

CONTENTS.Volume 1.

I. THE FORMATION OF THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT.	
1. A policy defined.	1
2. A government formed.	33
3. An election won.	60
II. SOME PROBLEMS OF CONCILIATION, 1906.	
1. Government 'according to Irish ideas'.	101
2. The problem of the labourers.	126
3. The town tenants bill.	145
4. The English schools question.	161
III. THE IRISH COUNCIL BILL, 1906-7.	
1. Sir Antony MacDonnell and his great scheme, 1906-7.	180
2. A new departure: Birrell at the helm, January-May 1907.	241
3. The national convention and the end of the affair.	281
IV. THE IRISH UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT, 1906-8.	330

Volume II.

V. THE IRISH LAND QUESTION AND POLITICS, 1905-9.	
1. Problems of the Wyndham act.	414.
2. The evicted tenants question	443
3. Land and agitation, 1906-8.	469
4. Towards the amendment of the land act, 1907-8.	522
5. The lords and the land bill, September-November, 1909.	555
VI. THE RE-ASSERTION OF THE HOME RULE POLICY, 1907-9.	
1. Irish party difficulties, 1907.	582
2. Attempts to restore the home rule policy, 1908-9.	629
3. The people's budget.	682
VII. BUDGET, VETO AND REFORM: THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS TO THE DEATH OF EDWARD VII.	718
CONCLUSION.	813
APPENDICES: 1. The Ancient Order of Hibernians.	827
2. The Imperial Home Rule Association.	848
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	857

CHAPTER V. THE IRISH LAND QUESTION AND POLITICS, 1905-9.

1. Problems of the Wyndham act.

The Irish land act of 1903 provided £100 million of state credit and an administrative machine to carry out the total transference of Irish land to the tenantry. In addition the state provided £12 million as a bonus to encourage sales. Its unionist authors saw the act not only as a revolutionary approach but as a final solution to the land question. Based as it was on a land conference report signed by Redmond as well as by leading landlords, it seemed set fair to succeed. But within a very few months of its passing, its author George Wyndham, was:

disappointed and chagrined by recent events. How can I take the sanguine view that the land act will fulfil the objects of the land conference if it is to be assailed daily by the Freeman, Davitt, and Dillon. My power of usefulness to Ireland is already diminished and may be destroyed.

1

2

Dillon, whom Wyndham regarded as 'a pure agrarian sorehead', felt that the price-fixing principles of the act, based less on the value of the land than on a guarantee of the landlord's income, would render it impossible for the majority of purchasers ever to achieve economic stability.

-
1. Wyndham to M. Fawcett, 14 Nov. 1903 (Jackail and Wyndham, George Wyndham, ii.472).
 2. Wyndham to his father, 21 Nov. 1903 (Jackail and Wyndham, George Wyndham, ii.474).

He especially objected to the 'zones' clause, which allowed direct sales between landlord and tenant to go through without inspection as to value, in cases where the annuity payment was equivalent to a reduction of between 10% and 30% on the former rent. The result, he prophesied correctly, would be an immense increase in the price of land. He said at Swinford in September 1906 that:

...if a national combination had been entered into three years ago arousing the people to refuse to buy except through the Commissioners, the price of land would be different today from what it has been....I wish to heaven we had the power to obstruct the smooth working of the act more than we did; it has worked too smoothly to my mind.

1

Redmond, however, had been a party to the 1903 agreement, which included the zones, and without the guarantee of the landlord's income which the zones implied it would have been impossible for a unionist government to have tackled the question. MacDonnell later told Bryce: 'I agree that this operation has tended to raise prices; but I don't admit that this was not foreseen or that it was not part of the great design'.

2

It was not until the estates commissioners' report of October 1906 made clear the true extent of the increases that Dillon won any support in British political circles.

3

-
1. Dillon at Swinford, 10 Sept. 1906 (W.F.J., 15 Sept. 1906).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 21 Aug. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11013).
 3. Report of the estates commissioners for the period 1 Nov. 1903 to 31 Nov. 1906; 1906 [Cd. 3148] xxv. 237.

But the implementation of a national purchase scheme raised two secondary issues which threatened to cause even more trouble than the basic price issue in the years 1904-9: firstly, whether or not the untenanted grasslands, especially in the west, would be sold off along with the tenanted farms; and secondly, the question of the restoration of those tenants who had been evicted from their farms for 'political' reasons since 1879. Redmond and the other tenants' representatives had only signed the land conference report on the understanding that these issues would be tackled concurrently with the larger one. But this had not been the case: whilst in the more prosperous areas of Ulster and Leinster, and in parts of Munster, purchase proceeded rapidly (seven-eighths of co. Wexford changed hands in the five years following the passing of the act), in the west it proceeded very slowly and was often induced only by boycotting and intimidation on the part of the tenants, and devious financial pressures on the part of the landlords; moreover, under the administrations of Wyndham and Walter Long (2 $\frac{1}{4}$ years) only 387 evicted tenants were restored, compared with 646 during the first 15 months of the following liberal administration.

Wyndham attributed this failure to lack of co-operation from the nationalists. He told Moreton Frewen in November 1903 that 'so long as Dillon and the Freeman show that their object is to cut down

1. Speech of Lord Crewe, 6 Aug.1907 (Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.179 cols.1696-1706).

the incomes of the landlords, it is impossible to deal with "evicted tenants" and "congestion"¹. But Dillon's policy was not a wrecking one in itself - it rather prevented a unionist-landlord government from approaching the problem in the only way which its supporters would permit. MacDonnell, who always sought to adopt the position of an apolitical administrator, explained the western problem fully in a letter to Lord Ripon in May 1905:

The situation in the west of Ireland is this. There are a number of small holdings, uneconomic and unfit to support the occupiers, who eke out a subsistence in many ways. There are large grass farms from which tenants had in former years been evicted. The landlords are willing enough to sell the smallholdings, keeping the grass farms. The occupiers of smallholdings refuse to buy them without additions from the grass farms, and I fear that if they do not in some way bring compulsion to bear on the landlords, the grasslands will not be distributed. The estates commissioners will certainly not regard the holdings per se as security for advances under the land purchase act. So that it comes to this; the purchase act cannot work unless the grasslands are distributed. It is beyond question in the interests of the peace and prosperity of the country that the landlords should sell the grasslands, of course at a fair price; but it is in the interests of the landlords, who let these grasslands to graziers on the 11-month system, that the land should not be sold. The situation is one which earnestly calls for patience and for the intervention of the estates commissioners as conciliators: but I am alone in urging this policy: and I see a blind and prejudiced minority urging on repression for an economic evil which requires an entirely different remedy. The very success of sales followed by distribution of grasslands stimulates those who are not permitted to buy to try violent measures.....I think Mr Long is an upright man; but he is in a most difficult position and subject to unscrupulous pressure.

2

-
1. Wyndham to Bowen, 14 Nov.1903 (Mackail and Wyndham, George Wyndham,ii.473)
 2. MacDonnell to Ripon, 5 May 1905 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43542 f.149).

Thus by the end of 1905, almost all Irish nationalists had in practice come to agree with Dillon, Davitt and Sexton that the bargain of 1903 was not the great boon it had seemed to be. It was now dogma among all except those of the O'Brienite persuasion that the evicted tenants had been almost entirely excluded from the benefits of the act; that the west, the most needy area, had suffered likewise; that the treasury bonus, intended to bridge the gap between what the tenant could afford to pay and what the landlord could afford to accept, had in fact simply been 'collared' by the landlord; and that the price of land had been 'artificially' inflated by upwards of 50%, thereby rendering a bonus unnecessary in most cases.

The most explosive of these grievances was the problem of the western grasslands, or ranches. For Dillon and others it was the main justification for their condemnation of the 1903 act, whilst for those like Redmond who bore some responsibility for the passing of that act, it was especially necessary to display concern for the areas in which it had failed. As the unionist government sank towards the horizon the nationalist leaders thus began to agitate for further legislation on the land question. 'Until compulsory powers are obtained in the west of Ireland there cannot be a settlement of the land question' declared Redmond at Loughrea in October 1905.¹ A few days later Devlin issued

1. Redmond at Loughrea, 21 Oct. 1905 (W.F.J., 28 Oct. 1905).

a circular calling on U.I.L. branches to draw up registers of all untenanted land, 'and to consider what steps would be best in the local circumstances to make it available for the persons entitled to allotments, in the event of its distribution'. Untenanted land was defined very widely, to include land which was not occupied by a permanent tenant but let on the eleven-months' system or used by a landlord or his agent; land added to a demesne 'but not properly part of it'; or demesne land itself, if the residence on it was no longer used as such.¹ The inspector-general of the R.I.C. regarded this as a most mischievous proposal:

This circular may easily form the ground of a fresh widespread agrarian agitation, and the bait held out to farmers' sons, labourers, and mechanics touched the classes who have been identified in the past with the more violent and illegal methods by which agitation has been carried on.

2

But by December 1905, with a new liberal government in office and the general election still ahead, it became necessary for the Irish party to produce some immediate results. Thus the national convention of that month, whilst calling for legislation to remedy the failures of the land act, attributed those failures, even more to the way the act had been administered by the tories.³ The new government, aware that their

-
1. Circular issued by Devlin to all U.I.L. branches, 27 Oct. 1905 (W.F.J., 4 Nov. 1905).
 2. Monthly R.I.C. reports (379/5), report of the inspector-general, Oct. 1905 (Dublin, S.P.O.).
 3. Report of the national convention, motion by John Fitzgibbon (W.F.J., 9. Dec. 1905).

educational policy held no attraction for Irish catholics, were no less eager to make immediate concessions with a view to securing the Irish vote in Great Britain. Walter Long, MacDonnell considered, had 'overdone his job as loyalist leader', and Bryce found no difficulty in reversing some of his sterner decisions.¹

The most important of these were the regulations issued by the tory government to the estates commissioners, which MacDonnell thought were 'open to serious objection both as policy and as law'.² They had prohibited the provision of farms for evicted tenants on estates other than those from which they had been evicted; made 'intimidation' a reason for postponing the sale of estates, even after the landlord and his tenants had agreed on the terms of sale; prevented the estates commissioners from purchasing untenanted land for the purpose of restoring evicted tenants; and refused permission to the estates commissioners to make grants for the improvement of evicted tenants' holdings. The cabinet confirmed that new regulations should be issued, and they were published a few days before the opening of parliament.³ The Freeman⁴ pronounced them to be 'generally beneficial'. They tended to shift the

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 8 Jan. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
2. Memorandum on the administration of the land act by MacDonnell, 2nd Jan.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.368 f.24).
3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 2 Jan.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012); Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 3 Jan. 1906 (Cab. 41/30/37).
4. W.F.J., 17 Feb. 1906.

emphasis of the land act away from sales and inducements to sell, in the direction of a more clearly defined policy with regard to the settlement of the land question as a whole. Priority lists were in future to be kept for three separate categories, so that sales to the estates commissioners and in the land judge's court might proceed a pace with direct sales; and the full initiative of the commissioners in the matter of resettling evicted tenants was restored.¹

These changes were adequate reason for the Irish party to support the liberals in the general election, but the Irish leaders were intensely conscious that greater achievements were expected of them if they were to retain the support of the country until such time as the Irish government scheme was introduced. An encouraging reference to Ireland in the king's speech would do much to silence the none-too-scrupulous criticisms of the O'Brienite press.² T.P.O'Connor urged on Redmond the importance of getting a root and branch condemnation of the existing system of government in Ireland passed by the house of

1. Ibid.

2. Though its attack relented slightly once the party decided not to oppose the O'Brienites in the general election, the Irish People remained strongly critical of the liberal alliance.

commons while the huge anti-tory majority was still united: 'there is no knowing how long it will remain so'.¹ Redmond accordingly wrote Bryce a long letter on January 29 in which he pressed for a statement that, pending the governmental reform, the government of Ireland should be carried on 'so far as the present system admits, in accordance with Irish ideas'. He called for a labourers' bill and the repeal of the coercion act, and demanded that:

....the king's speech should contain the promise of an amending land bill. The question as to where it should be a comprehensive measure or not, or whether it should be proceeded with seriously or not could be left over for the present....If our people get it into their heads that they can get nothing out of this government I anticipate the most serious trouble almost immediately.

2

But a week later Dillon found the situation far from favourable.

He wrote to Redmond:

T.P. and I had a long talk with Bryce this morning. He is entirely satisfactory so far as immediate legislative measures are concerned - and the paragraph in the address. On other matters, the repeal of the coercion act and the promise of a land act amendment bill, he is very shaky, and I fear we shall have trouble.

3

-
1. T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 28 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Bryce, 29 Jan.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 3. Dillon to Redmond, 6 Feb. 1906 (Redmond papers)

He considered that Bryce's attitude amounted to a refusal on the matter of the land bill, in which case he considered it would be necessary to make a 'very strong protest'.¹ Redmond's letter to Bryce suggests he was less concerned about an immediate land bill than was Dillon, and this may explain why neither the land bill nor the 'very strong protest' appeared. But the correspondence between the nationalist leaders does not bear out MacDonnell's report to Bryce of February 14:

I think J.E.R. was ungrateful about the king's speech. I know for a fact that Dillon did not expect any mention of projects of organic reform in the speech this time. I fancy if we could get a peep into the inner councils of the party - we should find it in great jubilation no matter how long a face J.E.R. may have pulled. But if there is to be an entente there ought to be consideration for the difficulties of both sides; and not merely of one side.

2

Thwarted in their demand for land legislation in 1906, the nationalists had therefore to look for reforms in administration. They could do little about landlords who refused to sell, but a sympathetic government, they thought, could do much to reverse the rise in land prices.

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 20 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 14 Feb.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

It was the essence of the price-fixing system, especially under the zones, that the rent (usually second-term) at the time of sale was the basis for calculating the selling price. This had the effect of keeping alive the whole question of 'fair rents' from the Gladstonian era, and it was here that the nationalist attack was now centred. The zones could not be touched without legislation, and the bonus would automatically come up for review in 1908 anyway, but the operation of the land commission in regard to rents and their policy in the matter of priorities with regard to purchase might be influenced by nationalist pressure through the chief secretary in parliament. Dillon wrote to Redmond on March 29 to stress:

....the vital importance of our insisting upon a reform of the [land] commission itself.....If Bailey were appointed judicial commissioner and set to hear appeals, two good legal sub-commissioners appointed....and a majority of the lay assistant commissioners got rid of and replaced by good men, a great impression would be made on the country and we could keep things going until next session.

1

After twenty years of unionist government, the Irish civil service was almost totally tory and therefore 'landlord' declared Dillon in the house of commons.² A more extreme speaker, Ginnell, claimed that it had been an integral part of the land conference 'to destroy the rent-

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 29 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers). W.F.Bailey was one of the three estates commissioners, and commanded the confidence of the Irish leaders to a considerable extent.
 2. 3 May 1906. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.156 col.820.

fixing courts in order to force the tenants to purchase on the landlord's terms'. Judge Meredith's administration, he said, had confiscated the tenant's interest in a holding: 'in other words the first section of the land act of 1881 has been repealed by Mr Justice Meredith'¹. MacDonnell however advised Bryce that although the judicial commissioners (Meredith and Fitzgerald) were men 'of the Kildare Street Club type', they were not unfair. There was, he said, a nationalist intrigue to replace one of them with estates commissioner Bailey 'and get into Bailey's place an out-and-out nationalist'². Thus, although the attorney-general, R.R. Cherry M.P., favoured a change along these lines, no steps were taken.³

1. Ibid., cols. 781, 784 .

2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 1 Mar. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

3. See J.Muldoon to Dillon, 26 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers, filed under 'Dillon'). When Meredith became master of the rolls later in the year, his successor was not Bailey but J.O.Wyllie, a prominent Irish liberal. A strong case could have been made by the opposition against Bailey's qualifications for a legal appointment; in addition, it would clearly have been embarrassing for a government trying to pursue MacDonnell's policy of conciliation to have to appoint 'an out and out nationalist' to Bailey's place on the estates commission.

But in another branch of the land commission the new government was more active. Much of the work in rent-fixing and sales negotiations in the country was done by a body of assistant land commissioners. These men were not ordinary civil servants but had temporary appointments, a number of which came up for renewal each year. Under the tories it had been the usual practice to renew all appointments, except in case of special incompetence.¹ But the nationalists considered the bulk of these men to be 'rabidly tory' appointments: 'they are for the most part broken-down landlords, aged land agents, retired military officers, and political hangers-on generally of the tory party', said Redmond.² MacDonnell agreed 'that we must introduce some new blood into the body of the assistant commissioners'.³ He told Bryce that the land commission, which normally took responsibility for such appointments, had not made satisfactory recommendations: 'the commission is divided. Wrench and Fitzgerald being on one extreme: Bailey and Finucane on the other. Meredith is wavering: and poor old Lynch distracted'.⁴ MacDonnell therefore interviewed all the retiring men and the new applicants himself.

