

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



In 1801, the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland saw the closing of Irish Parliament and was therefore routinely denounced by all manner of Irish nationalists. Much of Ireland was owned by absentee protestant ascendancy landlords, which caused a lot of bad feeling among the ordinary Irish people who worked on the land and had to pay extortionate rents for the land they worked on, often to be thrown off without compensation. The first major Irish Nationalist leader was Daniel O'Connell, who was born into the Roman Catholic Gentry and had Gaelic roots, and practiced as a barrister in Dublin. He believed in political and religious equality and wanted change, but his experiences of the French revolution had frightened him away from violence. He famously said, " No political change whatsoever is worth shedding a single drop of blood for. " His main objectives were the repeal of the Act of Union and to " restore old Ireland of her independence. It is probable that in the short term he hoped for reform of the Union rather than repeal, but if he had voiced this, many of the more radical Irish would have found him too moderate and he wouldn't have had nearly as much support as he did. When, in 1821 an Emancipation Bill passed the Commons, but failed the Lords, O'Connell had had enough; " Twenty years have passed and we are still slaves. " He felt new tactics were needed so decided to link emancipation with nationalism in order to widen support for the cause.

In 1823, O'Connell founded the Catholic Association, along with his supporters, as a constitutional organisation which was peaceful and legal and aimed to get civil and political rights for catholic Irish people, and to get off the remnants of the penal laws which imposed all manner of severe restrictions on the Catholics, including buying or inheriting land from

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Protestants, and their estates could not be passed on as a single property. In addition to this, the clergy were generally persecuted: bishops were banned from the country and ordinary priests were forced to register and allowed to practise only in limited areas. In 1824 the association introduced the Catholic rent of a penny a month to finance its work. The leaders were professionals, but the rent made all the members feel a part of it.

This provided the basis for mass support and the feeling of a crusade rather than just a pressure group. O'Connell regarded the Catholic Church as important, because priests could collect rent and they could spread the message in an effective way. Twenty thousand pounds was collected in the first nine months and another thirty-five thousand pounds over the next three years. By 1828, there were clear signs that Wellington, the British Prime Minister, was moving reluctantly towards the conclusion that emancipation was inevitable.

O'Connell's moment arrived when the Conservative Vesey Fitzgerald, sitting member for County Clare, was promoted to the Cabinet. This necessitated a by-election and O'Connell decided to stand, which wasn't illegal despite the bar on Catholics taking up a seat. Not surprisingly, as he had guaranteed the vote of the members of the Catholic Association, he won, and this created a crisis. O'Connell had said at the time " they must now crush us or conciliate us. " Wellington and his Home Secretary, Robert Peel, contrived a plan to concede to the Catholics in such a way that they simultaneously undermine O'Connell's power base.

In 1829, they passed a Catholic Relief Act, which opened a lot of doors to Catholics. But it also dramatically reduced the electorate in Ireland by raising the county franchise from forty shilling to ten pounds, which greatly reduced O'Connell's electorate, and sharply diminished the political power of the Catholic Association. The county electorate shrank from 216, 000 to 37, 000. After O'Connell's triumph of emancipation, he took his place as an M. P.

and gradually put together an O'Connellite party of about thirty. The Great Reform Act of 1832 did little for Ireland but increase the number of Irish representatives by five. However, Ireland still remained central in British politics throughout the 1830's and 1840's thanks to O'Connell's rhetorical assaults on the Union. The Whigs were in power through most of the 1830s and sought to appease Irish opinion by introducing a number of progressive reforms, such as the Irish Church Temporalities Act of 1833 abolished ten Anglican bishoprics in Ireland, thereby in small measure, reducing the financial burden on the Irish Catholics to support an alien church. O'Connell supported these measures. In 1849, it became obvious to O'Connell that the Whigs had no intention of supporting the repeal of the Act of Union, his next major project.

This emerging movement was, in effect, a campaign for a restored Irish Parliament in Dublin. The Repeal Campaign was funded in the same way as the Emancipation Campaign with a Repeal 'rent', with the Roman Catholic Church providing backing. O'Connell also had the support of 'Young Ireland', a group of young nationalist middle class intellectuals. He also had the continuing support of most of the poor peasantry, with the exception of Ulster.

