas of how to win the race and were not thinking of what would really suit the individual needs of the nation. On 15th of May 1903

Chamberlain made his famous speech in Birmingham. This truly brought the trade war into the political, and public eye. The liberals skilfully played upon the working classes understandable fear of protectionism.

They used this trepidation to create a united front against the conservatives; with posters showing two loafs of bread at the same price; one large under

free trade and the other smaller under Protectionism. This unity of the people was another nail in the coffin of the Tories, who had little defence against the uprising against them. I must point out that although the individual suggestion of tariff reform was probably the first step to the turnaround in political thinking, it would not, could not have progressed and expanded had it not been for Balfour. My personal opinion is that the Boer War (1899-1902) was a significant turning point in British politics, but one that was not as important as either Balfour's leadership or Chamberlain's Reform proposition.

It has been the case throughout the history of civilised culture that wars change the opinion of the electorate, be it for good or for bad, and the Boer War was no exception. Many believed that the strong resistance the British troops met from the Boers was the fault of an incompetent war machine, led by the government. The fact that in Manchester only several years previously it was discovered that only 9000 men were strong enough to carry rifles, was brought to the public's attention again by the liberals. They argued that it was impossible to win a war when a significant number of our troops capable of duty were incapable of carrying their most important tool.

This worried the public, as did the fact that our company of soldiers was using the sadistic methods of concentration camps, a technique never before seen (or maybe recorded; it was thought that the Spanish used the camps in the early 15th century) and was deemed as an atrocity. The liberals built on this anger to create a pre-rendered image of the conservatives. They were depicted as brutal warmongers, who used their power to invade other countries for their own personal wants (it is thought that Chamberlain used <https://assignbuster.com/to-for-the-defeat-of-the-conservatives-essay/>

the excuse of an expanding empire to reinforce his idea of Tariff Reform).

The liberals to a great extent milked this. It was a great opportunity for them to broaden their horizons, Campbell Bannerman (the leader of the party) was now trying to promote the party as an 'open church' in which every one from the non conformists to the upper class toffs could have their say. It was very much the bohemian upper and middle classes that were converted.

Their take on the Boer War was that it was a disaster for the human rights movement and as the Liberals were currently building on this point (among many others) they were inclined to support them. One small point that should be mentioned is the Lib/Lab pact, this was an electoral pact that helped both the LRC and the Liberal Party to gain votes in the 1906 election. This stated that if there was more of a chance that Labour would win the seat in a certain constituency then the Liberals would not stand in that area, and vice versa. This was quite a good move, as at this point all the two parties wanted to do was get the Tories out of power, and a good way to do this would be to join forces and think tactically.

The Liberals were by far the larger party at this point so for the LRC this was a great step towards becoming the Labour Party that we know today, as gaining more support is never a bad thing. In conclusion I feel that you cannot point a finger at one event to determine why the conservatives lost the election, but must look at them as a series of occurrences that merged together to form a front against the current government. While it is obvious that some events are more significant than others (for instance the electoral pact made cannot be compared to Balfour's poor leadership) the liberals

may not have one had all these events taken place in such a short space of time.