

Methods of the irish nationalists change between 1848 and 1890 essay sample



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The Irish Nationalists of 1848 held clear aims, they wanted independence for Ireland from Britain, they wanted to establish their own government, to gain fixity of tenure, increase fair rent and free trade. The methods in which they attempted to successfully reach those aims are the use of violence, the establishment of groups such as the Fenians, however such leaders as Daniel O'Connell aimed to use parliamentary techniques and elections to bring about reform. This however in some ways changed by the 1890s.

Daniel O'Connell or the liberator as he was also known is possibly the most significant Irish Nationalist of his time. O'Connell believed that Ireland should be treated as a free nation, he aimed to gain independence firstly for the Catholics in his fight for emancipation, he also aimed to bring about electoral reform, reform of the Church of Ireland, tenants rights and economic development. O'Connell tried to achieve these aims through various methods all of which however were peaceful; he held mass open air meetings, he used the press to his advantage along with posters and was able to rally the masses with his great oratory ability. Young Ireland was one of the first Irish Nationalist groups to form that have influenced many of the other Irish Nationalist groups. To achieve their aims they used constitutional methods like O'Connell used. However later into O'Connell's life his political career began to waver by 1842 and his final years leading up to his death in 1847 were not as significant.

After the death of O'Connell in 1847 Young Ireland found the methods originally used by O'Connell to be tedious and too drawn out, with them failing to reach their aims as soon as they would have liked. In order to achieve their goals more quickly, they changed their approach from the

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peaceful ways in which O'Connell had demonstrated to more violent ones. The members of Young Ireland led violent rebellions they were seen to cause damage and when police were called to control the rebels they began to terrorize them also. This attempt to reach their aims through violence however, as O'Connell had realised it would, failed, whilst it gained them much publicity and caught more attention of the British Government it did not help them to gain support and simply demonstrated a change in their methods.

These changes were not however taken up by all Nationalists, the Land League was a group aiming to achieve three F's: Fair Rent, Free Sale, Fixity of tenure this was mainly due to the unfair treatment of the tenants at the time, along with the poverty in Ireland caused by the large populations and then later the Great Famine. This attempt to gain the three F's soon led to a Land War headed by Michael Davitt; whilst Davitt first began by trying to use forceful methods and violence, after his arrest he soon realised that such methods were ineffective and soon began to use more constitutional methods like O'Connell; which is an example of continuity within the Nationalists. Their approach like O'Connell's also included the use of boycotting, propaganda in the form of mass meetings, which unlike those exhibited by the Young Irelanders whom followed O'Connell were much more peaceful. This then is another example of continuity in the methods and aims of the Irish Nationalists.

A group which showed more change than the Land League were the Fenians, the Fenians were a secret organisation. Although they can be seen to differ from the Land League and O'Connell in their methods, they did hold a

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similar approach to that of the Young Irelanders, they also held similar aims in that they too wanted to achieve a Republic of Ireland. Although similar to them in both aims and methods they were also more militant and used revolutionary methods, this was mainly due to the fact that they held greater support such as that gained from America and other organisations which shared the same beliefs. Their methods were mainly violent as they hoped these methods would make a bigger impact. Whilst they held protests and marches, they were not like those held by O'Connell they had changed to become more radical and violent. They also deployed methods of terrorism and went to the extent of killing; it was this ruthlessness displayed by the radicals that caught the government's attention and so meant that they could no longer be ignored, meaning that they did achieve at least one of their aims; they became a problem which could not be ignored any longer.

Once the Fenians had caught the attention of the British Government, Home Rule being an issue at the forefront of the Nationalist aims; this soon led to the formation of the Home Rule League. The Home Rule League was headed by Charles Stuart Parnell, who like O'Connell had come from a well to do background. Parnell like O'Connell also believed in the use of constitutional methods, whilst he failed to gain Home Rule as the first three Bills failed to go through he still focused on using constitutional methods. Parnell did however form the Kilmainham Treaty with Gladstone, this treaty saw both the British government and Parnell make an effort to co-operate, it is possibly because of Parnell's use of constitutional methods that helped persuade the government to make an effort and listen. This was significant in Irish Nationalism as for the first time they were working together, they

were taking each side into account. This then shows that whilst the changed methods of the Fenians helped gain the attention of the government, it was in fact the continuity displayed by Parnell to use constitutional methods that had the greatest effect in gaining their aims.

To conclude, it is clear from looking at the various groups and leaders that Irish Nationalism did certainly change some of its aims and methods through the period 1848 to 1890. There are however also examples of continuity shown throughout this period in both the aims and methods used. Whilst there are certain groups such as the Fenians who used less constitutional methods and more aggressive militant methods; there are still those that show continuity such as Parnell who was much more constitutional like O'Connell.