

**IMPERIAL UNION AND
TARIFF REFORM: SPEECHES
DELIVERED FROM MAY 15
TO NOV. 4, 1903**

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Imperial Union and Tariff Reform: Speeches Delivered from May 15 to Nov. 4, 1903 by Joseph Chamberlain

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JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

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**IMPERIAL UNION AND
TARIFF REFORM**

**Speeches Delivered from
May 15 to Nov. 4, 1903**

By

The Right Hon.

Joseph Chamberlain, M.P.

With an Introduction

London

Grant Richards

1903

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INTRODUCTION

I HAVE assented to the republication of the following speeches the more readily because, notwithstanding the perfection of modern stenography, I find that, owing partly to the difficulties connected with telegraphic transmission and partly, no doubt, to the fault of the speaker, many errors, and some of them of serious importance, have crept into the original newspaper reports.

But besides what I may call mechanical errors, there are also cases in which the argument was presented in a form which, although it might have been sufficiently appreciated by the audience at the time, would not be easily intelligible to a reader afterwards; and there are, on the other hand, many instances of repetition, not unusual in oral discussion but indefensible in the written word.

I have endeavoured, as far as the time at my disposal has permitted, to correct these faults and, while preserving the popular character of the addresses in which they occur, I have been glad at the same time to modify a few expressions, introduced on the spur of the moment, to which exception has been taken as suggesting a personal or party bias which it has been my earnest desire to avoid in what is essentially a National, and not a purely party, discussion.

As they are now presented to the public they describe fairly, and with sufficient fulness, the objects which Tariff

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Reformers have in view, and the means by which they believe that these objects can be attained. They have already been, and will in the future be further, supplemented by statistics and details which would have been unsuitable for great popular audiences, but which it is the function of the Tariff Reform League and the Imperial Tariff Committee to supply in their publications.

The issues raised are few and easy to understand. The changes that have taken place, since the adoption of Free Trade nearly sixty years ago, in the conditions of international exchange, in the comparative position of foreign nations, and, above all, in our relations with our own Colonies, seem to point conclusively to the necessity of a reconsideration of our fiscal system. It is not desirable to postpone this review to a time of depression, which many close observers think to be imminent, when the pressure of exceptional distress may compel us to hasty and ill-considered reforms.

The original object of Mr. Cobden and his colleagues was to secure a free exchange of products between the nations of the world at their natural price, but for many years the example of the open door set by the United Kingdom has not been followed by other countries, and hostile tariffs have everywhere interfered with the natural course of trade.

These tariffs, avowedly designed to exclude British manufactures, have been supported by the operation of bounties, subsidies, and trusts; while foreign producers have been enabled, partly by the same means, and partly by the lower standard of living, to which their working classes are accustomed, to undersell the British manufacturer in neutral markets and even seriously to attack his home trade.

The doctrinaire Free Traders have no remedy to propose

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for this state of things, which, indeed, they either deny, or else ascribe to the want of enterprise and intelligence on the part of our manufacturers, to the ignorance and incapacity of our people, or to the tyrannical action of the Trade Unions.

The Tariff Reformers, on the other hand, believe that by recovering our freedom of action, and by re-arming ourselves with the weapon of a moderate tariff, we may still defend our home market against unfair competition, and may, at the same time, secure a modification of foreign tariffs which would open the way to a fairer exchange of our respective products than we have hitherto been able to obtain.

But they attach even greater importance to the possibility of securing by preferential and reciprocal arrangements with our Colonies a great development of trade within the Empire and a nearer approach to a commercial union which, in some shape or another, must precede or accompany closer political relations, and without which, as all history shows, no permanent co-operation is possible.

They believe that these objects can be promoted, without loss to any class or any individual, by a slight transfer of existing taxes which will not increase national burdens, but will raise the revenue required for defence and administration in such a way as to develop our inter-Imperial trade to the mutual benefit both of the Colonies and the Mother Country, while adding greatly to the amount of employment for our ever-growing population.

The questions thus raised, although they interest every class, are more vitally important to working men than to any other, since they alone depend upon their daily employment for their daily subsistence.

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To the manufacturer and the capitalist the essential consideration is security for his investments which, under present conditions, are always liable to a kind of interference against which it is impossible for him to provide. His foreign competitor, unassailable in his home market, can safely issue forth to attack him, while he is incapable of retaliation, and powerless to defend himself against the new methods of foreign competition.

Both manufacturers and workmen are restive under these conditions, and if, with a long experience of popular discussion, I am entitled to express an opinion, I should say that never before in my recollection have they taken so keen and intelligent an interest in any economic and social question. They have refused to consider it from a party point of view, they have refused to be led by any party or partisan organisations. They are thinking for themselves, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, the majority have already decided in favour of the principles of our proposals. When they will be able to give effect to their decision is more open to speculation.

I have often wondered that we have never adopted the principle of the Referendum as practised in Switzerland, and also in many parts of the United States of America. It is the only way in which the decision of great national questions can be separated from all the complicated issues of party Government. At a general election the voter is influenced partly by his desire to see his own party in office and partly by his views on a number of special questions, many of them purely local or even personal.

If, in the case of a new policy, not necessarily political, it were possible to eliminate all side issues, we might have a national verdict which all sections would accept, and which

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would be given without reference to the perennial struggle between the "Outs" and the "Ins" which is at present the chief occupation of political life.

In the absence of such a machinery for testing public opinion, I will not venture on any prediction as to the exact time at which a conservative nation such as ours will decide on the adoption of new methods to meet new conditions, but I have no doubt whatever that the policy of free imports is already doomed, and I earnestly hope that the policy of mutual preference between the different parts of the British Empire may be accepted before it is too late for us to avail ourselves of the opportunity now within our grasp.

J. CHAMBERLAIN.

November 9, 1903.