-
1. Speech by Walter Long, 30 Mar. 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 155 col. 1319).
 2. 3 May 1906. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 156 col. 250.
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 10 Mar. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11012).
 4. MacDonnell to Bryce, 14 Mar. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11012).

Initially he thought that about half of the 27 men might be replaced, but the land commissioners, with the exception of Bailey and Finucane, called for the retention of them all, and by the end of March MacDonnell's changes amounted to five only. He admitted that 'a larger number could have been weeded out with advantage, but we have allowed length of service to prevail in doubtful cases'¹. The new broom was thus applied less ruthlessly than MacDonnell had originally contemplated, probably with the aim of pacifying the conservatives on the land commission and the landlords generally.

But the sequel to this was of course discontent at the other end of the political spectrum. Dillon seems to have had his ear less close to the ground than usual, for he did not alert Redmond to the 'danger' until March 31, by which time the decisions had been taken. He thought the demand should be for 17 new assistant commissioners, and considered the existing situation 'intolerable':

The government have made a terrible mess of it this week. But these proceedings have a very great lesson for us involved in them. That is that they are very weak and squeezable, and that the only way to deal with them is to put on pressure vigorously. I am sorry to be obliged to say that I do not consider that Bryce is dealing frankly and openly with us. I think all kinds of intrigues are going on behind our backs.....

1. Memorandum on the assistant land commissioners, enclosed by MacDonnell to Bryce, 10 Apr. 1906; MacDonnell to Bryce, 29 Mar. 1906 (both in Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

The discontent will be extreme if the party learn for the first time through the newspapers that 20 [in fact 22] of the old gang of sub-commissioners are re-appointed. And just fancy the feelings of the men going home at Easter to face the people.

1

Redmond then had a number of meetings with Bryce. But the result was 'thoroughly unsatisfactory', and he felt that the chief secretary was 'absolutely in the hands of Sir Antony MacDonnell and is doing exactly what he is told by him'.² The Ulster party had also meanwhile decided to register a public protest in view of the dismissal of five men 'without any given reason', and the Freeman commented sourly that 'apparently Mr Bryce thinks that if he satisfies nobody in Ireland he is on the right road.'³

On May 3 the Irish party moved a debate on the land commission vote, the basic tone of which was one of strong warning to the government that they must either adopt a more positive and radical approach to the land question, or be prepared for trouble in Ireland before long. Redmond explained that the lands commission had been singled out for criticism as being particularly inefficient and unjust yet capable of rapid

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 31 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Dillon, 3 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. W.F.J., 14 Apr.1906.

improvement, since many of its employees were not permanent civil servants but men who could be dismissed at will.¹ T.W. Russell, who within twelve months was to become a member of the liberal government, complained that it had done nothing to halt the 'conspiracy to raise rents and therefore purchase price in Ireland'.² J.P. Hayden, M.P. for South Roscommon, where the demand for the division of the ranches was strongest, warned that unless Bryce made a satisfactory statement on untenanted land and followed it by prompt action:

...there must spring up in a very few months in Ireland, in the west at least, an agitation which would very quickly set the machinery of land purchase in motion, and once again teach the people of Ireland that it was really upon themselves that they must rely.

3

Bryce endeavoured to be conciliatory and sympathetic. He pleaded that he had not yet mastered the complexities of the land situation and, as MacDonnell had suggested to him privately, promised that more 'improvements' might be expected.⁴ He loyally defended the judges from criticisms, and went on to explain that he as chief secretary

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.156 col.750.

2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.156 col.762.

3. Parlt Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.156 col.758.

4. MacDonnell to Bryce (telegram), 11 Apr. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

could not be always giving direction to the land commission and their tribunals, which were entirely independent of the executive and had statutory functions.¹ Dillon replied to this with a great list of things which he thought could be done to improve the position by administrative action,² but doubtless the Irish party were well pleased at having more or less extracted from Bryce an admission that fresh legislation was necessary: if there was nothing wrong with the land act, it could not impede the work of a liberal administration; if the law was pleaded as an impediment, then new legislation ought not to be long delayed. But the achievement was not without its drawbacks for Redmond and Dillon. Their decision to bring the matter into the open meant an end to the illusion that they guided the government's Irish policy, and inevitably therefore raised doubts as to the nature of the scheme of administrative reform expected in 1907. Having brought their opposition into the open the party would now be compelled to make more noise and go after more eye-catching victories.

The lessening of the Irish leaders' authority in this field is illustrated by the barrage of questions to which Bryce was subjected in the commons. Nationalist M.P.s usually put to him about thirty

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.156 cols.810-8.

2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.156 cols. 819-23.

questions a day, and often he would have more questions to answer than all the other departmental chiefs put together. The Irish office in London, with a staff of over half a dozen, was more or less entirely occupied with collecting the required information. This state of affairs was made worse as the Ulster M.P.s began to retaliate with a multitude of questions designed to reveal that Ireland laboured under the tyrannous heel of the U.I.L. The nationalists' questions ranged over the whole field of Irish administration, but concentrated especially on the handling of individual estates under the land act. Laurence Ginnell was especially prominent in this activity, often asking four or five questions a day.¹ T.P.Gill mentioned to Redmond that MacDonnell was very concerned over the practice, which he claimed gave an injurious impression and harmed not the government, but the people it was supposed to help. Gill suggested that the party channel their questions through a committee, so as to impose a clear policy on the activity and avoid duplication.² But there is no indication that Redmond acted on Gill's

-
1. On 7 Apr.1906 MacDonnell told Bryce that 'Mr Ginnell's questions regarding the land acts require very cautious treatment....His object is to get an admission that the estates commissioners may interfere with prices between landlord and tenant in zone cases' (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 2. Information conveyed by MacDonnell to Bryce, 5 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

advice, and indeed he may not have felt able to do so. MacDonnell told Bryce that:

Redmond has more than once said to me that he much regretted the badgering to which you were exposed: as much as to suggest it was against his grain; possibly it is: but it is not against the grain of his more irreconcilable colleagues.

1

By mid-session therefore, the Irish party had gained very little in the way of land reform. The labourers and town tenants bills were both legislative possibilities, but they were sectional only in their appeal, and the one might be hung up by an inadequate settlement from the treasury while the other, a party bill, had not yet been taken up by the government in any settled form. The Freeman thought Bryce's statement of May 3 'entirely non-committal and unsatisfactory', and indicated that in one sphere at least he would fail, even if his assurances were carried out:

One other promise made by Mr Bryce he is incapable of fulfilling. He is going, by administrative action, and without amendment of the land purchase act, to attempt the solution of the congested districts problem. He will of course fail. The problem of the congested districts cannot be solved under the land act of 1903 or without further legislation....The failure of the act in the west is due to the inflation of the prices by the zones.

2

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 24 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.I.I., Ms.11013).
 2. W.F.J., 12 May 1906.

The 1903 act had not operated at all rapidly in the west. The reasons for this were disputed, as were the possible remedies, but the facts were not in doubt. Most of Ireland was as peaceful as it had been for many years, but there remained a persistent streak of unrest in a belt of land stretching from Leitrim and Sligo, through Roscommon and East Galway, down to Clare.¹ This was the belt of land where the store cattle were grazed, mainly on lands let to large graziers on the eleven-months' system, before being fattened on the lush pastures of Meath and Kildare. In this grazing belt the 'ranches' tended to take up the best land, whilst the tenant farmers usually occupied farms which were both poor in quality and inadequate in size.

Here was clearly a crucial area for the Irish party. Its discontent might provide fire and energy for the national movement, but if the party could not soon achieve a substantial ameliorative measure political control might be lost to local agrarian agitators or even to political extremists - sinn fein was alive in Loughrea, Tuam and other towns by this time.² If landlords were permitted to auction off their lands or sell them to graziers, the battle would be lost for ever and the

-
1. In parts of East Galway, especially round Athenry and Loughrea, there was outrage of a more violent nature, but this was almost traditional, and was mainly confined to that notorious blackspot the Clanricarde estate (see the reports of the county inspectors for this period, in the monthly R.I.C. reports (S.P.O.)).
 2. See reports of the county inspectors, especially East Galway, 1906, in the Monthly R.I.C. reports (S.P.O.).

only solution would lie in emigration. It was the problem of congestion in these areas, and the demand for the application of compulsory sale to the grasslands, which had been the main reason behind the party demand for an amending land bill to be included in the government legislative programme for the session. This demand had been rejected, and the administrative machine had made little progress with the problem. MacDonnell wanted to press forward with his devolution scheme in the hope that people would prefer an Irish council to settle the problem, but for the Connaught M.P.s the problem was more immediate. A new labourers act was not much of an attraction in an area which offered no employment to labourers. Thus it was not surprising that it was Conor O'Kelly, M.P. for North Mayo, who raised the question at the party meeting on 17 May 1906. He suggested that the party asked the government to appoint a royal commission to enquire into the problem of congestion in the west generally, inside and outside the scheduled districts, and lay down a policy for the distribution of land. The party could lay 'an irresistible case' for compulsion before the commission, which 'would have a salutary effect on those landlords who are now refusing to sell on any terms'. In other words the very creation of a commission would ease the situation until legislation was actually passed.¹

1. W.F.J., 26 May 1906. Dillon admitted in the commons, 28 June 1906, that one of his strongest motives in supporting a commission was so that 'they could go back to the people and say there was going to be an enquiry' (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.159 col.1228).

Redmond conveyed the request to Bryce, asking for an enquiry on the lines of the Scottish commission of 1892, which held 64 local enquiries, and reported in five months. In this way the government would gain the necessary information concerning the failure of the 1903 act in time to produce an amending bill for the 1907 session. Bryce forwarded this request to MacDonnell, who was somewhat sceptical about Redmond's motive, and objected to any large scale enquiry, on the grounds that it might open up the question of prices or stir up the landlords in some other way. But he admitted that a more limited enquiry might be useful. The following day he met Bryce and proposed a team of five men (Dunraven as chairman, the archbishop of Tuam, one nationalist nominee, an independent Irishman, and an independent Scotsman), which would:

....Enquiry into the working of the C.D.B. andreport thereon: and alsoreport if any and what changes in law and administrative methods and agencies are necessary in order to give fuller effect to the policy of land transfer; improvement and enlargement of uneconomic holdings; the promotion of industry in the congested districts; and the migration of surplus population from these districts to other parts of Ireland.

4

-
1. Redmond to Bryce, 22 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. 'He [Redmond] sees that he cannot make way for the revision of the act in the house of commons: and he therefore wants to transfer the venue to a royal commission'.
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 24 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 4. Note in MacDonnell's hand, 25 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

During the first days of June there was some discussion of these terms of reference, which MacDonnell had hoped to rush through early on, but by June 10 it was established that there would be a royal commission, and not a departmental enquiry merely.¹

The great bone of contention was to be not so much the terms of reference as the membership of the commission. MacDonnell told Bryce that his idea of the commission was that it 'should contain no man who, with his unionism or his nationalism, has not also a strong tinge of moderation inbred or forced upon him by his environment'.² But Lord Arran, who was consulted by Bryce as to the landlords' attitude, thought that the land question was indivisible from politics. He thought the commission should include representatives of each side as well as 'impartial men', and warned that the landlord representatives 'should be in no way connected with devolution, nor should either of them be Irishmen who have joined the liberal party since the last government went out of office'.³ This conflict was surmounted to some extent by the choice of Lord Dudley as chairman and Bishop O'Donnell as the nationalist representative.⁴ MacDonnell agreed to the latter's appointment only reluctantly, believing

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 23 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 3. Lord Arran to Bryce, 10 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013). Arran's allusion was, it may be assumed, to Lord Dunraven and Lord Castletown in particular.
 4. Redmond to Bryce, 20 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

that the bishop 'is, honestly, a very advanced nationalist, and I was alarmed that the possibility of his inclusion would frighten the landlord class'.¹ Perhaps the under secretary's resistance was weakened somewhat when Bryce agreed that he, MacDonnell, should sit on the commission himself.

When this news reached the nationalist leaders they protested strongly. Dillon complained that the appointment of MacDonnell 'has completely altered my feelings towards Dudley's chairmanship'.² He felt that the latter would be quite dominated by 'a man of Sir Antony's well-known ability, forcing character, and dictatorial disposition'.³ If MacDonnell refused to withdraw, Dillon thought that the whole question of personnel would have to be thrown back into the melting pot, failing which the Irish party should publicly dissociate itself from the enquiry. He told Redmond on July 7, implying perhaps that his colleague was being too weak:

I feel so strongly on the matter that I think I shall be compelled to send in a written protest to Bryce...the Freeman will be exceedingly hostile to the commission as now constituted. They will conclude that MacDonnell has gone on the commission fearing that anything would be said hostile to the zones, etc., and I confess I believe that to be the right view.

4

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 22 and 23 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 7 July 1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Memorandum on the personnel of the proposed congestion commission, in Dillon's hand, n.d. (Redmond papers).
 4. Dillon to Redmond, 7 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

Redmond accordingly had another meeting with Bryce, and told him formally that he would henceforth hold himself free to condemn the appointments. But privately he told Dillon that it would be impossible for the Irish party to take any public objection to MacDonnell's being a member:

I fully expected that the Freeman would be hostile to the commission. Of course, the uncertainty in that quarter is one of the chief difficulties of the political situation. In this instance, however, it cannot alter the facts that we have asked for this commission, that we have got two men of our own selection, that I, incidentally, suggested Angus Sutherland, and that, as far as we know, Bryce's brother is friendly. We cannot, of course, expect to nominate the whole commission. I am not inclined to do anything more in the matter for the present. When the names are published we cannot then consider whether we should make any statement as to the personnel.

1

Dillon however, still felt that MacDonnell would need to be counterbalanced² by 'at least three strong men'. Redmond agreed to protest to Bryce once more, but he told Dillon he did not share his 'serious apprehensions' on the point, since MacDonnell was believed to be 'sound on the ranching question' (i.e. he was in favour of the policy of breaking up the western grasslands). Redmond continued that:

For us to come out and denounce the commission would in my opinion be fatal. It would at once be said that we have altered our policy just because Wm.O'Brien now seems inclined to welcome the commission and because

-
1. Redmond to Dillon, 9 July 1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 9 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

the Freeman's Journal does not like it, and it would create a very serious situation in the west. I am hopeful about the commission's result, and it would certainly ease the situation in the west.

1

Dillon however, was still intransigent. He did not propose to denounce the commission, but he thought that MacDonnell's addition should be balanced by a third nationalist, for which place he suggested Sexton - though he was careful to stress that he had not been in contact with him 'or with any of the Freeman people'. Since he himself was absent he asked Redmond to discuss the whole question with a small group of colleagues (P.A.McHugh, Conor O'Kelly, Edward Blake, and T.P.O'Connor).² This Redmond did, but reported unanimous support for his own more moderate point of view. It was decided not to send Bryce a stern protest, as Dillon had wanted, since it was felt that an irreconcilable attitude on the matter might lead to an open breach with the government (which would be undesirable while the 'scheme' was still a mystery), or to the discrediting of the commission, which was the opposite of what they wanted.³

-
1. Redmond to Dillon, 10 July 1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, two letters dated 11 July 1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Redmond to Dillon, 13 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

Redmond reported this on July 13, but Dillon was away in Middlesbrough, and did not reply until the 17th. On the 16th, the Freeman printed a slashing attack on the commission, and Dillon stressed that he had nothing to do 'directly or indirectly' with this article. He 'of course' accepted the decision of Redmond and his four colleagues, but insisted that Bryce and MacDonnell had treated them extremely badly; 'if we submit to this kind of treatment, very soon these gentlemen will pay no regard to our opinions'¹. Further representations were made to Bryce, but the chief secretary stood firm: 'in landlord quarters the commission has been denounced as partisan. So far as I can learn its composition gives general satisfaction to the friends of the tenants: and no wonder'². On July 20 the commission was finally empowered:

....to enquire into and report upon the operation of the acts dealing with congestion in Ireland, the working of the C.D.B. and the land commission under these acts, and the relations of the board with the land commission and the D.A.T.I.; what areas (if any) outside the districts now scheduled as congested require to be dealt with as congested; what lands are most conveniently situated for the relief of congestion; what changes in law or administration are needed for dealing with the problem of congestion as a whole, for facilitating the migration of the surplus population from congested areas to other lands, and generally for bettering the condition of the people inhabiting congested areas.