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The major tactic was the organisation of 'monster meetings', which were designed to intimidate the English government by the vast numbers of participants. O'Connell's idea was that these crowds would remain peaceful, so they would be hard for the authorities to suppress. The Tories returned to power in 1841, a year after the campaign began. Robert Peel was the Prime Minister and wasn't prepared to concede to O'Connell again, and, unlike the Whigs, Peel wasn't dependent upon the O'Connellite group in the House, plus it was widely known that the two men didn't like each other on a personal level. The issue of repeal came to a head in 1843, when O'Connell proposed a 'monster meeting' at Clontarf, which Peel decided to ban.

O'Connell accepted the ban, as the idea of breaking the law would in no doubt have led to widespread violence. This defeat signalled that the repeal movement was coming to an end, and Peel pressed his advantage home quite ruthlessly. In 1844, O'Connell was arrested for language judged to be an incitement to violence. His time in prison left him sapped and demoralised. Over the next two years, O'Connell's apparent weakness was coupled with arguments within the Repeal movement, and Peel's continuing policy of combating Repeal with concessions, such as the increased grant to Maynooth College (the main seminary for training Catholic clergy in Ireland).

All these factors combined to derail the movement completely. O'Connell died in 1847. O'Connell, it seems, was an effective Catholic rather than Nationalist leader, as his aims were clear on religious terms, such as Catholic emancipation, but unclear about what he wanted politically. His success regarding Catholic emancipation made him a national hero and involved an early use of the tactics of mass mobilisation. His choice to mix Catholicism

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with national feeling was clearly a mistake as it made nationalism into a religious choice, which hindered the cause. He wasn't so successful in reform and repeal, partly because the national campaign wasn't so strong, partly because the opposition was much stronger than it was for emancipation.

As he was rather vague about what he wanted, he was less effective. The Fenian Brotherhood was a secret society, originally established in America, whose aim was to overthrow British rule in Ireland. The Fenians didn't come anywhere near to their aims to overthrow the British; though there is no doubt that in the 1860s the Fenians catalysed a new phase in Anglo-Irish relations. In the spring of 1867 the Fenians attempted a nationalist revolution in Ireland, centred in Dublin. Due to appalling organisation and infiltration by British spies, the rising failed.

Later in the same year the Fenians attempted to rescue one of their imprisoned leaders, Captain Kelly, by holding up a prison van in Manchester. Although Kelly was rescued, a policeman in the van was shot dead in the process. The British authorities tried and convicted five Irish men, four of whom were Fenians, but none of them had fired the shot that killed the policeman. Three of these men were hanged. Many felt these men weren't guilty of murder, and they became known as the Manchester martyrs.

Although the Fenians were not particularly popular before this incident, the Irish were outraged by the executions and, by being made martyrs, they gained more support for their cause. In December of 1867, the Fenians attempted another rescue by blasting the walls of Clerkenwell Prison in London. Because of excessive use of explosives, a number of nearby houses

were severely damaged and several people were killed. This series of disturbances prompted the leader of the Liberal party in 1868, William Gladstone, to declare that it was his 'mission to pacify Ireland'. Gladstone took on a way to deal with the problem, inspired by Peel's approach a generation earlier, to win Irish support for the Union by offering concessions and addressing then current Irish grievances. Firstly, he disestablished the Church of Ireland, which removed long-standing Irish grievances about having to pay tithes to maintain a church the majority of the population didn't believe in.

This was received well in Ireland, although a more important issue was the Land Question, which concerned the relationship between tenants and the landlords. Tenants for many years had complained about excessive rent rates, absentee landlords and unwarranted eviction without compensation. Although the Fenians never came anywhere near to their ultimate aim of smashing the union and liberating Ireland, their actions did contribute to the concessions granted to Ireland by Gladstone. Isaac Butt was the first figure in the movement for constitutional change. He was a Protestant lawyer who began his political career as a Tory in favour of the Union, but he became increasingly upset by England's lack of support for Ireland, and as a result of defending the Fenians, some of their ideas rubbed off on him. He didn't support armed rebellion or the forming of a republic, however he developed favour of self-government.

In 1870 he founded the Home-rule Association with home-rule as the aim and a non-sectarian approach. It widened its demands to include tenants rights, and in the 1874 elections, the Home-rule League got 59 MPs. The <https://assignbuster.com/how-effectively-did-irish-catholic-and-nationalist-leaders-advance-their-cause-in-the-years-1801-1921-essay/>

Home-rule party didn't have much effect because it lacked unity in terms of ideas. Only 1/3 were home-rulers, the rest were either Fenians or Liberals. Also, Butt was a poor leader as he lacked inspiration, and, one of the most important political requirements, charisma.

