

How effectively did
irish catholic and
nationalist leaders
advance their cause
in...



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The extent that leaders were able to further the Irish cause was dependent on various factors including the degree of opposition or support within Ireland as well as economic and political aspects. While these factors were beyond the control of both Irish Catholic and nationalist leaders, the diverse methods they adopted to advance their respective causes also heavily influenced their effectiveness. The first leading figure in the period was O'Connell.

He was effective in gaining mass support (especially from conservative Catholics) by setting up the Catholic Association in 1823, reducing membership to a penny a month by the introduction of Catholic Rent and due to his skills as an orator. Hoppen argues that the chief reason for his eventual success was his effective politicisation of the Catholic priesthood. It may be argued that the 1829 Emancipation was passed due to O'Connell encouraging peaceful agitation and gaining mass support, as conservative Catholicism pressurized Peel's government to fear a revolution in Ireland.

However, other factors also influenced Peel's fear of a revolution such as the revival of localised violence known as Whiteboyism. Moreover, the Emancipation was practically ineffective as the voting qualification was increased from 40 shillings to £10 so most Catholics could not exercise their right to vote. However, despite this, R. Foster describes it as a "formal constitutional revolution" which effectively started the gradual diminishing of the power of the Protestant Ascendancy by securing political concessions. Moreover, Robert Kee argues it showed how "the down trodden Catholic masses had taken on the government and won".

O'Connell had limited effectiveness in the 1830s due to his willingness to work with the Whig Government under Grey and Melbourne. However, the fact that they were keen on appeasement may have been a greater factor than O'Connell's influence and the reforms introduced were very limited. Moreover, although 1841-1843 saw his Monster Meetings raise the political temperature, it may be argued that he was less effective in the 1830s and 1840s because his party lacked discipline and he lost contact with more radical nationalists.

Although J. C. Beckett writes that " No other single person has left such an unmistakable mark on the history of Ireland", in general, O'Connell's effectiveness was limited. Hoppen argues that for him, " the people" were the Catholics for whom he achieved virtually full political and civil rights by the Emancipation. Nevertheless, he had failed to cause any fundamental changes: the Church of Ireland still collected rents from Catholics and he was unable to achieve Repeal, showing failures with regard the nationalist cause.

However, Hoppen argues that this was due to the strong resistance of Peel and because " middle class Catholics were less enthusiastic about Repeal than they were about Emancipation". O'Connell's main success was perhaps that through non-violence and veiled threats, he was able to get Ireland's situation to the forefront of British politicians minds and to lay the foundations for future nationalist movements. Indeed, Oliver MacDonagh argues that he was, " the actual shaper of the emergent Irish nationalist Catholic culture". Following O'Connell, the more extreme nationalist Young Ireland movement emerged.

In its early stages, it sought to bring Irish regeneration through the revival of the Gaelic language and culture, but was ineffective as it lacked a coherent programme and many Protestants did not support creating a common culture. However, after 1845, they effectively gained limited support under Mitchel and Lalor due to the Famine and because according to Hoppen, for Lalor, "the people" were essentially the farmers. However, Hoppen argues that they were "practically ineffective" and "an ideal" whose ideas of a Commonwealth came too early.

Indeed, their 1848 rebellion exemplifies this as it was merely a series of skirmishes with the police. Thus, F. S. L. Lyons argues the rebellion displayed "romantic idealism totally out of touch with the world of reality". Kee sees Young Ireland as ineffective because they lacked mass support: while people may have ideologically agreed with them, the Catholic Church made it a Cardinal Sin to support them because they promoted violent resistance. Indeed, Lyons argues that their only effectiveness was in the ideas they had, limited mainly to the idea that an Irish Republic should be fought for.

Young Ireland formed the roots of the Fenians who effectively recognised the importance of the rural community, adopting an agrarian policy (under Davitt) that "land is the property of the people". However, they failed to advance the nationalist cause as their leadership failed to control the excessively local movements, leading to what Hoppen describes as "a necklace of violent nationalism". Furthermore, their violent methods proved ineffective as they lost the support of the Catholic Church.

Although they failed to bring any change in the 1860s, they forced the British government to look closely at Ireland's situation and following the three "Manchester Martyrs" of 1867, were able to create a cult and pass on the idea of independence to the next generation. Indeed, historians have argued that Gladstone's renewed interest in Ireland after 1867 was a response to the Fenian outrages of that year. During the 1870s, Isaac Butt continued the Home Rule campaign. However, his effectiveness was extremely limited as his Home Government Association gained little support from Irish Catholics who pinned most of their faith on Gladstone.

Furthermore, Butt's weak leadership made him unable to inspire his followers and he was often away from the Commons pursuing his legal career. Finally, his conservatism frustrated more radical members and caused his downfall before he was able to have any significant effect except arguing Westminster lacked the time and expertise to govern Ireland. In the late nineteenth century, nationalism was led by Parnell, whose contempt for English opinion made him a popular hero for militant Irish nationalists and while he rejected the use of violence, Fenians were willing to co-operate with him.

Furthermore, E. Norman argues that people like Davitt, the Land Leaguers and Parnell were effective as they "exploited the [rural] disorders for political purposes". Additionally, Lyons argues that Parnell was effective in "fusing into one national movement all the elements of Irish protest and grievance" by the 'New Departure'. The work of Parnell, Davitt and the Land Leaguers eventually culminated in the Second Land Act of 1881 which was valuable as it delivered the 3F's to tenants.