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 17 July/¹⁹⁰⁶(Redmond papers).
 2. Bryce to Redmond, 18 July 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

The membership was settled at nine: Lord Dudley, Sir Antony MacDonnell,
 John
 Sir/Columb (an Irish landlord), Sir Francis Mowatt (ex-head of the
 treasury), Bishop O'Donnell, J. Annan Bryce M.P., and Angus Sutherland
 (both experts on similar problems in Scotland, the former being the
 chief secretary's brother), W. McM. Kavanagh (an Irish landlord who in
 fact became a nationalist M.P. in 1908), and Conor O'Kelly M.P.

The Freeman's Journal was not satisfied either with the terms
 of reference, which it thought would preclude the commission from
 considering the effect of the inflation of land values on the problem of
 congestion, nor with the personnel.¹ As the assistant under secretary,
 Sir James Dougherty, explained to Bryce after the paper's most violent
 outburst:

The Freeman is out of temper. It has waged war on the
 zones from the outset, and it is disappointed that the
 commission is so constituted as to give little hope for
 the success of an attack upon its 'bête noire'.

2

But the peak of the storm had been reached. On July 24 Redmond was 'glad
 to observe that nothing further has appeared in the Freeman's Journal of the
 same character as their article of a week ago'.³ He urged on Dillon his

1. W.F.J., 21 July 1906.

2. Sir J.B. Dougherty to Bryce, 19 July 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

3. Redmond to Dillon, 24 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

view that they could only make the best they could of the commission, since Bryce had quite refused to appoint another man. Dillon agreed that this was now the only policy, and that the party should begin to organise evidence, but he was far from happy about the situation:

I am still unshakeable in my opinion that we have been exceedingly badly treated and that the commission is a most dangerous one. The more I see of the administrative proceedings of Sir Antony and Bryce the less I like them.

1

This was as near as the nationalist leaders came to a major breach during these years: Dillon's suggestion that he would send Bryce a note of protest amounted to a threat of independent action. It was a predictable divergence, the roots of which went back to the land conference. Dillon had always been in the forefront of opposition to the zones and the 1903 settlement, and with the Freeman noisily active at his elbow to remind him of his old policy, it was difficult for him to concur in another, which might recommend reforms within the framework of the 1903 act. Redmond was much less suspicious of the liberals over the question, and though critical of the zones system, did not feel that its continuance totally barred improvements being made in other ways.

1. Dillon to Redmond, 25 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

His stand on the issue was one of the few occasions on which he failed to accept Dillon's advice on agrarian matters. The commission was set in motion without an open split, but from the summer of 1906 on, nationalist pressure for legislative reform was applied more vigorously, both in Ireland and at Westminster.

2. The evicted tenants question, 1906-7.

In a country where peasant farming offered almost the only means of livelihood and where the land was already overpopulated, to be evicted from a farm meant probably the permanent loss of both job and home. During the agitation of the Land League and the Parnellite period, especially during the Plan of Campaign, thousands of small tenants were evicted, mainly in the south and west. Many of course emigrated to the cities, to Great Britain, and to America or Australia, but many also stayed on, 'by the roadside', as Redmond was fond of putting it, scraping a living from occasional work and perhaps nationalist doles, but serving as a constant reminder of the iniquities of past times and of the wickedness of the unfortunate person who occupied the evicted farm - the 'planter' as he was known in the house of lords, the 'grabber' as he was universally called in nationalist Ireland. Some of these grabbers were bona fide tenant farmers, but many were caretakers put in by the landlord, and most would have been glad of an opportunity to find a living elsewhere. The

introduction of land purchase served to prolong this situation long after it would have faded into the history of any country less socially and economically petrified. The prospect of state credit held out new hope to the evicted tenant whose farm was still deserted or in the hands of a caretaker, whilst in places where the 'grabber' was in fact settling down as a serious farmer, there was strong pressure for rapid action before the farm could be sold to him and the chance of re-instatement lost forever.

It was with this in mind that the tenant representatives at the land conference had insisted on the re-instatement of evicted tenants as part of the deal over the 1903 act. But under the unionist government little progress was made, and the nationalists claimed to have been betrayed. As we have seen, the regulations issued to the estates commissioners by Wyndham and Long prevented the purchase of untenanted land for evicted tenants, or the re-settlement of evicted tenants on their former estates unless the whole of the estate was up for sale. Thus in the first two years of the act only 387 tenants were restored.¹ It was hoped that the new regulations issued by the liberal government would

1. Speech by Lord Crewe, 6 Aug. 1907 (Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol. 179 col. 1699).

improve matters, and to speed things up further six extra inspectors were appointed to the land commission in May 1906, to attempt a complete survey of the scope of the problem and finally assess the numbers involved.¹ In this way the problem was removed from political controversy during the first eight months of 1906.

But the matter was not forgotten by Irish politicians, and as the six months' limit which Bryce had set on the inspectors' work drew near, they became active in the matter once more. William O'Brien was the first in the field. He wrote on 22 August 1906 urging Bryce to avoid 'bitter agitation' during the winter by introducing a short bill during the autumn session giving effect to the commissioners' report.² But Bryce considered legislation out of the question: 'there is unhappily such a thing as the house of lords'.³ MacDonnell had advised him that the estates commissioners' report would not be available until November and it would be 'highly expedient' for Bryce to maintain a discreet silence until this time, and make no attempt to force the pace 'in deference to William O'Brien's special views'. MacDonnell did not conceal from Bryce

1. Ibid.

2. Wm O'Brien to Bryce, 22 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

3. Bryce to O'Brien, 27 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

the fact that the inspectors 'have not made much effective progress'¹. The difficulties were numerous; the landlords of evicted holdings were as a rule not interested in selling these farms in advance of the whole estate, and in some cases wished to use the promise of restoring the evicted tenants as a lever to extract higher prices from the other purchasers; many of the 'grabbers' refused to go unless they received an exorbitant amount of compensation; and many of the evicted tenants were no longer suitable for restoration, especially in view of the limited amount of money the commissioners had available for restocking holdings. W.F.Bailey thought that unless some new inducement could be offered to landlords, compulsory powers would be the only solution.²

But O'Brien was not to be fobbed off so easily. To get round the house of lords difficulty, he proposed to reconvene the land conference. T.W.Russell and the Dunraven group he knew would accept the invitation, and he also offered Harrington 'the unrivalled opportunity of restoring the situation of three years ago'. If Harrington accepted (which he did) O'Brien felt that Redmond would not dare 'take the odium of ruining the

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 28 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

2. W.F.Bailey to Bryce, 31 Aug. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

evicted tenants' chances'.¹ Harrington must have been prepared to believe this, though it was scarcely a realistic assessment of the political situation. Dillon heard of O'Brien's plan very quickly, probably from Bailey, and contacted Redmond immediately:

This would be a very mischievous business and it ought to be stopped. It will be necessary for us to start a vigorous campaign on the evicted tenants question - as there is almost a deadlock on it.

2

He urged him to make 'a very clear and emphatic statement' at once about what the party were doing for the evicted, before O'Brien could espouse the cause as his own:³

He knows of course that the commissioners are taking very active steps to put pressure on the landlords and that there is reason to hope that in a very short time the pace of re-instating the evicted tenants will be very much accelerated, and relying on this and having been repulsed in his attempt to get a deputation received, he proposes to trot out his conference proposal again. And thus to take credit for all that is done.

4

Redmond accordingly informed Bryce that he would ask a question about evicted tenants at the beginning of the autumn session.⁵

-
1. O'Brien to T.Harrington, 13 Aug.1906 (Harrington papers, N.L.I., Ms.8576).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 31 Aug.1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Dillon to Redmond, 22 Sept.1906 (Redmond papers).
 4. Dillon to Redmond, 20 Sept.1906 (Redmond papers).
 5. Redmond to Bryce, 27 Sept.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014).

During the first week in October the land conference (minus Redmond) reconvened at the Shelburne Hotel, and issued a report which was unanimous on everything save compulsion. Dunraven sent Bryce a note of the proceedings:

It is rapidly coming to an open fight between two principles represented by two men. Violence, "the old medicine", and the extreme demand - independence, under Mr Redmond, activated by Mr Dillon; and conciliation, the new method and moderate demand, under Mr Wm. O'Brien. Mr O'Brien can be relied on. He is perfectly honest and independent ... Mr. John Redmond is influenced by Mr Dillon and weighted down by responsibility as leader of the parliamentary party. He will not or cannot shake himself loose from the physical force section in America.

1

But apart from stimulating the Irish party to greater activity O'Brien's conference manoeuvre showed little sign of success. Dillon expressed a fear that 'Sir Antony and co. have doctored the reply to your question so as to play into the hands of the Shelburne Hotel gentlemen to some extent';² but when Bryce came to make his statement, on October 29, it contained nothing which really justified these fears. From the nationalist point of view it was not a very satisfactory reply, in that it failed to promise that fillip (compulsion) which they were

-
1. Lord Dunraven to Bryce, 27 Oct.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11014).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 28 Oct.1906 (Redmond papers).

hoping to offer the country, but the explanation for this lay in the difficulties of the government's parliamentary position, and not in any attempt to set up O'Brien against Redmond, O'Brien's devious and turbulent personality and his very limited following were more than enough to outweigh any advantage which the liberals might see in his 'conciliatory' policy as opposed to that of the Irish party.¹

The estates commissioners' report, the basis of Bryce's statement, revealed that 5,912 applications from evicted tenants or their representatives had been received. Of these 505 had been rejected as unsuitable, and 542 had been restored. In 444 cases landlords had refused to allow the inspector to see the land, and a further 242 present occupiers ('grabbers') had refused to vacate holdings, which in most cases they were buying. Bryce did not consider that the act had practically broken down, though he admitted that progress was still much slower than had been expected. But enquiries were still in a preliminary stage, and it was his intention to increase the staff so that the whole problem might be under control in six months. He could not say at that stage whether further legislation would be required.² Redmond replied that all his

-
1. Though MacDonnell (who may be pardoned for seeing in O'Brien an attractive combination of that 'moderation' he was always searching for, and some popular appeal) occasionally attempted, without success, to push Bryce in that direction. See especially MacDonnell to Bryce, 30 Nov.1906 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).
 2. Statement by Bryce, 29 Oct.1906 (Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.163 col.715-7).

reasons boiled down to one - the refusal of landlords to sell untenanted¹ land. The government ought therefore to resort to compulsion.

Both sides were in fact in a difficult position - the Irish party were compelled to play strong in the matter to avoid giving O'Brien another opportunity of gaining ground, whilst the falling off in subscriptions to the parliamentary fund meant that they were desperate for an issue on which to rouse the people and re-invigorate their organisation. Furthermore, since the meeting of Redmond with Bryce on October 8, it was known by the leaders that the Irish council scheme was unlikely to be any great triumph for them. The government on the other hand, particularly MacDonnell, were anxious that no issue should be brought forward which might cause antagonism between classes in Ireland or between the government and the house of lords, and so prejudice the chances of the Irish council bill's acceptance in 1907. In addition, the government programme was heavy enough without adding further Irish burdens, and if the evicted tenants question could be left to an Irish council to settle, so much the better. Thus the year ended without significant progress in the matter.

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.163 col.778.

The king's speech for 1907 contained no mention of the Irish land question, and the Irish party consequently moved an amendment to the address, asking that the estates commissioners be at once given powers to satisfy the claims of the evicted tenants. Dillon recalled that in October 1906 Bryce had said that if no progress was made compulsion would be needed.¹ Birrell's reply was the first indication that there was a new regime in Ireland. The evicted tenants, he declared, appeared before the house 'asking for the performance of a distinct bargain'. He hoped that by the end of April the commissioners would have adjudicated on every claim and know exactly how much land it would be necessary to acquire to fulfil the parliamentary obligation. Legislation would then follow.² Redmond declared the statement to be 'completely satisfactory', and withdrew the amendment.³ Tribune talked of 'changed times in Dublin Castle', and the Freeman commented that 'the newness of tone and firmness of decision has struck the liberal press as it has struck Mr Redmond, and as it must have struck every Irish reader'.⁴

Three months later, when the collapse of the council scheme threatened to throw the government's Irish policy into chaos, Birrell's promise assumed a new importance. Dillon told Redmond on 29 May 1907:

1. 14 Feb.1907. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.169 col.350.
2. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.169 cols.364-71.
3. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.169 col.371.
4. Tribune, 15 Feb.1907; W.F.J., 23 Feb.1907.

The only chance the government have of making the Irish situation manageable at all is a generous evicted tenants bill with a good sum of money, and to proceed to re-instate the tenants immediately. You should urge them to include a power to expropriate the planters - with full compensation.

1

On June 3 Campbell-Bannerman made the desired statement, but he made no mention of a general land bill, and announced the withdrawal of the university bill for that year.² Overall, Dillon thought that 'Bannerman's speech was very bad'. He also passed on a rumour that MacDonnell was now 'busily at work trying to secure that the evicted tenants' bill will be as bad as the council bill'.³ There is no evidence to support this assertion, but Redmond's disappointment with the prime minister's statement reverberated round Ireland, and the summer of 1907 was to be a difficult one for the Irish party in many ways. The Freeman's pronouncement on the situation hovered uneasily between being a threat issued on behalf of the Irish party, and a warning to them:

We do not minimise the importance of the evicted tenants question. Ireland is under an obligation to the victims of the land war. But the problem is small in scope, and upon its settlement all parties are agreed. Mr Walter Long has said ditto to Mr Birrell upon the desirability of winding up this long-standing account....[but]....the strongest cabinet of modern times, the heirs of Gladstone,

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 29 May 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.174 col.323.
 3. Dillon to Redmond, 7 June 1907 (Redmond papers).

cannot whittle away their Irish policy to this small measure and still expect to be able to boast that they retain 'the confidence of the Irish party'... The P.M. is sounding the tocsin for an assault upon the house of lords. But what is to be Ireland's share if the victory is won?

1

The relationship between the Irish leaders and the government was by no means clear. Birrell reported to the cabinet on June 11 that the position was 'somewhat mysterious'.² Redmond's communications with him at this time avoided touching on the general subject, but kept strictly to demands for specific points. The truth was that the Irish leaders, or rather Redmond (since Dillon was taking virtually no part in affairs) were 'hanging on'. If not actually breaking up, the Irish party was definitely fraying at the edges, losing support to sinn fein and, more especially, to advocates of recalcitrant agrarianism. If Redmond was not to be forced to fall in with this agrarian movement and sever all connection with the government (a course of action which would presumably end in a coercionist taking over at the Castle) then he needed to demonstrate the efficacy of his policy by material gains: the policy under pressure was not so much the liberal alliance as a continued faith in a

1. W.F.J., 15 June 1907.

2. 'The evicted tenants bill', a cabinet paper by Birrell, 11 June 1907 (Cab.37/89/69).

peaceful and parliamentary agitation. It was not inconvenient to keep the government guessing as to what the Irish party would do, but it was also a policy born of necessity - they didn't know what to do. At Westminster the party had been abused by liberals for rejecting the council bill, and Birrell told Bryce:

They did not like it at all, and are sulky. How deep it goes we shall know when the evicted tenants' bill comes on next week. There are some 2000 of these evicted tenants to be dealt with and we are proposing compulsory powers of purchase. Who is to fix the price? and what to do with planters who won't budge - are the points of controversy.

1

Birrell, though he may have been somewhat concerned about the line the nationalists would adopt, realised well enough that it was they rather than he who were in the difficult position. His bill, though it was a fairly radical one, had been prepared in the Irish office, not in conclave with the Irish party, and he told the cabinet that it should be pushed through regardless, putting the onus on the Irish party to vote against it.

2

This he was confident that they would not do.

-
1. Birrell to Bryce, 17 June 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).
 2. 'The evicted tenants bill' by Birrell, op.cit.