He was also often absent pursuing his legal career and was too mild and non-confrontational which made him weak. Then Charles Stewart Parnell emerged. He came from a Protestant ascendancy family who had held high office in the 18th century. Until he got into politics in 1874, he lived the life of a country gentleman.

In the House of Commons he identified himself with the militant wing of the Home-rule party, which was critical of Isaac Butts leadership. He took part in obstructive tactics, which interrupted business, and consisted of making long speeches so that nothing got done in order to draw attention to the problems in Ireland. It was his long-term aim to restore the Parliament, which had closed with the Act of Union in 1800. Gladstone was aware that Parnell was a powerful adversary and sought to compromise with him. He was in contact with the Fenians, although he didn't accept their revolutionary programme. In 1879 he headed the 'Land War' as leader of the Irish National Party.

The Land War involved little violence, and the strongest tactic developed by it was the 'boycott' method, where organised tenants would refuse to cooperate in any way or even speak to a landlord who was deemed to have acted unjustly. Parnell was imprisoned for inciting the boycotts. Eventually the struggle was largely resolved when Gladstone pushed through the Act of 1881, which was a major concession as it gave tenants the so-called '3Fs':

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Fair rent, Fixity of tenure, and a right of Free sale of their tenure. Despite these being considerable, an obstacle still remained.

During the campaigns of the Land League, Parnell had urged tenants emerged in conflicts with their landlords not to pay any rent, and as the Land War came to an end the landlords began to insist that the rent arrears be paid. Many tenants simply could not afford it. This led to an awkward impasse, which threatened to undermine the success of the second Land Act. It was Parnell's greatest coup that from prison he was able to persuade Gladstone, through various intermediaries, to pass another act, the Arrears Act of 1882, by which the Government agreed to pay off most of the rent arrears.

This was a high price for the British Government but essentially, in doing this they had purchased an end to the Land Wars. With the medium victory of the Land War behind him, Parnell shifted his aims towards restoring the Irish Parliament, or Home-rule. Initially, Gladstone was opposed to the idea, but at some point in the 1880s he had begun to feel that a Parliament in Dublin could be the solution to the Irish problem. In December 1885, he went public with his new shift towards home-rule. Lord Salisbury, the leader of the Conservatives, adopted an extremely oppositional role to the idea and the Liberal Party was split on the issue, and eventually ninety-three dissident Liberals voted against the Bill. The effect of this was disastrous for Ireland and the Liberals.

Parnell never had another chance to deliver home-rule to Ireland as his political career was ruined when a member of his own party, Captain O'Shea,

filed for divorce on grounds that his wife, Kitty O'Shea, had been having an affair with Parnell. This shocked Catholic Ireland, which was appalled with public immorality, and Parnell's career never recovered from the scandal. In 1891, Parnell died, but Home-rule lived on as an idea. Gladstone's second attempt in 1893 actually passed its various stages in the Commons only to be blocked by the Lords. It didn't return until 1912.

Parnell's aim had been to unite nationalists behind him to achieve home-rule legally through Westminster's Parliament. His methods were those of a practical politician, and having links with extreme nationalists helped conjure support and perhaps appear more of a threat. He built up an obedient, united party which was well organised and was successful at keeping religion out of politics by being a Protestant leading an essentially Catholic party, and kept most nationalists on side by campaigning for home-rule, which for the first time became a realistic prospect rather than a vague hope. Parnell achieved a lot through land reform and was effective in his methods as a politician. He only missed his ultimate aim, rather unfairly, by a whisker.

The Boer War of 1899-1902 created excitement in Dublin and saw the forming of another nationalist group, namely Sinn Fein, under the leadership of Arthur Griffiths. Sinn Fein was Gaelic for 'Ourselves Alone' and wanted more than home-rule, as their name suggests. Griffith believed that Ireland should become a joint partner in the British Empire, much like Hungary in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He advocated that Irish M. P.

s should simply withdraw from Westminster and declare a co-equal parliament in Dublin. John Redmond was the leader of the Irish Nationalist

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Party, and in 1910, stated that he believed that the only thing that was preventing a successful home-rule bill was the Lords Veto. Redmond had long believed that Ireland had the right to greater self-government, although he didn't want to see Ireland independent from Britain and he was opposed to the use of violence and wanted to get anything he could for Ireland through the process of Parliament. In 1910, Herbert Asquith's Liberal government had fought two general elections and only held onto power by forming political alliances. In 1910, this was with the Irish Nationalist party. In exchange for his party's support of the Government, Redmond wanted Home-rule.

