

Parnell | Topic Notes

Background

- Protestant landlord, estate in Wicklow
- Hated England and English
- American mother
- MP for Meath

Beginning – Parnell and obstructionists

- Joined obstructionists (some of the Home Rule MPs) and quickly became their leader
- Isaac Butt (leader of HR party) disagreed with obstructionism because he thought it would turn British MPs against the Irish cause
- However, obstructionism was very popular at home in Ireland and Parnell realised the importance of being popular at home

Courting Support

Fenians:

- They supported the obstructionists; this is part of the reason Parnell joined them
- Parnell defended Manchester Martyrs (3 men executed for killing a policeman during a Fenian escape)
- He worked to free imprisoned Fenians – very importantly, Michael Davitt (sentenced to 15 years for gun-running)
- Parnell wanted the support of the Fenians to take advantage of their widespread branches and funds from America
- Danger getting too close to them, he could scare off other groups
- He never committed to them

Catholic Church:

- Suspicious of Parnell – Protestant and they didn't like Fenians or obstructionists

- To win over support, Parnell supported their demand for state aid for Catholic schools and for the Catholic University

End of Butt

- Butt died; party split between Parnellites and people who preferred Butt
- William Shaw elected
- Parnell realised that he needed more support

Parnell and New Departure

- Michael Davitt wanted Fenians to cooperate with more extreme Home Rulers
- IRB rejected idea, but gave permission to individual Fenians to take part in constitutional politics
- Davitt and Devoy (American) were interested in Parnell
- Talked to him about their proposals, he committed to nothing
- Devoy thought he would support them, went to America and collected money for Parnellite Home Rulers

Crisis in West

What happened:

- Michael Davitt went to visit relatives in Mayo, found economic crisis
- Long depression, worldwide
- Caused cut in demand for Irish products, falling prices
- Tenants found it difficult to pay the high rents
- Big farmers and small farmers were suffering – bad harvest
- Tenants faced eviction
- Worst in Mayo – no work for them, harvests failed, facing starvation and eviction

Land Movement began:

- Fenians encouraged tenants to resist eviction
- Westport meeting – Davitt believed if Fenians helped small farmers, small farmers would support Fenians

- Invited Parnell to be speaker
- Parnell told audience to demand fair rent, gave a passionate speech

Land League set up:

- By Michael Davitt
- Parnell president, but it was really under Fenian control
- Aims:
 - Reduce rents and evictions
 - Abolish landlord system
 - Using peaceful agitation and parliamentary pressure at Westminster

Situation

- Parnell collected money for expected famine in America – no famine, now had £2 million to use for Land League and HR Party
- Conservatives defeated and now Gladstone was PM again, but this time didn't want to focus on Irish affairs
- Parnellite HRs won, Parnell now leader of HR Party
- However, party was divided

Parnell and Land League

- Parnell had to strike a balance between:
 - Home Rule MPs – not sure of Land League
 - Tenant farmers – just wanted land reform
 - Fenians – wanted complete revolution and split from Britain
- Farmers economic problems continued
- Land League spread all over the country – popular due to depression
- Agrarian violence – intimidate landlords, threatening letters, violence, burned barns, killed animals and people
- This was bad publicity, and the British could possibly retaliate harshly
- To deal with this:
 - Mass meetings

- Parnell told them to use moral force
- "...by isolating him from his kind as if he were a leper of old..."
- Captain Boycott – had to get English in to work his land, protected by soldiers.
Cost more than harvest, he eventually left for England

- Boycotting became a favourite strategy, and it gained a lot of publicity
- Reporters appalled at conditions in Ireland – pressured Gladstone into acting

Second Land Bill and Protection of People and Property Bill (coercion)

- Gladstone, due to international pressure, proposed two bills together:
 - Coercion bill – anyone suspected of organised boycotting could be arrested without trial
 - Generous land bill giving tenants full tenant rights
- Parnell and 20 of his MPs began to obstruct – 41 hours later debate stopped and obstruction banned
- Michael Davitt's parole cancelled
- Dillon, Parnell and 34 HR MPs protested and were ejected
- Parnell as a constitutional politician:
 - Refused to go back to Ireland – instead stayed to vote on Land Bill
 - Although he possibly believed he just wouldn't have had enough support to do this
- Leading members of League began to be arrested under coercion bill – actually increased agrarian violence

Second Land Bill

Terms:

- Land Court set up where landlords and tenants could go to get fair (judicial) rent fixed
- Judicial rent set for 15 years, while it was paid a tenant could not be evicted
- After that time, tenant could return to get it adjusted
- Contained land purchase clause

Failures:

- Tenants with leases and in arrears could not go – this was a large number
- 15 years too long

Results:

- Split Parnell's followers
- Parnell dealt with that by avoiding showing his side – got suspended for a noisy protest and could not vote on it.