The bill was introduced on June 27, and Birrell hoped it would prove 'non-controversial'. He explained that the applications had almost all been examined, and the number of genuine cases was not expected to rise above 2,000. Approximately 80,000 acres of land would be required. It was proposed to give the commissioners compulsory powers to acquire any untenanted land they thought necessary, and, at their discretion, any tenanted land in the possession of a planter, in return for compensation elsewhere. Any petition would be settled by the decision of two estates commissioners. Power was also taken to give commissioners Bailey and Finucane the security of tenure already possessed by their colleague Wrench as a county court judge. The main problem Birrell expected to be the method of assessing value.¹ Walter Long in replying called the measure the 'thin end of the wedge'.²

Dillon's fear about MacDonnell and Birrell's fears about the nationalist attitude both proved to be unfounded. In private at any rate the Irish leaders were extremely conciliatory, as Dillon's letter to Redmond of July 5 demonstrates:

My view is that we ought to move very few, if any, amendments. One point on which we shall be pressed to move an amendment is the provision confining the act to tenants evicted before the passing of the act of 1903. But my opinion is that we ought not to move

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 177 cols. 124-32.

2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 177 col. 135.

any amendment on this point - and generally that when Birrell has met us so fully on the vital points on which you pressed the government, we ought to meet him fairly on the minor points. I think we ought frankly to accept the bill as a good one and concentrate on seeing that Birrell does not yield to the attacks of the unionists - and confine yourself in debate to attacking the Ulster unionists and showing their vindictive spirit..... It is extremely satisfactory that there is no limit of numbers in the bill.

1

When the second reading came up on July 8, any hopes that the measure might be 'non-controversial' were dashed, for the debate was opened by William Moore. He condemned the proposals as 'extraordinary and revolutionary' and objected especially to securing the tenure of the estates commissioners, or having an appeal to them. Ireland had no confidence in them, he said: 'they looked for their policy to the Freeman's ² Journal, and took their orders from the brotherhood of the U.I.L.'

J.H.M.Campbell sneered that 'a strong dose of predatory legislation was necessary to bring back the [nationalist] sheep to the [liberal] fold, and this bill supplied it'. ³ Devlin, whose return from Australia had added much weight, if not subtlety, to the Irish debating force, met this with a threat which was all the more real coming from the man chiefly

1. Dillon to Redmond, 5 July 1907 (Redmond papers).

2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.177 cols. 1183-97,

3. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.177 col.1274.

responsible for the organisation of the national movement in Ireland:

Let the house remember that if any attempt was made in that or the other house to deny the evicted tenants their rights to enjoy the homes to which they were so passionately attached, dangers and difficulties might arise in Ireland. It would be easy to strike a match and light a torch in Ireland at the present time, but none desired that.

1

The second reading was carried by 315 votes to 98.

In committee the unionists pressed for limitations as to the scope of the bill - 2,000 tenants was suggested, and a maximum of 80,000 acres to be acquired compulsorily. The estates commissioners' report did not suggest a need to acquire tenanted land, they claimed, and the planters should not be disturbed, though Birrell attempted to explain that the planters were in fact eager for a bill which would enable them to escape from an area in which they were unpopular and often boycotted, without financial hardship.² On the other side the Irish party demanded little, Redmond refusing to take up the demand of J.J.O'Shee M.P. that the measure be extended to permit the compulsory expropriation of planters who now owned their land.³ On August 2 the bill passed in the commons for the third time.

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.177 col.1257.

2. 17 July 1907. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.178 col.712.

3. J.J.O'Shee to Redmond, 13 July 1907 (Redmond papers).

But all this was shadow-boxing - demands for further concessions like those of O'Shee and others were made simply on principle, or with an eye to their constituents. Everyone realised after the unionist criticism in the commons that the real decisions would be taken once more in the house of lords, and the question was not what the nationalists should demand, but what they might get. The initial feeling was that the lords might be quite reasonable: Crewe wrote to Ripon on July 25: 'I think Lansdowne etc., can be squared over the evicted tenants, though some may rebel'.¹ But by August 3 he was less confident: 'much must depend on what Birrell agrees to give away in our house'.²

In the house of lords Crewe explained that the bill was a political measure aimed at improving the peace of Ireland - it was not the 'thin end of the wedge', because the general land bill which would follow the Dudley report would be an economic measure. He gave assurances that any planter who really worked his land would be allowed to keep it, and that any amendment on the lines of an appellate tribunal would be considered by the government. But he defended the clause giving tenure to Bailey and Finucane, on the grounds that they did exercise semi-judicial functions and should be removed from party pressure. He hoped that the opposition would not insist on inserting limits of time, area, or number.³

-
1. Crewe to Ripon, 25 July 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43552 f.173).
 2. Crewe to Ripon, 3 Aug.1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms.43552 f.175).
 3. 6 Aug.1907. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.179 cols.1696-1706.

Lansdowne's reply contained none of the bitterness manifested by some of the Ulster M.P.s and later by some of his own colleagues. He nonetheless declared that 'this bill contains provisions for a parallel of which you might search in vain the statute book of this country or of any part of the British Empire'. But he recognised that compulsion was an essential feature of the bill, and was prepared to accept it where the case for reinstatement was 'established,' where voluntary means had failed, and where the terms offered were 'really just'. He insisted on a court of appeal to deal with matters of fact and law, away from the estates commissioners, who were 'the promoters of the bill'¹. A second reading was at last granted, though Lord Clonbrock spoke 'fighting a strong disposition to move its rejection at the present stage'².

It was in committee on August 9 that slaughter really commenced. Atkinson passed two amendments permitting compulsion only where the commissioners could show it had been impossible to acquire the land voluntarily (anywhere in Ireland!), and introducing 'compensation for loss'³. These changes Crewe said would 'destroy the entire purpose of this measure',

1. Ibid., cols. 1706-18.

2. Ibid., col.1742.

3. Parl. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.180 col.487.

for compensation for loss would put an end to voluntary sale.¹ There then came what became known as Lord Robertson's amendment, which accepted compulsion:

.....provided always that no lands shall be acquired compulsorily which have been purchased or agreed to be purchased under the land purchase acts prior to 1 May 1907, nor any tenanted land which is in the possession or occupation of any tenant using or cultivating the same as an ordinary farmer.

2

This in effect meant that a grabber could not be forced to leave. As a final gesture, Atkinson moved that the clause giving tenure to the commissioners be removed, despite Crewe's rather barbed protest that 'if the estates commissioners for any reason displease the government of the day at a time when both houses represent the same political views, the estates commissioners are done for'.³

After this display it was difficult for the government, and for the Irish party, to decide what attitude to adopt. 'The evicted tenants bill has been so much knocked about in the lords that its ultimate fate is very doubtful' was Lord Ripon's verdict.⁴ Lord Dunraven complained

1. Ibid., col.494.

2. Ibid., col.527.

3. Ibid., cols. 747-9.

4. Ripon to Dunraven, 13 Aug.1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms.43640 f.93).

that his colleagues:

.....seem to forget that the bill is justified by urgency and moral obligation of parliament and sentiment in Ireland, and cannot be compared on all fours with the ordinary use of compulsory power to acquire some particular piece of land for a railway or for some similar purpose.

1

Birrell's report of the situation to Redmond reflects his doubts. He wasn't yet sure how many of their guns the lords intended to stick to, and he was no more certain of the attitude the Irishmen would adopt. He wrote, on August 10:

It is difficult to make out what the lords are up to. Atkinson is very bitter and his amendments are impossible. But some think that in the upshot the lords will be content with limitations as to acreage and to the time (say 4 or 5 years) during which the compulsory powers are to operate, and with some sort of appeal - so far as we may be able to meet them - but a good deal may turn on what sort of appeal. Delay and cost are of the essence of the matter. As to the planter - they were very absurd last night. Lord Robertson fired off a very carefully prepared oration which might just as well have been delivered in the moon - some words will have to be devised to get round this difficulty. But the time for this will be after the bill comes back to us.

-
1. Dunraven to Ripon, 12 Aug. 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43640 f.89). The unionist lords had made great play with the precedent of the land clauses act of 1845, which provided for the compulsory acquisition of land for railways, and allowed for the payment of compensation on top of the value of the land.

Then there is the tenure of the unhappy commissioners.
 Poor Finucane is nearly out of his senses, raging and
 fuming. But they won't resign!

1

On August 14 those liberal leaders most closely concerned with the measure had a long discussion and decided to reject all Atkinson's amendments, but felt they must consent to some form of appeal from the estates commissioners, if the bill was to be saved. They were prepared to concede an appeal as to value to the judicial commissioner, and Lord Crewe was strongly in favour of conceding a similar appeal as to the reasonableness of removing a planter, but they could not of course accept an appeal as to the necessity for putting the compulsory powers into operation. R.R. Cherry wrote, requesting Redmond's view on these points.

2

Redmond passed the letter on to J.J.Clancy, the party's draftsman and expert on the law of property, who advised that the party should consent to the appeal as to value, but not to anything else. His letter reveals clearly enough the extent to which the Irish leaders' usual independence of action had been hampered by the set-backs of the summer, and the consequent increase in the influence of the more extreme rank and file M.P.s:

-
1. Birrell to Redmond, 10 Aug. 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Cherry to Redmond, 14 Aug. 1907 (Redmond papers).

It would be ridiculous to agree to give a judicial tribunal the power of deciding on a question of pure policy such as whether a planter ought to be removed or whether the compulsory powers generally should be put into operation. Of course even if the former question were submitted to an appeal court and the bill were otherwise right, the tenants could be restored all the same to their own or other holdings: but I take it that we could not afford to vote for this; but if the latter question were made the subject of appeal, the bill in my opinion might as well be dropped altogether.....

.....The question of excluding certain classes of land is not in my opinion vital, and I would give the lords their way there, but here again I suppose we could not afford to say publicly. The Kilbrides and Ginnells in our own party would probably denounce us.

1

On August 16 the lords gave a third reading to the now truncated measure, and on the 20th the commons considered their amendments. On most points the government stood firm, accepting from the lords only a time limit on the bill and an appeal to the judicial commissioner on questions of value. They rejected the move to make the estates commissioners prove the necessity for acquiring a particular piece of land, and also the addition to the price of 10% 'compensation for compulsion'. Birrell stated categorically that sooner than accept these the government would abandon the bill altogether. He also rejected, though without the threat of abandonment, the Robertson clause protecting the planter; the limit on number; and the attempt to keep the two commissioners unestablished.

2

1. J.J.Clancy to Redmond, 15 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).

2. 20 Aug.1907. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.181 cols. 635-98.

Redmond registered a strong protest against any giving way
¹
over the questions of appeal and the planter. But so far the government
had conceded previous little, and the Irish leader was really making the
noises which his position obliged him to. Now that the government had
shown firmness, and publicly indicated what they thought to be essentials,
it was time for serious bargaining and a decision as to whether the bill
was to become law or not. On August 22 Birrell and Crewe had a long
talk with Lansdowne and Walter Long, at which the broad lines of the
bargain were laid down. Redmond, however, had to consider not only
what was worth accepting per se, but what he could risk accepting from
the point of view of nationalist opinion in Ireland. Birrell's fear,
consequently, was that the bill would still from the government's point
of view be worth saving, but that the nationalists would vote against it,
thereby giving the lords an excuse to wreck it altogether. So his
account to Redmond of his talk with the unionist leaders was very cautiously
phrased. Lansdowne and Long, he said, were:

...very stiff indeed over the planter and Lord Robertson's
amendment. In effect what they said was we wouldn't if we
could and we couldn't if we would! They said that the
English peers were as strong on this point as the Irish,

1. Ibid., cols.646-9.

counted it as a point of honour not to desert, etc., etc. I don't think they are bluffing on this point. On the appeal question - they adopted a firm attitude of opposition and tried their best to make a case against Wyllie [the judicial commissioner]. They did not raise the question of appeal as to the necessity of taking the land, but confined their remarks to value and the questions raised under clause 6. I cannot say they yielded to our batteries - but I don't think (as a matter of speculation) that if they gained the day over the planter they would kill the bill over the judge point. As a compromise, they might concede the jud.comm. on value, if they had another judge of the high court on cl.6. This latter point is not one of substance - as the estates commissioners can easily avoid taking land likely to raise any such questions.

They pretend to be shocked by the tenure clause, and no doubt some of their friends are very angry over it.

The real point is the planters. As a matter of principle, it is of great importance, and the pacificatory effect of the bill will be destroyed by their omission.

But it is not a total omission - Robertson's words will leave out some of them, for it is likely that many planters would be removed even if our bill became law.

In my opinion the bill is worth saving and ought to be saved. Of course we shall not concede anything of importance in the lords tomorrow, but when the bill comes back we shall have to think seriously.

1

On the following day, August 23, the lords stuck to most of their guns: compensation for loss, the 2,000 limit, and Lord Robertson's amendment. But on the matter of appeal [Atkinson] put forward a new

1. Birrell to Redmond, 22 Aug. 1907 (Redmond papers).

amendment involving the judicial commissioner, and Lansdowne hinted at a bargain over this point in return for ratification of the commissioners' tenure.¹ Temperamentally, Birrell was for standing firm against these changes. He told MacDonnell:

The Ashbournes and the Atkinsons...use their powers simply to foment trouble whilst the other lords haggle over the price of Irish land, under cover of protecting the planter. I don't agree with you on that point. I think the action of the landlords is contemptible as it stands. A score of planters doesn't matter to them - it is all a matter of price.....
What have these fellows done to be so pampered and to be paid peace prices in the Hour of Revolution? I think it monstrous that I should have to wage war on my friends to protect my enemies, such sordid enemies.

2

But in practice the government had to choose between a compromise bill and no bill at all. Robertson's amendment, Birrell complained, meant 'the triumph of Lord Clanricarde', for it would secure many of the planters on his estate. But he had been assured, Birrell continued, that some pacification might still be achieved if the evicted tenants were restored on lands other than their own. He thus recommended that Robertson's amendment be accepted. He also accepted the 2,000 limit, though considering it silly and meaningless, for now that this compulsory act existed, most transfers would in practice take place voluntarily under the 1903 act.

1. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol. 181 cols. 1290-1344.

2. Birrell to MacDonnell, 29 Aug. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.15).

He accepted the appeal to judicial commissioner Wyllie on value, though not Lord Atkinson's destructive appeal, and he assumed that the commissioners' tenure had been agreed upon. He rejected the compensation clause entirely. ¹

Redmond had no alternative but to express 'extreme concern' at these 'surrenders': there would never be peace in East Galway while the planters remained on the Clanricarde estate; the lords were 'animated by the motive of wishing to see the chief secretary embroiled in the coming winter in trouble and turmoil in Ireland'. He then declared, in a peroration which Balfour afterwards described as a 'direct incitement to disorder in Ireland':

Did the house think that the house of lords, representing the landlord party, would dare to deal with this bill in the way it had done if there was a strong and menacing agitation afoot in Ireland at the present time? They would do nothing of the kind.....The moral for Ireland is that if she wanted to get next session land legislation, if she desired to see the evicted tenants reinstated; if she desired to see the blackspot of the Clanricarde estate and other similar spots wiped out in Ireland, if she desired to see the land act of 1903 amended...she would have to close up her ranks and make her movement sufficiently strong and menacing to overcome both the hon. members above the gangway [i.e. the tories] and the house of lords.

2

T.P.O'Connor said that the nationalists washed their hands of the bill, and the few remaining members of the Irish party left the chamber. ³ The

1. 26 Aug.1907. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.182 cols. 181-5.

2. Ibid., cols. 190-5; Balfour's comment, ibid., col.196.

3. Ibid., col.201.

re-amended bill was returned to the lords, who under protest agreed that the landlord should receive only the 'value' of his land, without the addition of compensation for loss. The passage of the truncated measure was assured when their lordships accepted an appeal on value to the judicial commissioner alone, calling in a judge of the high court on matters of law only.¹

The nationalist position was such that they could express no thanks. But the act offered them solid gains - under it, almost all bona fide evicted tenants capable of running a farm were enabled to purchase one, at a figure which compared favourably with most post-1903 prices. The main failing of the act was that despite the long-standing promises of the Irish leaders, many of the evicted were not restored to their original farms, and intimidation remained as the only sure way of removing a well-established 'grabber'. It was even feared that the Clanricarde planters, reminders of the worst struggles of the land war, would all be enabled to remain. But in fact this was not to be the case. To Lord Clanricarde's chagrin, many of his caretakers did not take advantage of Robertson's amendment to claim exemption as bona fide farmers.

1. 27 Aug.1907. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.182 cols. 283-99.