Home-rule, however, wasn't a vote-winner for Asquith. When the Lords rejected it in 1886 and 1893, there was next to no protest in mainland Britain, so Gladstone's crusade in 1880s and 1890s wasn't matched even by the Liberal Party. This wasn't helped by the fact that Asquith wasn't a natural supporter of home-rule, but due to his need for the support of the I. P.

P. , if he wanted power over Britain as a whole, he had to be prepared to bargain. The greatest opposition to Asquith and the Bill was the Unionist Party. It was comprised of an assortment of parties, but was dominated by the Conservative Party.

Before 1910, the Unionists had put their faith in the House of Lords rejecting any form of home-rule bill, but, after the Parliament Act of 1911, they could no longer do this. This was a major leap towards Redmond's goal of greater self-governance in Ireland, as the liberals were in power and were expected to vote in home-rule. However, In 1912, a third home-rule bill was introduced

to the Commons. Redmond fully expected it to be passed. He wasn't however expecting the response it provoked from the Protestant dominated Northern Ireland.

The Protestants had been separate in religion and culture ever since their arrival in Ireland, especially in Ulster, where 57% of the population were Protestant. The area was passionately anti-Pope and anti-Catholic, and depended on its links with mainland Britain for its economy, so after 1801 Ulstermen became solidly pro-union. Ulster had little to fear until the 1880s and Parnell and the Home-Rule Party Ulstermen and saw the creation of Ulster Unionism. Ulstermen were frightened of home-rule because of the possible destruction it could lead to of the Ulster economic links with Britain, and that an Irish Parliament would possibly be dominated by radicals, and Fenians would threaten property and eventually the existence of the British Empire.

Also, their religious fear that home-rule would equal "Rome rule". There was sectarian violence in Belfast, and an Ulster defence association was formed. There was less of a threat after the disintegration of Parnell's parliamentary group after his death in 1881. The Tories won the elections of 1895 and 1900 and, again, tried to kill the home-rule ideals with kindness, by giving the middle-classes more power at the expense of the landlords, and with a great buyout of the landlords by Government and sell-off to tenants at very favourable rates. Redmond should have been as successful leader, as his tactics to get home-rule were both legal pragmatic. I think it is safe to say that if the Tories hadn't latched on to the backlash to home-rule of protestant Ireland, he may well have successfully achieved his aims.

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In 1905, the Ulster Unionist Council was formed which would become the directive force of Ulster Unionism in the future. The Council bombarded the British people with propaganda with Conservative assistance. The two main leaders were: - Sir Edward Carson who led the Unionists in the House of Commons from 1910. He was a Protestant from Southern Ireland and was desperate to maintain the union. The other leader was James Craig who was less glamorous than Carson yet was a good organiser.

The first form of resistance was great meetings. Belfast in 1912 where there were 100, 000 Ulstermen present. In the autumn, the Solemn League and covenant was signed by a quarter of a million men. After this, the UVF was founded and grew very rapidly.

For most of 1913, Asquith drifted and took no action, but in November, republicans and nationalists in the south formed the Irish Volunteers, which also grew rapidly, backed by Redmond. By 1914 there were two private armies in the North and the South. Asquith was afraid of dealing with the UVF, because he feared the British Army might support the rebels. One possibility was ' exclusion' which would mean excluding Ulster from a self-governing Ireland. Carson and Craig accepted that and even Redmond accepted it on the understanding that it was temporary. But then the problem was shelved with the arrival of World War One.

On 4th August 1914, the British Government declared war on Germany. John Redmond agreed to accept the suspension of the home-rule legislation for the duration of the war and declared his party's total support for the war effort. Carson and the Unionists did the same. Many Irish Nationalists were

unhappy about Redmond's pledge of unconditional support and nationalism as a movement began to divide.

The IPP under Redmond remained supportive of their leader's loyalty, but other organisations, such as the Irish Volunteers, split into loyalty and revolutionary factions. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, the militant faction of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army worked together to stage a rising. The rising was planned for Easter 1916 to be led by a school teacher poet, Patrick Pearse, who was intense and extreme and believed Ireland needed some sort of blood sacrifice. James Connolly, who was the leader of the Irish Citizen Army was more realistic and thought that success might be achieved by motivating the masses. The planned this rising in secret because McNeill, who was the leader of the Irish Volunteers, didn't want immediate action, but negotiation with force in reserve, as with the Fenians, the revolutionary leaders were disorganised and disunited in pursuing their cause.