Parnell in Kilmainham

- Arrested for speeches attacking Gladstone
- Signed No Rent Manifesto
- Gladstone declared Land League illegal
 - Already had been falling apart
 - Now Gladstone rather than Parnell was blamed
- Ladies' Land League still present and keeping Land League ideals alive, but chaos prevailed

Kilmainham Treaty

Causes:

- Government could not control agrarian violence, needed Parnell's help
- Parnell wanted to get out – prison was bad for his health, and he wanted to see Katharine O'Shea and his child
- Negotiations were indirect, neither side wanted to be seen talking to the other

Treaty:

- Not actually signed
- Gladstone would:
 - Amend Land Act to allow those in arrears into the Land Court
 - Help tenants in arrears to pay rents
 - Drop coercion and release suspects
- Parnell would:

- Try to quieten country
- Support Liberals

Phoenix Park murders

- Lord Frederick Cavendish (newly-appointed, pro-Ireland Chief Secretary for Ireland) and T.H. Burke (Under-Secretary) brutally killed with butchers' knives
- By the Invincibles, splinter group of Fenians
- This caused a drop in support for the Fenians
 - Solved Parnell's problem with split in followers over Kilmainham Treaty
- Parnell and HR Party left as undisputed leaders of nationalist community in Ireland
- Gladstone introduced new, harsher coercion act in response
 - United HRers against him

Parnell after Kilmainham Treaty

- Style of leadership changed – almost no contact with Fenians, paid little attention to farmers, spent more time in England than Ireland and he became remote from his followers
- Why?
 - No one threatened his leadership, so he was safe
 - He had less energy because of his time in jail
 - He wanted to be with Katharine O'Shea
 - He needed to be in the House of Commons, because all the important decisions were made there
- No one minded that he had changed, everyone saw him as the 'uncrowned king of Ireland'

National League

- Let the Ladies' Land League die out
- Instead of reviving the Land League, he replaced it with the National League
- Aims:
 - Home Rule

- Land purchase
- Reform of local government to make it more democratic
- Wider franchise
- Home Rule now more important than land reform
- Very different from Land League
 - Not controlled by Fenians
 - Political party (worked for Home Rule Party)
- Branches all over country
- Encouraged priests to join and chair meetings to get Catholic support
 - Scared Protestants
- What they did:
 - Collected money
 - Organised elections
 - Chose candidates and imposed party pledge (to go along with whatever Parnell said, or leave the party)

1884 Reform Act

- Franchise widened to every man in UK who owned or rented a house, or even a room
- Gave vote to extra 500,000 men
 - Mainly poorer men who would support and vote for Parnell

Negotiating with the British

- Independent opposition – remaining independent, but saying they'll vote for whichever party supported Home Rule
- Only worked if Conservatives and Liberals were equal – Liberals currently had large majority
- Liberals (currently allied through Kilmainham Treaty)
 - Relations got worse between HRP and Liberals
 - Liberals had not dropped coercion as promised
 - Liberals divided over coercion
- Parnell turned down Joseph Chamberlain's plan for a Central Board

- Conservatives
 - Had some similar aims to HRP – education, land
 - Began to be friendly to Parnell – especially Lord Randolph Churchill
- Liberals (due to quarrels over coercion and Gladstone’s retirement) were divided and fell – Gladstone resigned
- Due to the current redrawing of boundary lines, an election could not take place. Salisbury took power (Conservative)
- He began to court Parnell
 - Did not renew coercion
 - Appointed Lord Carnarvon – pro-Home Rule
 - Land Purchase Act – lent £5 million to Irish farmers
- Unionists began to worry and organise and take action
 - Both northern and southern unionists
 - Unionists united against the threat – both Anglicans and Presbyterians
 - Orange Order revived
 - Demonstrations, no violence

Parnell chooses Conservatives

- Lord Salisbury had refused to meet with him, but the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Carnarvon, and Lord Randolph Churchill met with Parnell and seemed to support Home Rule
- Gladstone refused to say anything about his stance on Home Rule
- Also, Conservatives controlled House of Lords

1885 election – Results (Case study, part 1)

In Ireland:

- South:
 - Unionist candidates got no seats, despite their campaigning
 - National League won all 68 seats
 - Only graduates of Trinity, entitled to elect 2 MPs, elected Unionists
- Ulster:

- Unionists divided between Liberals and Conservatives, so their voting power was diminished
- 17 seats for National League, 16 for Conservatives, 0 for Liberals

In Britain:

- Irish affairs did not really affect the election
- Liberals got 86 more seats than Conservatives, exactly the number of HR MPs
- This put Parnell in a bad bargaining position – he could not help the Conservatives
- However, Gladstone needed Irish votes to become Prime Minister again

First Home Rule Bill (Case Study, part 2)

- Gladstone's son 'let slip' that Gladstone intended to bring in Home Rule Bill.
- Unionists shocked – organisations grew rapidly, and the Unionist Party was founded
- Salisbury rejected HR and said he would bring back coercion – alliance broke down
- HR MPs voted with Liberals, Gladstone became PM
- Conservatives become unionist
 - Wanted to stop HR bill, realised that Ulster unionists were the key
 - 'playing the Orange card'
 - Conservatives united over this, changed the party's name to 'Conservative and Unionist Party'
- Gladstone's plans:
 - Presented HR bill
 - Ireland gets its own parliament, which would elect Irish government
 - Westminster only controls the Crown, defence, war and peace, trade and navigation, coinage, post office, colonial relations
 - No Irish MPs in Westminster
 - Ireland would pay 1/15 of cost of running the empire
 - Land Purchase Bill – British lend to Irish tenant farmers to buy their farms
 - To protect Irish landlords from HR parliament controlled by tenant farmers
 - So Irish farmers would get along with the landlords
 - Misunderstanding of unionists