Clanricarde himself therefore made this claim on their behalf, and accordingly refused to sell. His lawyers had indeed found a loop-hole, for the act did not make clear whether it was the right of the landlord or of the planter to lodge an appeal. But in 1908 the lords found no difficulty in passing a one clause amendment bill which effectually destroyed Clanricarde's case.¹ Despite the forebodings of the Irish party and of Birrell, therefore, the evicted tenants act achieved its basic aim.² The real threat implicit in the episode for the government and the Irish party was the indication it gave of how their lordships were likely to respond to any attempt at a general revision of the land act of 1903.

3. Land and agitation, 1906-8.

In addition to the evicted tenants problem the land act of 1903 failed on two other important fronts. In its financial mechanism it was too optimistic. It was unable to furnish the amount of cash needed: partly because that sum had been seriously underestimated; partly because

-
1. See W.F.J., 7 Mar. and 23 May 1908; Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.189 col.1506.
 2. By 31 Mar.1910, 3,581 evicted tenants had been restored, including 1,914 who were re-settled on their former holdings (Annual report of the estates commissioners. 1919-20 [Cmd. 577] XIX. 965).

Irish land stock remained stubbornly well below par; and partly because the tremendous land hunger combined with the zones system to produce an unexpectedly large increase in land prices. The second difficulty was quite independent of the first, except in so far as it was exacerbated by the increase in prices. This was the western problem, the problem of congestion, the demand for the distribution of the grasslands.

It was hoped in Ireland that the new government would apply themselves very rapidly to this second problem. Dillon meanwhile urged a go-slow on purchase, in the west at any rate, on the ground that the position would improve:

I wish to warn the people of Ireland not to be rushing in to pay extravagant prices for their land. The times have changed, and in my opinion, if the people are only true to themselves you will see a heavy slump in the price of land within the next year or year and a half.

1

But although the liberal government proved satisfactory as to immediate administrative alterations, no land bill was mentioned in the king's speech for 1906. Furthermore, once the election was passed, Bryce's administration gave little satisfaction to the Irish party. Prices showed little sign of moving in the direction Dillon had indicated, and land legislation was postponed by the appointment of a royal commission, about which Dillon, if not Redmond, was sceptical.

1. Dillon at Swinford, 9 Jan.1906 (W.F.J., 13 Jan.1906).

Accordingly, during the summer of 1906 Dillon embarked on a series of fiery speeches in Ireland which the Irish government studied very closely.¹ His hostility was mainly occasioned by the setbacks described in the previous paragraph, and by the issue of the estates commissioners' report dealing with the price increases,² which he called 'one of the most interesting documents published in Ireland for many years'.³ But probably his intransigence had in part the intention of letting O'Brien (who was at this time approaching Redmond and Harrington with his conference plan) know that there was no weakening of his resolve on the matter of reunion. He declared at Swinford on 10 September 1906 that:

I am as ready as any man for conciliation, but I don't believe any man, no matter how eloquent, can get rid of the Irish landlords by conciliation; and when you hear the landlords begin to talk about conciliation you may be sure that they are in a hot corner, and that in my opinion is the time to hit them hardest.

4

This activity was also the beginning of a campaign to revive the party organisation. In June the inspector-general of the R.I.C. had reported that/^{the}slight decrease in the number of U.I.L. branches during the

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 16 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
2. Report of the estates commissioners for the period 1 Nov.1903 to 31 March 1906; 1906 [Cd. 3148] XXV.237.
3. Dillon at Swinford, 10 Sept.1906 (W.F.J., 15 Sept.1906).
4. Ibid. It was this sort of talk that gave rise to the idea, which I think is incorrect, that Dillon was opposed to the implementation of major social reforms before the implementation of home rule, on the grounds that they might 'kill home rule by kindness'. Dillon, as much as anyone in the Irish party during these years, stressed the importance of securing ameliorative legislation whilst home rule was in abeyance (see especially his letters to Redmond on the evicted tenants, in 1906-7). What he feared was that landlords throughout Ireland would rush the tenants into bad bargains before the Irish party were able to secure an amending land act.

quarter 'does not accurately reflect the loss of influence suffered by
¹
 the organisation generally'. The land question was still the only basis
 for a vigorous organisation:

In counties where there is little friction between
 landlord and tenant the League is weak. Where
 there is no fight there is little general interest,
 and the second part of the programme, viz. the
 contribution of funds, is by no means popular.
 In some counties the original defensive character
 of the League is gradually being replaced by a
 more aggressive tone. This is chiefly with reference
 to the large grass farms.

2

On 14 September 1906 a circular marked 'important' was
 confidentially issued by the U.I.L. central office urging that public
 meetings be held in connection with every group of evicted holdings,
 and that branches should 'keep prominently before the public the failure
 of the Land act of 1903 to cope with the pressing problem of the equitable
 distribution of untenanted land'.³ On this question of the grasslands
 the circular elicited a stronger agitation from some nationalists than
 the party leaders perhaps wanted. David Sheehy M.P., at Tara on October
 7, urged the people of Meath to 'break down the fences and let the cattle go

-
1. Monthly R.I.C. reports (884/S), report of the inspector-general, June
 1906 (S.P.O.).
 2. Ibid., November 1906 (1206/S).
 3. Ibid., Sept. 1906 (1063/S).

astray' in order to enforce the break-up of the grass farms. Such action was illegal, he said, but it was the only way anything could be won from the British government - there were not enough policemen in Ireland to stop it. What he wanted was 'action' from the young men.¹ But the meeting was 'poorly attended' according to the R.I.C. county inspector, who did not think Sheehy's advice was likely to have much effect in Meath.² There is evidence that Sheehy's suggestion, plainly intended to encourage in Meath the unrest that was always more or less present in the Connaught grasslands of East Galway and Roscommon, was not welcomed by the party leadership. A Drogheda priest who complained to Redmond about Sheehy's speech received a most courteous reply: Redmond promised to speak to Sheehy about the matter, and added 'I am not, as you are aware, in favour of the use of wild language of this kind'.³ When Sheehy again spoke in Meath, at Summerhill on 1 January 1907, the county inspector reported that 'no inflammatory language was used'.⁴

-
1. Sheehy at Tara, 7 Oct. 1906 (Judicial Division: intelligence notes, 1906 (P.R.O., C.O. 903.13) pp.42-4).
 2. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1130/S), report of the county inspector for Meath, Oct. 1906 (S.P.O.).
 3. Redmond to Fr Curry, 23 Oct, 1906 (Redmond papers).
 4. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1318/S), report of the county inspector for Meath, Jan. 1907 (S.P.O.).

Other members of the party proved less pliable. Laurence Ginnell M.P. called a meeting at The Downs, Westmeath, on 14 October 1906 at which, he later claimed, 'I pronounced a death-sentence upon the ranching system and announced a plan for its execution'¹. He said that a liberal government would fight very shy of 'gaoling the people', and insinuated that 'those large cattle were able to walk or run 30 or 40 miles in a single night'². The leadership was evidently uneasy about his plans, for J.P.Hayden, a far more senior member of the party, editor of the Westmeath Examiner and M.P. for neighbouring South Roscommon, at first tried to prevent the 'Downs' meeting, and having failed to do so took the chair and spoke far more moderately than Ginnell.³ A few weeks later the county inspector for Westmeath reported that:

There is some friction in the county...owing to a section under Mr Ginnell M.P. having advocated an advanced policy. However, at a large meeting in Mullingar recently, Mr Hayden M.P., moderate nationalist, was elected chairman of the county executive [U.I.L.] by a large majority...over Mr Ginnell. This arrangement makes for peace and good order.

4

Ginnell claimed, both at the time and eighteen months later in his book, that Hayden was the tool of the local ranchers, but it seems certain that

1. L. Ginnell, Land and Liberty (Dublin, 1908), p.209.
2. Ginnell at The Downs, 14 Oct.1906 (Judicial division: intelligence notes 1906 (C.O. 903.13) pp.42-4).
3. Ginnell to Redmond, 12 Jan.1907 (Redmond papers).
4. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1264/S), report of the county inspector for Westmeath, Dec.1906 (P.R.O.).

at this time it was the party leadership which wanted a more moderate approach. Further, they must have realised that however powerful a vote-catcher it was, the policy of encouraging landless men to hope for a carve-up of Meath and Kildare in their favour was not the same as distributing the Connaught ranches to congests, and would find no support in the liberal party or at Dublin Castle.

The aim of the leadership in the autumn of 1906 was simply to re-vitalise their organisation somewhat, because the fund seemed to be slipping, and because there was a natural fall-off in areas where the 1903 act had done its work. MacDonnell told Bryce at this time that:

William O'Brien is making great headway [this was certainly an exaggeration], especially with the tenants who have already purchased and who are weary of subscribing to U.I.L. funds, now that they have got the land. I am told that O'Brien's progress is seriously alarming J.R. and D., and especially Sexton.

1

The absence of Devlin, who was in Australia for almost a year, had deprived the party machine of its guiding genius, and the huge liberal majority, with its apparent lack of an ambitious Irish policy, damped enthusiasm even more. But agitation of an extreme nature was an embarrassment. Bryce complained to Redmond on 17 October 1906:

The accounts that reach me from various parts of the country are somewhat disquieting....I hope therefore that you and your friends will exert your influence to

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 30 Nov.1906 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).

avoid trouble. Needless to say how much difference to next session a peaceful or turbulent winter may make. Already such speeches as that made by Ginnell last Sunday are doing harm: and it becomes hard to overlook such direct incitements to violence, however unimportant the person who makes them.

1

By December things were somewhat quieter so far as the grasslands were concerned, and even the inspector-general, normally a Cassandra-like figure, was not unduly concerned: 'it is in the springtime that lettings of this nature are generally made, and there is nothing yet to show whether the agitation will be pressed with unusual vigour'.² Only in East Galway, around Loughrea and Athenry, was there grave cause for concern. MacDonnell's comments illuminate this situation, as well as shedding some light on his own views on the western problem. He minuted on the inspector-general's report for January 1907:

The East Riding of Galway is in an unsatisfactory condition as it has been for very many years. Here landlords in past times were hard on their tenants, and conspiracies and combinations against landlordism have been continuous. In this part of the country landlords have not been slow to combine to uphold prices and no wonder that they should be met by efforts to reduce them. It is in this part of the country that the campaign against 'grass ranches' is most bitter. The police have done their best to detect crime and protect unpopular people: but if such people have come to see that they cannot hope to brave popular

-
1. Bryce to Redmond, 17 Oct.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1264/S), report of the inspector-general, Dec.1906 (P.R.O.).

disapproval, and submit, I do not see that the government are to be blamed. A social revolution is going on; and it is fortunate that we are keeping it a bloodless one.

1

The appointment of Birrell to the Irish office in January 1907 gave the nationalists some hope of a more progressive policy, both on the council scheme, which had reached deadlock, and in agrarian matters. The U.I.L. national directory, on 5 February 1907, called upon tenants to refuse direct sales pending an amending land bill, but no promises were forthcoming in the king's speech. The Dudley commission on congestion was clearly going to take far longer to report than had originally been anticipated, while the council bill and a university measure claimed precedence so far as legislation for 1907 was concerned. To soften the impact of this disappointment, the Irish party drafted a land bill of their own, which was given a second reading on April 19. It was not comprehensive, in that it did not deal with the financial problem or with the administration of the acts, but it proposed to do away with the zones and restore inspection; to introduce a bonus scale favouring the landlord who sold cheaply; and to implement compulsion for the relief of congestion and 'for providing land for people who were now without any'². The government were generally

1. Ibid. Jan.1907 (1318/S).

2. Speech of J.J.Clancy, 19 Apr. 1907 Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.172 cols.1269-78.

sympathetic to the measure. Cherry explained in the face of criticism from the Ulstermen that it did not set aside the 1903 act, but was intended to carry out its essential details and cut down the risks run by the state over security.¹ Birrell also approved of the purpose of the measure, but stated that there could be no compulsory purchase on a large scale until there was new financial machinery. The government would support the bill on second reading but could give the measure no more time during the session. He made no definite promise, but expressed a hope that legislation might be introduced 'at an early date'.² The second reading was passed by 208 votes to 60. 'Rarely has a more unanswerable case been made for the amendment of an act of parliament'³ declared the Freeman.

With the rejection of the council bill and the growing fear, which mounted as the 'hands off Trinity' campaign developed, that the university bill would not appear, concessions on the land front became of paramount importance to the Irish leaders. Their one firm gain was the

1. Ibid., col.1311.

2. Ibid., cols. 1326-31.

3. W.F.J., 27 Apr.1907.

evicted tenants bill, but the number of people who would directly benefit from it was very small, whilst as a class the evicted tenants, though respected in principle as 'the wounded soldiers of the land war', were not particularly popular, especially when they were migrated on to holdings in preference to local congests or landless men. It was therefore necessary for the Irish leaders to press further demands on the government.

But the land and university bills were for 1907 a forlorn hope, and Redmond's letter to Birrell of May 28 was in the main a plea to the government to save his face by giving him a noisy demonstration of their intention to persevere with ameliorative legislation, and so provide a justification for his continued tolerance. He wanted a day's discussion on land purchase finance 'the moment the treasury have made up their minds how to meet the difficulties that have arisen', and a discussion on the future of the D.A.T.I. as soon as the report on it appeared. As to the party's land bill, he said:

Of course we do not expect that the bill can be seriously discussed this session, but I think that it is of the utmost importance that you should state at the earliest possible moment on behalf of the government that next session you intend to introduce legislation on the lines of this bill, the second reading of which, as you will remember, the government supported and carried by a large majority.

1

1. Redmond to Birrell, 28 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

C.B.'s statement in the commons on June 3, as we have seen, did little to ease Redmond's difficulties. The Freeman observed that 'the P.M.'s statement on the subject of the Irish bills of the session will, save upon one point, intensify the dissatisfaction caused in Ireland by the nature of the Irish council bill'¹. Probably the cabinet and the liberal party as a whole felt some resentment at the way the council bill had been (apparently cursorily) dismissed by Redmond, and, whilst appreciating his position and wishing him no harm in the long run, may have felt that a little reciprocation of his non-co-operation might have a salutary effect. They may be said to have achieved this object: Dillon observed to Blake on August 30 that 'Redmond and the party are having a strong time, but I do not take a gloomy view of the outlook'². But the cost to the government of their action was considerable. There ensued in Ireland, or at least in a very substantial part of it, two years of unrest which made the jocular chief secretary the main object of tory hostility in the commons and the country and came near to making a mockery of the liberals' pious intentions of ruling Ireland 'according to the ordinary law'.

1. W.F.J., 8 June 1907.

2. Dillon to Blake, 30 Aug.1907 (Blake papers, on microfilm in N.L.I., p.4683 f.585).

The government were not lacking in warnings as to the dangers of the situation, and indeed their resolute prosecution of the evicted tenants bill suggests that Birrell had been persuaded of its importance at least. But it was not enough. T.P.Gill thought they should indicate their intention to push ahead with the land and university bills as soon as possible:

The strengthening of the position of the Irish parliamentary party is an essential element in the safety of the present government, with regard to Ireland. The party is now united and its position can be strengthened. But it would be quite easy to undermine and weaken its position. If that be done, the government in Ireland will have to reckon with different forms of extremism in the country - sinn feiners at one end, agrarians at another, and in the middle a humbugging, misleading, insincere collection of devolutionists and so forth, who would be no support to any sort of government whatsoever.

1

As a former nationalist M.P., Gill of course regarded the situation very much from the party's point of view. But Sir Antony MacDonnell, whose predilection was generally speaking for a weaker Irish party, also urged the government to show more activity. His concern of course was not with the future of the Irish party but with the maintenance of peace in the west of Ireland. It was the first year since 1902, he said,

1. Gill to Dudley, 31 May 1907 (Gill papers).

in which the annual agitation against the letting of the ranches on the eleven-month system had not died away by May, but had continued to grow after that time. He urged that the question could not be left over until the Dudley report appeared, but that the government should act at once on its own initiative. They should make the evicted tenants bill a measure 'assuming really important dimensions', by giving the estates commissioners compulsory powers to buy all the grasslands they could in Connaught on behalf of the C.D.B., who were themselves helpless, having insufficient staff for the work and a purchasing limit for the year of only £50,000, imposed by the treasury. MacDonnell warned that:

In the real need for enlarging uneconomic holdings, which cannot be satisfied unless these grass ranches are broken up and the people migrated to them from congested areas, there is ready to the agitator's hand a potent leverage for working on people's minds and producing disorder which, without the crimes act it may be difficult if not impossible to control.

1

Concurrent with these steps to remove the source of the grievance he urged an increase of 600 men in the R.I.C. The force at that time was 9,500, he said, as it had been since the general election. In 1903 it had been 10,800.