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Thus, Parnell had effectively forced the government into land reform by encouraging peaceful protests, boycotts and rural agitation. However, the successes of 1881 were not solely due to him as the influence of Davitt's agrarian violence was also crucial (Gladstone only passed the Act as he feared social revolution). The historian George Boyce comments that the extent of Parnell's effectiveness was reliant on his ability to work with Gladstone as shown by the 1882 Kilmainham Treaty in which he agreed to use his influence against violence in return for the relaxing of the Coercion Act.

Throughout the period, Parnell also required mass support to be effective as it allowed him to express his views and filibuster in Parliament. Thus, most historians believe Gladstone decided to introduce the 1886 Home Rule bill due to mass support for Home Rule in Ireland and because he needed the support of Parnell's party (they had won 86 seats in 1885) and in this way, Parnell effectively furthered the cause for Home Rule. By Parnell's fall from power, the extent of his effectiveness appears limited. Lyons argues he had left his party "weak, divided and dependent on the Liberals to deliver Home Rule".

However, he did effectively gain the 1881 Second Land Act and got Home Rule moving as a constitutional issue due to close relations with Gladstone, his non-violent preaching and the mass support he gained. Furthermore, it may be argued that he can not be criticised as Lyons argues Home Rule was unachievable constitutionally due to the built-in Unionist majority in the Lords. Redmond's Home Rule campaign in the early 1900s had limited effectiveness. He successfully united the Irish Parliamentary Party and <https://assignbuster.com/how-effectively-did-irish-catholic-and-nationalist-leaders-advance-their-cause-in-the-years-1801-1921-essay-sample/>

gained the 1911 Parliament Act which limited the Lords right to veto legislation to two years.

However, by 1916, he was branded a failure as he abandoned the 1912 Home Rule bill because it permanently excluded six counties. Furthermore, Foster argues that the successes were because of Asquith's commitment to Home Rule rather than Redmond's influence and this may explain why he was less effective under Balfour previously. Opposition to Repeal existed predominantly within the Protestant community in Ulster. They can be seen to be effective as through resistance (especially by the Ulster Volunteer Force) and propaganda, they were able to convince British politicians that Ulster deserved exclusion from Home Rule.

However, Patricia Garland argues the effectiveness of the Ulster Unionists was limited as exclusion from Home Rule was a compromise and they deserted unionists in the south. Ultimately, after the signing of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, they had failed as they never wanted a separate state of their own. In 1916, the emergence of Irishmen seeking an independent Irish republic led to the Easter Rising under key figures such as Clarke, Pearse and Connolly. In the short term, the leaders of the Rising were ineffective as they failed to gain enough support although in the aftermath, effectiveness was mixed.

They had got attention back to Ireland and Pearse had been given his " blood sacrifice" by the execution of 15 men. Thus, the rebels were seen as martyrs, evoking sympathy from both England and Ireland and leading Asquith to make a new effort for an Irish settlement. However, Lyons argues

that they were ineffective as he believes, “ the whole constitutional movement ... was the chief casualty of 1916”. The emergence of Sinn Fein under Arthur Griffith in 1907 as a militant nationalist organisation who desired a republic was ineffective until 1916 as their anti-war stance was a minority view.

However, by the election of de Valera as its President in 1917, they had effectively combined the leadership of both political and military wings of the Irish revolutionary movement and enjoyed mass support (in 1918 they gained 73 seats). Indeed, the main effectiveness of the IRA and Sinn Fein was that by violent militant tactics, they made it clear (by the 1919-1921 Anglo-Irish War), that neither side could militarily defeat the other and thus, a truce was needed.

However, Boyce has questioned the effectiveness of Sinn Fein, Griffith and de Valera by suggesting that “ it was the revolt of the British conscience not the defeat of the army” that led to the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. Furthermore, the fact that Ireland broke into civil war soon after demonstrates that much of the south were unsatisfied as the Treaty was a compromise rather than the republic they wanted. Griffith and Collins’s effectiveness as negotiators was also limited as they did not know how much authority they had and were forced into the Treaty by Lloyd George’s threat of war.

However, the Treaty was not an unmitigated failure: it effectively gave Ireland the status of a self governing Dominion that controlled its own internal affairs and the oath to the Crown was watered down. Thus, Sinn Fein’s militant tactics combined with Griffith and de Valera’s political

compromise effectively achieved change quickly. Overall, it emerges that the Irish Catholic and nationalist leaders were more effective in advancing their different 'causes' in some periods than others. O'Connell's initial 'cause' was the Catholic people whom he helped by the 1829 Catholic Emancipation.

However, following this, he, Young Ireland and the Fenians failed to gain Home Rule which suggests this period was less effective. Parnell was effective in advancing the 'cause' for farmers and in achieving Home Rule bills. Historians have argued that the effectiveness of the leaders was largely dictated by changing circumstances (factors such as public opinion and the attitudes of British politicians). This may explain why after 1916, the nationalist 'cause' was advanced most quickly under Sinn Fein, de Valera, Griffith and others (by the 1921 Treaty) and why Ulster Unionists failed to maintain the Union.