- Thought land purchase would deal with unionists
 - Completely wrong
- HR splits Liberals
 - Arguments for:
 - Separate nation, majority voted for HR
 - Only alternative was coercion, which had failed before
 - Irish wouldn't put up with anything less
 - The bill would protect minorities
 - Reconciliation between Ireland and Britain
 - Irish were distracting from important British issues
 - Arguments against:
 - Ireland part of Britain, so British people had to agree too
 - Irish didn't really want it, they were persuaded
 - Eventually, Ireland would then want independence
 - Protestant minority would suffer
 - Irish not able for self-government
 - Liberals were split
 - Majority wanted HR, but many reluctantly to be loyal to Gladstone
 - Minority, Liberals unionists, opposed it
 - Conservatives and unionists were united
- HR bill defeated – Gladstone calls a general election to try to increase his power

The 1886 Election (Case study, part 3)

- Situation in Ireland wasn't going to change, British opinion was what mattered
- Both sides went around Britain campaigning
 - Isabella Tod made an impact on the unionist side
- Majority of British rejected HR
 - Conservatives won, Gladstone resigned and Salisbury became PM
 - Liberal Party was destroyed for many years
- Consequences of 1885-1886:

- Partition was suggested for the first time, although rejected
- Liberals much weaker, no longer strongly supported HR
- Independent opposition now impossible – HRP reliant on Liberals
- Irish Unionist Party now was the voice of Irish Protestants
- Conservatives dominant party for 20 years

Parnell's Final Years

- Parnell spent most of his time in England with Liberals to try to regain support from HR and convince British that HR posed no threat
- Land agitation by Parnell's lieutenants:
 - Parnell disapproved, stopped them after a few months for fear of annoying British Liberals
 - It attracted British journalists, who publicised terrible conditions of tenants
 - Sympathy was won among British Liberals, they also became embarrassed
- Pigott forgeries
 - Pigott claimed to have letters showing that Parnell supported the Phoenix Park murders
 - The Times published them
 - Conservatives set up a commission to look into the links between Parnell and the Fenians
 - In it, Parnell's lawyer eventually cross-examined Pigott, proving that the letters were forgeries
 - Parnell had won, and the whole Liberal Party celebrated for him
 - Gladstone and Parnell began to discuss a second HR bill
- O'Shea divorce case
 - William O'Shea had turned a blind eye to his wife and Parnell because of money from Katharine's aunt – aunt died, William filed for divorce
 - At first, nationalists supported Parnell and believed it was a plot against him
 - Then in court, Parnell didn't deny William (he wanted them to divorce, so he and Katharine could marry) – William painted Parnell as heartless and immoral

- Public reaction:
 - Ireland – very few questioned Parnell’s position. Davitt most extreme, called for Parnell to step aside until it died down
 - Britain – Gladstone was urged to cut off ties with him. Liberals would lose votes if they stuck with Parnell
- The fall of Parnell
 - Re-election:
 - Parnell only candidate for leader of HRP
 - Gladstone told McCarthy, vice-chair, that Liberals wouldn’t support HRP with Parnell as leader
 - McCarthy told Parnell, no one else was told
 - Parnell was re-elected, although many hoped he would resign in gratitude for loyalty – he didn’t
 - Gladstone’s threat held – now should the Irish MPs abandon their leader, or ruin alliance and chance of HR?
 - Meeting called of HRP, in which Parnell created a diversion
 - Introduced a manifesto saying terms of HR bill were too limited
 - This gained some support with extreme nationalists, but destroyed the alliance with the Liberals
 - Party splits in Committee Room 15
 - Parnell chaired meeting – changed discussion to his manifesto every time leadership issue was brought up. Continued this for 6 days
 - On 6th day, 45 MPs, led by McCarthy, walked out. 27 MPs left with Parnell.
 - Parnell said he had won, since the others were traitors
 - Who supported which side?
 - Anti-Parnellites supported by Catholic Church
 - Parnellites supported by Fenians and other extreme nationalists
 - By-election in Kilkenny tested Irish opinion – anti-Parnellites won two to one
 - Parnell worked tirelessly, making speeches all over Britain and Ireland – still kept losing by-elections

- Parnell's health deteriorated, he died from a cold he got while making a speech
- Legend of Parnell
 - At the end, he supported Fenians and so he became a republican hero
 - Hero to romantics – e.g. Yeats and Joyce
 - It's not clear if Parnell actually was a republican
 - He was always ambiguous when made to give his opinion
 - He changed his views to please different audiences and to get as much support as possible
 - We don't know his true views