2

-
1. Memorandum on the grasslands question by MacDonnell, 31 May 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.372 f.21).
 2. A letter by MacDonnell on unrest in Ireland, circulated by Birrell as a cabinet paper, 16 June 1907 (Cab. 37/89/90).

The government did agree to an increase in the R.I.C. by 400 men,¹ but their only response to MacDonnell's positive suggestions was a parliamentary announcement by Birrelly² that he confidently expected the Dudley report to be presented by the end of the year, and that an amending land bill would be brought in as soon as it had been considered.² In fact MacDonnell's urgent letter to Birrell 'was merely handed round at the cabinet, but was not discussed, nor was any decision come to on it'.³

The condition of the west of Ireland was meanwhile becoming serious. Agrarian outrages recorded by the R.I.C., which had averaged between 12 and 20 a month since before the liberals took office, showed a sudden alarming increase: from 11 in February 1907, they rose to 32 in March, 39 in April, and 44 in May. The figure levelled out during the rest of the year, but it rose above 50 on three occasions during the first half of 1908, and at no time showed any sign of dropping back to the 1906 level.⁴ The driving of cattle also started around this time. Normally a less serious type of affair, and not alone classified as an outrage,

-
1. Asquith to the King, 28 May 1908 (Cab.41/31/58).
 2. 5 June 1907. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.174 col.692.
 3. Ripon to Crewe, 24 June 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43552 f.161).
 4. These figures are taken from the Monthly R.I.C. reports for this period (S.P.O.).

it was, however, something which could make the police look very foolish and which was very difficult to deal with when adopted on a large scale. Many who had too little nerve or too many scruples to fire into a dwelling house might find satisfaction in opening a gate and encouraging a few cattle down the road. Although the practice had been known in Ireland since the eighteenth century, it had never been used before as an organised protest against the grass ranches. Ginnell and Sheehy had advocated it for a brief period in the autumn of 1906, but little heed had been paid, and they were evidently warned off by their leaders. Down to March 1907 the police had no record of drives, but in April there were 9, and in both May and June 36. This continuation was serious, as has been pointed out, because agitation had normally died away after the lands were re-let each May. In July and August the figures dropped to a little above 10. The inspector-general explained this as being partly the effect of the haymaking season, and partly the effect of the law - extra vigilance by the police, fear of winter assizes, and the 'wholesome effect' of changes of venue in recent prosecutions.¹ But his hopes were soon dashed, for in September the figures began to show an increase once more, until in November there were 108 drives and in December 81. The

1. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1668/S), report of the inspector-general, July 1907 (S.P.O.).

peak was not reached until May 1908, when there were 139. Almost all these cases occurred in 8 counties: three in Connaught, four in Leinster, and Clare in Munster. To break it down further, 322 of the 390 cases in 1907 occurred in Galway (131), Roscommon, Westmeath, Meath and Kildare. The presence of these last two counties is a special indication both that the movement was the work of agitators and that it was part of a 'land for the landless' movement, for there were no congests in these areas.¹

This type of lawlessness was extremely difficult to control. When 200 men took part in a great drive at Roscrea in April 1907, the government ordered a prosecution of the leaders for unlawful assembly, but those whose cases went as far as Cork winter assizes were found not guilty by the jury in face of clear evidence. Lord Chief Justice O'Brien commented 'Gentlemen, I am astonished'.² It was evident by the summer of 1907 that there was almost no chance of getting a jury to convict in an agrarian case in the west. But even less serious legal

1. The definition of a 'drive', however, was rather broad. It could mean anything from one or two boys opening a gate to a minor riot involving half the neighbourhood and a garrison of police. As Dougherty observed, 'cattle-driving in Meath and Longford is a very different thing from cattle-driving in Roscommon and Galway' (Monthly R.I.C. reports (1866/S), minute by the assistant under secretary, 17 Dec.1907 (S.P.O.)).

2. Judicial division: intelligence notes 1907 (C.O. 903. 14) p.8.

procedures met with the same lack of success. Others arrested at Roscrea were summoned at petty sessions, but in this and many other cases the bench¹ of magistrates refused to accept informations. The 1898 local government act had made the chairman of every district council an ex officio J.P., so that when these men were assiduous in their attendance on the bench, ordinary J.P.s and resident magistrates could be in a minority. The government instruction to ex officio J.P.s not to sit outside their own districts, issued during the summer, had a limiting effect only. A few dismissals were made, but only where there had been very strong² provocation. Lord Ripon, a politician normally in sympathy with the nationalist cause, exclaimed:

Surely it was madness on the part of Gerald Balfour to create these ex officio magistrates under the local government bill. It may be very well in England, but totally inapplicable to the state of things in Ireland.

3

-
1. Ibid., p.12.
 2. About this time, Michael Reddy M.P. was stripped of his J.P.ship for inflammatory speeches. In the most notorious case of all, P.J.Kelly, chairman of Loughrea U.D.C., who was regarded by the police as the focus of I.R.B. organisation in Connaught, was removed from the bench when he was charged with incitement to murder Lord Ashtown. Even in this case the cards were stacked against the government. Kelly had urged the people of New Inn, co.Galway, to deal with Lord Ashtown 'as Blake had been dealt with'. Blake was a local agent, who had been murdered in 1882. But the police note-taker at Kelly's meeting had in error written the name 'Baker' instead of 'Blake', and despite the evidence of other police witnesses that they had heard the name 'Blake' mentioned, a jury at Galway assizes found Kelly not guilty.
 3. Ripon to Lord Fitzmaurice, 28 June 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43543 f.53)

How far the nationalist leadership was in control of this agitation is hard to assess. Redmond, at Battersea on July 7, called for a 'widespread and vigorous campaign in Ireland' during the autumn and winter, and 'a great home rule movement'.¹ But this was not unpredictable: it was stronger stuff than he had resorted to since the change of government, but was clearly part of his struggle to maintain his position in face of demands for more extreme policies. The speech of one of his 'followers', Ginnell, at Killulagh the following week, was far more calculated to attract the attention of the government. It was, the Times reported, 'an extraordinary address on cattle-driving':

He said that the people who were best promoting their own and the national interest at the present moment were the people in the west of Ireland who were scattering the cattle like chaff before the wind. He would be among those people tomorrow....They had it on the authority of Lord Denman in the house of lords that the scattering of cattle was no crime.

2

This was without doubt an incitement to crime, but the inspector-general reported that Ginnell had had a 'cold reception' in Westmeath, where his advice was not generally followed.³ When the question of prosecution

-
1. Redmond at Battersea, 7 July 1907 (W.F.J., 13 July 1907).
 2. Ginnell at Killulagh, 14 July 1907 (Times, 16 July 1907). Lord Denman was a young man who had been appointed, faute de mieux, as government spokesman in the lords on Irish matters. In reply to unionist criticisms of the state of Ireland on 4 June 1907, he had declared that 'in our opinion the driving of cattle cannot, of itself, be considered a crime of a very serious nature' (Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.175, col.450). Unionist politicians and press of course seized on this slip and, to their delight, so did the less 'responsible' nationalist elements.
 3. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1668/S), report of the inspector-general, July 1907 (S.P.O.).

of orators was discussed in the cabinet at this time, there was 'a general shudder'.¹ (Another M.P., J.P. Farrell, who actually led a cattle-drive at Longford a few days later, was arrested and sent for trial).

It is clear that the cattle-driving movement got under way in the summer of 1907 without a concerted effort by the U.I.L. at national level. But Devlin was quick to perceive the dangers of an unsupervised agitation, and at the same time saw how it might be used to strengthen the movement. He wrote to Redmond from Dublin on June 25:

I think it would be well if depending the second reading of the evicted tenants bill you sent over here about a dozen of the best members who can be relied on to take a thorough interest not only in the immediate situation, but in the future work, so that they might be sent to districts where personal effort is badly needed. I think too that as far as possible the representative for each district where cattle-driving is carried on should be sent into these places to associate himself with the people. I was told by [William] Duffy [M.P.] that it is the sinn fein people who are carrying on the fight in Athenry, and as they are making a great fight there, it is rather a pity that some of our members should not be associated with it.

The divisions in which the fight is most acute for the grazing lands are - both divisions of King's and Queen's County; North and Mid-Tipperary; North and South Roscommon; South and East Galway; and North Mayo, There is no row at present in Westmeath, but Ginnell has written to me to say that he is coming over in order to create one, and I have given him every encouragement. If you have an opportunity you might also say to Haviland Burke that the people are ready for him the moment he comes over.

2

-
1. Campbell-Bannerman To Asquith, 5 Sept. 1907 (Asquith papers, Bodleian Library, Ms. 10 f. 224).
 2. Devlin to Redmond, 25 June 1907 (Redmond papers).

Within a few days of this The Times could claim that 'almost every conspicuous member of the nationalist party advocates in public speeches the tactics of cattle-driving'¹. But it failed to draw the distinction which the Irish leadership did between 'association' with the people and incitement of them. The Freeman was still somewhat apologetic: 'trivial incidents in the west, such as a few head of cattle being driven from one place to another, or the utterance of some crack-brained village celebrity, are recorded[by the tory press] in lurid language'². The sequel to Devlin's encouragement of Ginnell was of course the latter's Killulagh speech of July 14. Redmond must have written to Devlin to protest about this, for Devlin (who had written to him a long letter on the 17th without mentioning the episode) wrote again on the 18th that:

With regard to Ginnell's speech, he got no instructions from this office or from anyone in it, to make such statements as have been attributed. I think it is better not to interfere with him as it would only make matters worse. I think it is generally understood that people pay no attention to what he says.

3

After this the U.I.L. handled its firebrands with rather more caution, attempting to find a balance between reviving the organisation, in some areas,

1. Times, 4 July 1907.
2. W.F.J., 13 July 1907.
3. Devlin to Redmond, 18 July 1907 (Redmond papers).

and riding with the storm in others, without producing a situation which would embarrass the parliamentary leadership. Devlin told Redmond on August 9 that 'Ginnell is starting for Meath on Monday, and will remain there as long as it is deemed advisable for him to stay'¹.

Thus, as the parliamentary session ended, with a truncated evicted tenants bill in place of the complete measure introduced by Birrell, MacDonnell feared an expansion of the agitation. Redmond called for a movement 'strong and menacing', to warn the lords against tampering with the expected 1908 land bill, but he was still following in the wake of his extremists.² Ginnell and Sheehy delivered a series of speeches in Meath, Westmeath and Roscommon in which they continually invited prosecution, and MacDonnell studied their words very closely. In Roscommon there was no doubt that drives would have occurred without Ginnell. But there were now indications that the advice would be acted on further east - certainly Ginnell and Sheehy were making every effort towards that end. On August 25, Ginnell told the people of Westmeath that if their ranches were not left derelict the next land bill 'will not trouble you'.³ But MacDonnell must have been especially struck by

-
1. Devlin to Redmond, 9 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond at Ballybofey, Donegal, 29 Aug.1907 (Times, 30 Aug.1907).
 3. Ginnell at Killulagh, Westmeath, 25 Aug.1907 (Judicial division: intelligence notes 1907 (C.O. 903.14) p.18).

mischévous nature of his appeal at Kells on the 15th: he announced that 'if the people of Meath did not claim the grazing ranches in time, he believed under a new bill next year outsiders would be brought in to claim them'¹. This was a plain attempt to incite feeling against migrant congests, evicted tenants and the like, and was not only in opposition to government policy, but contrary to the advice of Dillon and others not to oppose the migrants.

At the end of August, MacDonnell made a determined effort to secure the prosecution of Ginnell and Sheehy for their speeches. He felt that the popular demand had now grown into something which the government could not hope to satisfy, and therefore they should act against it:

In the congested districts where the problem is acute we are doing all that the state of the finances will allow to buy these lands, but even in Connaught the purchase will take many years to complete, while in Meath and counties similarly circumstanced, no such transfers can be effected if the great cattle industry of Ireland is to survive. Therefore the agitation is calculated not only to embarrass the government and inflict far-reaching injury on private owners, but in many counties is in itself directed to an end which is entirely impracticable.

2

-
1. Ginnell at Kells, Meath, 15 Aug.1907 (Judicial division: intelligence notes (C.O. 903.14) p.17).
 2. Memoranda on the speeches of Messrs Ginnell and Sheehy, by MacDonnell and the law officers, 31 Aug.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.372 f.1).

MacDonnell consulted the law officers on the advisability of requiring the orators to find bail for good behaviour, but although Redmond Barry (solicitor-general) supported him, Cherry thought that the prosecutions would have no effect on the drivers, and would only force more moderate members of the Irish party to adopt an extreme position.¹ Lord Aberdeen on the other hand, who once more demonstrated his adherence to the views of the under-secretary, stated that he had:

obtained reliable information that there is practically no prospect of the more moderate and influential members of the Irish party adopting the attitude referred to. They regard Ginnell and his associates as erratic and inconveniently irresponsible persons. And John Redmond in particular disapproves of the cattle-driving plan: but it is one thing to disapprove and quite another to repudiate publicly. And we all know how excessively the party at present desire to avoid any appearance of disunion.

2

Birrell received MacDonnell's first request for a prosecution whilst at St.Moritz, and his reply was somewhat blasé:

I doubt whether a liberal administration ought to make itself responsible in existing conditions for order in Ireland, and particularly whether a liberal minister ought to attempt the task imposed on him by the house of lords.

3

1. Ibid.
2. Aberdeen to Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Sept.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41210 f.118).
3. Birrell to MacDonnell, 29 Aug.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.17).

Nothing daunted, a few days later MacDonnell sent Birrell the full dossier he had prepared on the grasslands situation, and a synopsis of the campaign of Ginnell and Sheehy. But Birrell was adamant:

Unless the watches of the night bring other resolves I shall say 'No'. I fully appreciate the force of all you say, but what fails to convince me is that the proposed procedure against the two men named would have a good result. It appears to me, on the whole, but I admit I am not positive, to amount to a direct challenge to the whole Irish party to do likewise. Were they to be forced to take up the challenge, we should be forced to make war on them and clap them in jail also. To do this seems a well-nigh impossible task for a liberal minister, who finds himself thwarted for party purposes by the house of lords. At all events I am not disposed to be in a hurry, though the risks may be ugly. Nor I think would the cabinet support me willingly on any drastic impressing policy - it is unfortunate all these things should culminate at the very end of the session. After all, as Cherry says, we are not doing nothing. We have prosecutions proceeding and applications for change of venue, and we are rigorous about overt acts and violence. My present mind is to let Ginnell and Sheehy alone. If they take a turn at the cattle-driving themselves it will be another matter. Ginnell's speeches, though mischievous, are not without a certain grasp of the situation. Are all the graziers in Meath on the eleven-month system? Redmond's speeches are feeble and verbose, but his heart is evidently not yet bent on violent measures, and that I know is the view of most of the party. It would be a pity to drive them into the field if we can help it, and I am not the man to do it if I can help it. Ardilaun Donoughmore and Campbell no doubt might act otherwise. But if they did they would only accelerate the hour of their own final discomforture. And that perhaps is the only way out of the present imbroglio.

1

1. Birrell to MacDonnell, 2 Sept.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.17).

Other members of the cabinet were inclined to agree with Birrell. Aberdeen sent MacDonnell's dossier to Campbell-Bannerman, who observed to Asquith that 'it looks like an attempt by Antonio to rush the thing through in the chief secretary's absence. I am dead contra. Neither of the two men has any importance, but if proceeded against they would be heroes'¹. Asquith and Crewe agreed with him: they both expressed the view that Cherry's opinion was more valuable than that of MacDonnell or Aberdeen, and Asquith felt that the recent increases in the R.I.C. would show some good result: 'I cannot help thinking that vigilant and well-contrived action by the police is a more hopeful form of proceeding than the prosecution of speakers'². Crewe thought such prosecutions ought not to be embarked on 'without the gravest consideration, and after a demand - and not merely an acquiescence - from Birrell. As you say, the cabinet recoiled from the idea.....The fact is, we might as well apply the crimes act at once'³.

For a while it seemed as if this policy would justify itself immediately. The figures for driving actually decreased in July and August, during the first weeks of Ginnell's campaign, and whilst September

-
1. Campbell-Bannerman to Asquith, 5 Sept.1907 (Asquith papers, Ms.10 f.224).
 2. Asquith to Campbell-Bannerman, 10 Sept.1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms. 41210 f.293).
 3. Crewe to Campbell-Bannerman, 14 Sept.1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms. 41213 f.350).

showed some increase (34 as against 15 in August), 22 of these were in Meath, and they were in the main unaccompanied by any violence or mass demonstration. The number of listed outrages for September, 22, was considerably lower than for any of the previous six months, for which the average was 37.¹ Dougherty commented in early October that 'the country is fairly quiet; and cattle-driving on any extensive scale has almost ceased'. Ginnell's 'oratory' had encouraged 'a few ill-conditioned people' to open some gates in Meath, but 'the circumstances of tumult and disorder which accompanied cattle-driving in Galway and Roscommon were entirely absent'. By the end of September driving even in Meath had virtually ceased, and Ginnell had been 'muzzled', which Dougherty thought was probably the result of 'some remonstrance from the Meath graziers to the headquarters of the League'.²

In this assumption he was probably correct. Certainly the moderate members of the Irish party were of the opinion that with a sympathetic chief secretary in office and a royal commission report on the way, a demonstration of responsibility rather than of implacability was required from the Irish people. William Redmond warned that:

The news of every little disturbance was lapped up by the London Times and the orange press as eagerly as a cat lapped milk. They well knew these people wanted Irishmen to play their game.

3

-
1. See Monthly R.I.C. reports for 1907 (S.P.O.).
 2. Dougherty to Bryce, 12 Oct. 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015).
 3. William Redmond at Ennis, 6 Oct.1907 (W.F.J., 12 Oct.1907).

But in the country in general the Irish party were still riding the tiger of reaction against the liberal alliance. Where local feeling ran high, and where there were local men of great influence who favoured extreme courses, like John Fitzgibbon of Castlerea, they dared not apply the brake. But Ginnell's case was rather different. That he had lost the favour of the leading nationalists in Westmeath had become apparent in January 1907 when he had signally failed in his bid to replace Hayden as U.I.L. director for the division. The local paper, Hayden's Westmeath Examiner, was solidly against him and his doctrines, and the area was devoid of the large numbers of congests and evicted tenants who provided the hard core of discontent further west. Any success he attained would have to come as a result of an undisguised class appeal to the 'have-nots', the labourers and other landless men. As the inspector-general observed, 'many of the officers of the League [in Westmeath] are themselves graziers, and the number of small farmers living on poor holdings, who would be interested in such a movement, is small'.¹ If extremism was to be opposed, here was the place to do it. As well as being antagonistic to local vested interests, Ginnell's doctrines were sometimes in opposition to official party policy on the land question. He had on occasion encouraged the claims of landless men against the congests (though John Fitzgibbon had

1. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1726/S), report of the inspector-general, Aug.1907 (S.P.O.).

also been known to do this); further, he did not discriminate in his attacks on ranches between lands let under the eleven-month system and other types of non-residential holdings; in some cases indeed, cattle driving and other forms of intimidation were employed against tenant purchasers of grass farms. There were many other advocates of cattle driving within the Irish party, but all the others, including Sheehy, confined their attacks to the eleven-month farms. The inspector-general reported that 'Mr Ginnell does not discriminate, and he appears in this respect to go further than those who control the U.I.L. in Roscommon'¹.

Reasons why the party should wish to silence Ginnell were thus not lacking, but a wary eye had to be kept on the more active agrarians in the party and in the country. It must also be borne in mind that the leadership was extremely concerned about the state of the organisation, especially with regard to finance, and it is true to say that there was at least some conflict of interest here - aggressive agitation and intimidation certainly helped to infuse life into the U.I.L., in areas where it had been weakening, but it conflicted with the image of responsibility which the party wanted to present in England, made matters more difficult for a sympathetic chief secretary, and generally played'into the

1. Ibid.

hands of the unionists. For this reason the party attitude to its extremists, and to Ginnell in particular, was somewhat unclear during the autumn of 1907. Ginnell wrote to Redmond on October 14:

I am extremely glad to receive a copy of your circular dated 10 October with reference to the parliamentary fund. Assuming that it frees me, in my own constituency at least, from the restraint imposed by the standing committee letter of September 11, I will at once urge branches to arrange meetings which I will address with pleasure. My rallying circular of last August was prevented from having effect by the stopping of the anti-ranching movement. That movement so vitally concerns the people of these parts that if it is pushed forward they will cheerfully contribute for all purposes, while if it is damped off and the League left in the hands of the graziers, as at present, the people will naturally neither join nor contribute.

1

Sure enough, in October and November Ginnell was back on the platforms every Sunday. On November 3 at Bishops' Grave, Westmeath, he said 'he did not approve of any heavier blow than such a gentle touch as would make the bullocks run about five miles away', and a week later he was outside his constituency in neighbouring Meath, urging the people to 'hurl the cattle indiscriminately off the ranches' and to 'give up fruitless whining to parliament'.²

-
1. Ginnell to Redmond, 14 Oct.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Ginnell at Wilkinstown, Meath, 10 Nov.1907 (Times, 12 Nov.1907).

By the end of October, cattle-driving was beginning to assume serious proportions. Because November and May were the two key months for the commencement of the eleven-month tenancies, an increase in unrest at these times was not unusual, but now it was on a scale larger than for many years past. In October the number of drives increased to 58, and in November rose to 108.¹ Birrell, doubtless with one eye on the cabinet meeting planned for November 6, and the amount of time to be granted for Irish legislation in 1908, wrote C.B. an unusually long and uncharacteristically alarmist letter on October 30:

I think I must before we meet early next month give some account of the province which you gave unto me last February. I will only premiss that you can have it back whenever you want it. So far as 'Law and Order' are concerned Ireland is well enough save in one respect - Cattle driving on both sides of the Shannon has assumed dangerous and most discreditable dimensions - you may take it that during the last twelve months there have been (say) 170 drives on a considerable scale, and they show no signs of diminution. If they spread much further the state of things will become alarming. They are unaccompanied with personal outrage or even cruelty, but as intimidatory acts must be pronounced eminently successful.....If you ask what are we doing to stop it - I can only say, the best we can in the circumstances.....[He goes on to explain that convictions were difficult to obtain from juries, or from benches of magistrates, where the ex officio nationalist element tended to turn up in force]..... Here, one at once asks, where are the other magistrates? Why didn't they attend and support the R.M.s? The answer is cowardice of the most contemptible kind, and partly spleen - which

1. Statistics of cattle-driving, 1907 (P.R.O., C.O. 904. 121, folder no.I).

derives a malicious pleasure in seeing a liberal government in a hole. They want to force us to use the crimes act. If these magistrates did their duty and attended we should be able to grapple with what is not a really popular movement. The farmers who have bought under the act are no enemies to grazing and would support the local magistrates if they did their duty.....

....Then there is that pestilential ass Ginnell, a solitary unpopular figure, a very bad speaker, of no personal influence, hated by his own party, but a clever writer, and as the Irish Times is careful to report him verbatim, he gets the limelight full turned on him. In Westmeath he has undeniably instigated cattle-driving. What he wants is to be prosecuted and to defend himself in a state trial. He also longs to be sent to prison. To prison he would have gone long ago, but for the fear that if he is sent to prison more powerful persons (Hayden e.g.) would be compelled to take his place. This is a very real fear, and hitherto has prevailed.. No doubt the immunity granted to Ginnell has a bad side to it and has encouraged the agitation to a certain extent, still if I can avoid making him a hero I am anxious to do so. The party of 'Law and Order' have one remedy and one only - the crimes act!. Only proclaim Galway, Roscommon, Meath and the King's County, and the victory is won. I am satisfied this is nonsense..... We should be declaring war on the whole of Ireland.

1

When the cabinet met again, for the first time since the end of August, 'nearly the whole sitting was occupied with Irish affairs'. Birrell's university proposals were agreed to, and time was allotted for a

1. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 30 Oct.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41240 f.127).

land bill, which however could not be framed until Dudley's commission reported. As to cattle-driving, the cabinet once more decided that 'to proceed against these wild orators would only play their own game', though C.B.'s comment to the king, that 'it is not thought that speeches urging the practice have much effect', conflicts directly with what Birrell had just told him (that Ginnell had in Westmeath 'undeniably instigated'¹ driving). It was difficult for the government to admit this, or to deny that the movement was a 'popular' one, without prosecuting the orators. Burns recorded in his diary: 'Ireland. No crimes act. No imprisonment for the foolish Ginnell.....Birrell animated, humorous and very sensible'.²

The cabinet still seemed relatively unconcerned about the situation. But in the tory press a great campaign was being organised against Birrell's handling of the crisis. From July onwards, fuller and more prominent reports of Ginnell's speeches could be found in the London Times than in the Freeman or any of the liberal papers, and in mid-November that organ published a series of three 'feature' articles under the title 'The cattle-driving conspiracy', denouncing this 'lawless and immoral attack upon private property and public order'.³ Earlier in the

1. Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 6 Nov.1907 (Cab. 41/31/36).

2. Burns' diary, 6 Nov.1907 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46325).

3. Times, 16 Nov.1907.

year Horace Plunkett, again not the most impartial of judges, had written to Balfour that he had 'seen bad government' in his time, 'but never anything quite like Birrell's'.¹ Another active unionist, Ian Malcolm was busy trying to set up a Union Defence League to publicise disorder in Ireland.²

But even within the government camp, opinion was not solid. MacDonnell, who had been on vacation in the U.S.A. for some weeks, returned towards the end of November, and was far from happy at the turn events had taken:

In every way things had gone against my views: and it is clear that Mr Birrell has cut connection with the past system of administration: and has adopted one which I cannot otherwise describe than as letting the nationalist extremists go as they please. His hope, I fancy, is that the better judgment of the leaders will tell them that outrage will not pay. That hope is a broken reed to lean on.

3

About the same time, Lord Fitzmaurice, a member of the government, wrote to the editor of the Westminster Gazette, J.A.Spender, urging him to take a firm line against Irish disorder, before the situation became 'as bad as the 'eighties again':

The demand would seem to be that Ireland should again be cut up into the potato patches which caused the famine - It is most unfortunate that Birrell cannot

1. Plunkett to Balfour, 20 Apr.1907 (Balfour papers, B.M. Add.Ms. 49859 f.300).
2. Ian Malcolm to Balfour, 2 Oct.1907 (Balfour papers, Add.Ms.49859 f.205).
3. MacDonnell to his wife, 23 Nov.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.45).

cure himself of the sort of jocular tone which he adopts, whatever the subject....The position of Mr Cherry, who sits by the goodwill of Mr T.P.O'Connor for the Exchange division of Liverpool is not one which in these matters inspires confidence as the advisor of the crown in Irish matters. The whole of this movement is not agrarian so much as political. It is engineered by the local agitators, backed by the corner-boys and rowdies, who have got up a reign of terror....I am wondering how long Sir Antony MacDonnell and Mr Cherry will be able to act together. The whole thing could have been put down by an ordinary J.P. in three weeksI am beginning to think that literary men are bad administrators.

1

Previously, the Westminster Gazette, along with the rest of the liberal press, had made little mention of Irish disorder, but by the end of November the campaign of the unionists forced it to make some sort of reply. On November 23, and again on the 26th Irish disorder was the subject of its front-page leader, though the line taken was simply one of support for Birrell's refusal to adopt extreme measures, coupled with a plea to the nationalists to see where their true interests lay. But on December 3, the day after Fitzmaurice's letter to Spender, the Westminster's front page demanded:

How long can the government go on prosecuting the young men who drive the cattle, while leaving alone the older and more responsible man who incites them

1. Fitzmaurice to J.A.Spender, 2 Dec., 1907 (Spender papers, B.M. Add.Ms.+ 46389 f.150).

to drive cattle?.....There comes a point when if proceeding against Mr Ginnell gratifies Mr Ginnell, he must be gratified, or higher interests will suffer....if the situation is allowed to drift and the movement spreads, we may see the whole complicated edifice of the land purchase act plunged into confusion, with very serious consequences both to Ireland herself and to the British taxpayer.....The right course it seems to us is to take steps to bind Mr Ginnell to keep the peace.

1

Meanwhile the cabinet, although it had decided to take no new action against the cattle drivers, had realised that something further was required. Birrell's jocular manner, to which Fitzmaurice referred, combined with the general government silence and lack of activity in the matter, and especially Lord Denman's much publicised slip during the summer, was beginning to give the impression that the government were not concerned about the disorder in Ireland. Consequently, Birrell made two speeches in November, in which he stated his own and the government's position. At Southampton on the 12th he said that cattle driving had reached 'great proportions', and was 'an illegal, a reprehensible, and a dishonest method' of seeking redress of grievances, which would tend to prevent the working out of land purchase, but that he refused to be bullied

1. Westminster Gazette, 3 Dec.1907.

into a more extreme policy before he was convinced of the need for it.¹
 At Belfast ten days later he was more explicit: although, he said, 'his fingers were itching' to prosecute Ginnell, he felt that a few months imprisonment for that gentleman would only strengthen his reputation as an agitator and 'would not serve the only object they [the government] had in view, viz. the suppression of the offence'.² Redmond obligingly declared five days later that 'for every man put into jail under a coercion act for practices of that kind, seven would be ready to take his place'.³

But during the autumn things had become rather easier for the government from one point of view at least. Though driving had increased alarmingly, a way had at last been found of bringing the drivers within the operation of the law without resorting to coercion. Up to the end of October most drivers who had been apprehended were charged at petty sessions, or occasionally at assizes, with unlawful assembly. But convictions were hardly ever obtained. Of 18 cases (involving 150 people) dealt with at petty sessions during 1907, a conviction was obtained only in one case, involving five people.⁴ The results at assizes, even with a

-
1. Birrell at Southampton, 12 Nov. 1907 (Times, 13 Nov.1907).
 2. Birrell at Belfast, 22 Nov. 1907 (Times, 23 Nov.1907).
 3. Redmond at Merthyr, 27 Nov.1907 (Times, 28 Nov.1907).
 4. Memorandum on agrarian agitation by MacDonnell, 10 Jan.1908 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.372 f.60).

change of venue, were scarcely more encouraging. J.P.Farrell, who in August personally conducted a large drive near Longford with his umbrella, thereby attracting much publicity, was charged with his co-drivers at Wicklow Assizes in November, but the jury disagreed and the case had to be dropped.¹ One M.P. triumphantly declared 'cattle-driving might be a crime against the law, but they could not find twelve jurymen to say so'.² Thus, at the beginning of November, a new procedure was adopted against cattle drivers, following a circular issued from Dublin Castle to resident magistrates on September 24. This announced that the law officers had decided that, under a statute of Edward III, the practices of driving cattle against the will of the people and of destroying fences with the same intention were:

acts of such open violence as to constitute breaches of the peace, and that in such circumstances a constableshould forthwith bring the persons arrested before a justice of the peace and apply for sureties of the peace and good behaviour against him.

3

Drivers could thus be brought immediately before a single resident magistrate and asked to find sureties, failure to do which would automatically result in six months imprisonment. This procedure was used

1. Irish office; register of prosecutions, 1902-11 (P.R.O., C.O. 904.31) p.114.
2. J.P.Hayden at Boyle, Roscommon, 1 Dec.1907 (Times, 3 Dec.1907).
3. Dublin Castle circular to R.M.s, 24 Sept.1907 (P.R.O., C.O. 904.35) p.69.

against cattle-drivers on 30 occasions in 1907, involving 360 people, proceedings being successful in 25 cases involving 288 persons.¹ Denunciation of this procedure by nationalists continued for some time, and both they and the unionists attempted to maintain that it was in fact a more coercive method of enforcing order than the crimes act had been. But as the government pointed out, under the statute no man need go to prison, and he had not been convicted of any offence. Cattle driving showed no sign of abatement as a result of this procedure, but the government were at least enabled by it to bring drivers within the operation of the law. They were thus able to resist the demand for a return to the crimes act.

The attitude of the nationalist movement towards cattle-driving remained very mixed. One element strongly favoured it and to an extent instigated it, whilst another opposed it strongly enough to condemn it in public. Many nationalists M.P.s, however, adopted an ambivalent attitude, not exactly advocating it, but making it clear that they considered it to be a legitimate response to the government's failure to make the land act a success in many parts of Ireland. Redmond was most active on public platforms throughout the autumn, running the whole gamut of arguments

1. Memorandum on agrarian agitation by MacDonnell, 10 Jan.1908 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.372 f.60).

for home rule and seeking reasons why every class and interest in Ireland should espouse the national cause. But his speeches were mainly rambling historical accounts of Ireland's grievances, often touching little if at all of current politics.¹ In August Birrell told MacDonnell that 'Redmond's speeches are feeble and verbose, but his heart is evidently not yet bent on violent measures, and that I know is the view of most of the party'.² A few weeks later Birrell's opinion had crystallised further. He told the prime minister:

Redmond's position is a ticklish one. I think he has saved himself for the present, but only by the skin of his teeth. He has very little personal control - he would stop the cattle-driving if he could, but he can't and he know he can't.

3

At Portumna on October 6 Redmond encouraged the use of intimidation against the Clanricarde planters, but elsewhere he contented himself long into November with general enjoinders to the people to 'maintain a virile agitation'.⁴

1. They were later edited by J.G.S. MacNeill and published as a pamphlet (Dublin, Irish Press Agency, 1908).
2. Birrell to MacDonnell, 2 Sept. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.17).
3. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 30 Oct. 1907 (C.B. papers, Add. Ms. 41240 f.127).
4. Redmond at Portumna, co. Galway, 6 Oct. 1907 (Times, 7 Oct. 1907).

But most members of the Irish party made a bigger gesture towards the activists. Though we may concede the correctness of Birrell's assertion that Redmond would have liked to stop the cattle-driving, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that other influences in the movement at national level, possibly even Devlin, were less anxious to calm things down. For Ginnell's leading rival in the instigation of driving in Meath was David Sheehy M.P., who as chief organiser of the U.I.L., was in receipt of a salary from the movement, and therefore might have been expected to be eminently under the control of the leadership. Yet he consistently advocated driving long into 1908, even after Ginnell had been sent to prison and had lost much of his influence.¹ Other M.P.s were less frequent and regular in their advocacy of driving, but some of them were on occasion no less definite. When Sheehy told the people of Ballinvar, Meath, to drive the cattle if they wanted the eleven-month farms, J. Murphy M.P. supported his 'splendid advice'.² Others who advocated driving during the last months of 1907 included not only J.P. Farrell and Michael Reddy M.P.s and John Fitzgibbon, but also men like T.M. Kettle and Stephen Gwynn, as well as most M.P.s from the West and Midlands - W. Delany, P.A. Meehan, Dennis Kilbride, Patrick White and Haviland Burke.

1. Extracts from a number of Sheehy's speeches are included in Judicial division: intelligence notes, 1907-8 (C.O. 903.14).

2. J. Murphy at Ballinvar, Meath, 13 Oct. 1907 (Times, 15 Oct. 1907).

But by the end of November, as the agitation reached new heights, the forces of moderation seemed to feel a new strength, which may not have been totally unconnected with the news that Birrell had decided on a firm plan for a catholic university. The Church had previously been silent on cattle-driving, but speaking at Galway Cathedral on November 24 the Archbishop of Tuam declared that:

Cattle-driving was not only an unjust and immoral practice, but it was lamentable folly at the present time, when a sympathetic chief secretary had declared himself ready to do all in his power, not only to procure for the people a satisfactory settlement of the university question but also by providing more money to hasten the splitting up of non-residential holdings, which was the chief aim and anxiety of the cattle-driver.

1

The following Sunday all priests in the Tuam archdiocese were instructed to read out a letter from his grace denouncing the practice, and Bishop O'Dea at Loughrea explained that cattle-driving was a reserved sin.

A few weeks later in his lenten pastoral, the bishop of Elphin, though careful to stress that all legal agitation was permissible and that the ranches should be surrendered to the people, because their existence was a great temptation, declared that cattle-driving was morally wrong.

-
1. Archbishop Healy of Tuam at Galway, 24 Nov.1907 (Times, 27 Nov.1907).
 2. Bishop O'Dea of Clonfert at Loughrea, 1 Dec.1907 (Times, 4 Dec.1907).
 3. Bishop Clancy of Elphin at Sligo, 1 Mar.1908 (W.M.J. 7 Mar.1908).

Archbishop Walsh, either because he was slower to detect immorality, or because he was less willing than some of his colleagues to help the Irish leaders out of a tight corner, was more grudging in his denunciations.

At Dublin, on 13 December 1907, he said:

.....he should be slow to say a word that might be taken as giving sanction or encouragement to that particular form of lawlessness that was at present triumphing over the administration of the law in some districts. But was it any wonder that legal obligations should be esteemed so lightly by people in Ireland when those whose duty it was to show an example of respect for the law persevered in what they were told on the highest legal authority amounted to a continual disregard for legal duty.

1

From this time on the tide of expressed opinion turned quietly against the drivers. O'Dowd was perhaps the most explicit of the K.P.s.

In September he had been urging the people of Mayo to 'make it hot this winter for the government and every unreasonable grazier and grabber'.²

Yet speaking at a U.I.L. meeting in co.Sligo on the same day that Archbishop Healy made his declaration, he advised the crowd:

.....not to resort to the system of cattle-driving in the county. Mr Birrell he said was one of the best chief secretaries who ever held the position,

1. Archbishop Walsh in Dublin, 13 Dec. 1907 (Times, 16 Dec.1907).

2. J.O'Dowd at Rathduff, co.Sligo, 8 Sept.1907 (Times, 11 Sept.1907).

and they should give him at least breathing time.
 If they acted illegally by cattle-driving, they
 would drive Mr Birrell with disgust from the
 Irish office.

1

Although this remark attracted enough attention in the liberal press to become the subject of a cartoon in the Westminster Gazette, like the archbishop's statement, it was only briefly reported in the Freeman. A more devious method of putting forward O'Dowd's viewpoint was employed by J.Halpin M.P. He wrote a letter to the Freeman thanking his constituents for the 'quiet, peaceable, yet effective manner in which they induced the few holders of eleven-month tenancies to give up their lands', and added rather casually that:

as their hazel wands, in which there is such virtue
 in Clare, are not further required for the present,
 I hope that they will keep them over the mantelpiece
 pending momentous events for the people.

2

Others were even more cautious. Hayden's remark at Boyle on December 3, that the Irish people took their guidance on morals not from Mr Cherry or the judges but from their own teachers and consciences, has a less defiant ring when one recalls that it came only a few days after the local archbishop's denunciation of driving.³ When Ginnell made one of his

-
1. O'Dowd at Ballymote, co.Sligo, 24 Nov.1907 (Times, 26 Nov.1907).
 2. J.Halpin, letter to the F.J., 17 Dec.1907 (W.F.J., 28 Dec.1907).
 3. Hayden at Boyle, 1 Dec.1907 (Times, 3 Dec.1907).

extreme speeches at Moyvore, Westmeath, on December 15, Sir Walter Nugent M.P., following, said that he 'did not agree with him in most of the things he had said that day'¹. At Abbeyleix on December 22nd, Stephen Gwynn declared that 'until recently he had recommended men to drive cattle, but he now believed that Mr Birrell was a man whom people could trust. For that reason he did not advise anyone to drive cattle where it was a question of the grazing system, but where it was a question of the evicted tenants he urged the people to push the agitation home'. Following him, T.M.Kettle said that cattle-driving had brought the ranching system to its death-bed, but that Birrell should now be given a chance to show what he would do for Ireland.² At Castlerea on 19 January 1908 Kettle advised the people to be guided by Mr John Fitzgibbon in their use of the hazel wands.³ Fitzgibbon had a week previously 'asked the people to suspend for a short time any further drives, as Mr Birrell himself was going to have a cattle-drive by splitting up the wastelands and putting back the people'.⁴ Thus the majority of nationalist speakers had by the end of 1907 accepted the decision to relax the pressure of driving. Only a few extremists such as

-
1. Sir W.Nugent at Moyvore, Westmeath, 15 Dec. 1907 (Times, 17 Dec.1907).
 2. T.M.Kettle and S.L.Gwynn at Abbeyleix, 22 Dec.1907 (Times, 24 Dec.1907).
 3. Kettle at Castlerea, 19 Jan.1908 (Times, 21 Jan.1908).
 4. J.Fitzgibbon at Hillstreet, Roscommon, 12 Jan.1908 (W.F.J., 18 Jan.1908).

Sheehy and Reddy made no appeal for a respite, and John Roche, while agreeing that Birrell should be given a chance, thought that a 'fighting attitude' adopted by the people would help him best.¹ T.P.O'Connor, who had been silent throughout the crisis, declared (incorrectly) at Blackburn on 22 February 1908 that 'cattle-driving had practically come to an end'.²

Redmond, as leader, was forced to be more circumspect. His unity talks with O'Brien were an indication that he was intent on moderation,⁴ but they were part of a delicate manoeuvre, which was not at all popular in some quarters, and he consequently had to avoid any action which might be construed by his more extreme followers as a change of policy in order to mollify O'Brien. A straight denunciation of cattle-driving on his part might have had such an effect, and lost him more support in the west and midlands than he could hope to gain by reunion with the moderate Cork men. On the other hand, continued silence on the subject would only emphasise the weakness of his position. Thus, in a series of speeches in Britain at the end of November, he directed most of his remarks on the question of Irish disorder against the exaggerations of the unionists. The Times campaign against 'Irish crime', he said at Motherwell on December 1, was 'worthy of Pigott'.³ There was far more

-
1. J.Roche at Moylough, co.Galway, 6 Jan.1908 (W.F.J., 11 Jan.1908).
 2. T.P.O'Connor at Black burn, 22 Feb.1908 (W.F.J., 29 Feb.1908).
 3. Redmond at Motherwell, 1 Dec.1907 (Times, 2 Dec.1907).
 4. See *infra*, ch.6.

crime relatively in Britain than in Ireland, he claimed:

But whilst there was neither crime nor outrage, there was widespread impatience, and there was over certain sections of the country taking place constantly technical breaches of the strict letter of the law in the shape of what was called cattle driving. In no instance however had a single beast been injured, nor had there been an instance of malicious injury to property or life....No one regretted more than he that there should be breaches of the law, even in a good cause, but he asked himself how was the unrest and disturbance to be stopped.

1

Notwithstanding the hesitancy of Redmond's pronouncements, it was evident to the government and its supporters, if not to the tories, that although the disorder had not died down, official nationalist encouragement of it had virtually ceased. For The Times, which had been filling its pages with accounts of seditious speeches and disorder for three months or more, this was a great disappointment, which it pretended had not happened. Its Dublin correspondent reported defiantly on December 19:

I find no confirmation for statements which have been telegraphed to England to the effect that cattle-driving is to cease as suddenly as it began, and that by some obscure agreement between Dublin Castle and the nationalist party leaders, Mr Birrell is now to be given a "chance" in Ireland. Although no serious cattle drives have been reported during the last few days, it seems foolishly premature to assume that the

1. Redmond at Merthyr, 27 Nov.1907 (Times, 28 Nov.1907).

the practice has been definitely abandoned. Indeed, no such assumption can be made until Mr Redmond summons up courage to denounce cattle-driving with the same publicity with which Mr Ginnell advocated it. There is no hint of submission in Mr Sheehy's latest letter to the press.

1

The comment of the Westminster Gazette on the following day, though erring slightly on the side of optimism, was nearer the truth:

On the whole the situation tends to improve and not to grow worse. Mr Birrell is not faced by an organised movement with the Irish parliamentary party behind it. There is scarcely a responsible man in Ireland who supports Mr Ginnell's agitation; there are a great many responsible men who have openly disavowed it. Mr Ginnell himself can scarcely go on to a platform and advocate his peculiar views without running the risk of being publicly disowned by any colleague who may be with him. In the last few days there have been remarkable manifestations of sympathy with Mr Birrell from leading Irish nationalists, lay and clerical.

2

The belated imprisonment of Ginnell was both a symptom of and a stimulus to this development. On December 1 he made a speech at Kilskyre co. Westmeath, during the course of which he had urged the people to drive the cattle from certain lands which happened to be in the charge

1. Times, 20 Dec. 1907.

2. W.G., 20 Dec. 1907.

of the land judge's court. Judge Ross accordingly issued a writ against him, and Ginnell was sentenced in his absence to six months for contempt of court.¹ After a dramatic escapade he was apprehended by the police, and detained in Kilmainham until April 1908, when he was released on grounds of ill-health. It is impossible to resist the conviction that he allowed himself to be 'outwitted' deliberately. As a lawyer and a former U.I.L. official he would certainly have known all about the land judge's court and what lands were under its control, especially in his own part of the country. He had actually warned the people of Strokestown, back in August 1907:

If you attack an estate in the land judge's court you will be charged with contempt of court, not that the flies hunted the cattle, or that you drove the bullocks for the police....but that you meddled with an estate in his lordship's court.

2

Why did Ginnell thus bring himself deliberately under the jurisdiction of Judge Ross, a well known unionist and reactionary? It seems that Birrell's opinion, that Ginnell wanted to be jailed, was the correct view: having failed to goad the government into a prosecution by the extremism of his speeches, in desperation he took another way out. This theory is

1. W.F.J., 21 Dec.1907.

2. Ginnell at Strokestown, 11 Aug.1907 (Judicial division: intelligence notes, 1907-8 (C.O. 903.14) p.15.

supported by the time he chose to do it, as well as the circumstances. Following the spate of denunciations of driving by nationalists clerical and lay, it was clear that nationalist pressure on Ginnell to give up his campaign was likely to increase and that with the clergy openly against him he stood little chance. He therefore chose prison, both because it relieved him of the necessity of making a humiliating withdrawal or facing an embarrassing failure, and because there was an outside chance that his arrest might give a new boost to extremism.

In the event, he got little more than the minimum of sympathy and support from official nationalism, and the episode turned out most conveniently for the government. Asquith and Grey, and later Crewe and Haldane, now came forward and publicly associated themselves with Birrell's handling of Irish disorder.¹ The Daily Chronicle proudly declared that 'the resources of the ordinary law have proved equal after all to coping with Mr Ginnell, M.P.' and that although the Irish executive was not responsible for the prosecution (this was heavily stressed both by Judge Ross and the prosecuting counsel, who was, ironically, J.H.M.Campbell M.P.) 'to be sure they placed no obstacle in its way'.² The Westminster Gazette blundered at first by congratulating Birrell on having taken action against

-
1. Asquith at Aberdeen, 19 Dec.1907 and Grey at Berwick, 19 Dec.1907 (Times, 20 Dec.1907).
 2. Crewe at Watford, 9 Jan.1908 and Haldane at Dunbar, 9 Jan.1908 (Times, 10 Jan.1908).
 2. Daily Chronicle, 21 Dec.1907.

Ginnell, but corrected itself in later issues.¹ The nationalist leadership cannot have been any less grateful than the government for the mode of Ginnell's departure from the scene. Most adopted the same attitude as Stephen Gwynn, who denounced the autocratic powers possessed by Judge Ross (they were removed by legislation in 1908, following Irish party pressure) but pointed out that there was no love lost between Birrell and Ross, and no reason to associate the government with the prosecution.² The Tories, Gwynn said, hated Birrell as they had hated Gladstone!

The imprisonment of Ginnell and the declarations of the Church,^{the} combined with general disapprobation of the Irish party, ended the first stage of the crisis. The Irish party had decided that ultimately its policy was still that of tacit co-operation with the government, and the government was released from the possibility of wholesale imprisonment of M.P.s. But once started, the machine of disorder was not so easy to halt. The number of classifiable agrarian outrages per month in 1908 was consistently higher than it had been in 1907, let alone 1906, and the same holds true of cattle-driving for the first nine months of the year. There were 681 listed drives in 1908, compared with 390 in 1907, and May 1908, with 139 drives, was by far the worst month of all.³

1. W.G., 14 Dec.1907.

2. Gwynn at Nenagh, 12 Jan.1908 (Times, 14 Jan.1908).

3. Figures taken from Monthly R.I.C. reports, 1908 (S.P.O.).

So if the government's relations with the Irish party were a little easier by the beginning of the 1908 session, the same could not be said of their relations with the unionists over the state of Ireland. In both the lords and the commons fierce attacks were made on Birrell's administration of the law, which continued, spasmodically but still fiercely, until the 1909 budget swept all else off the stage. These attacks, however, tended to produce a more solid liberal front, and drew public expressions of support for Birrell from even the 'moderates' in the liberal cabinet, as well as from the reputedly 'Roseberyite' Westminster Gazette.¹ Birrell meanwhile was building up some sort of public defence before the onslaught, and at Bristol on 28 January 1908 he tried to tie the whole problem in with the house of lords issue:

The whole trouble in disputes in Ireland arose out of the land.....A measure went to the house of lords. Who were they to arbitrate in such disputes? They were parties to the disputes. What had they done in the past 25 years? They had mutilated bills, and thereby had imposed on the chief secretary a great difficulty. There was in consequence of their action discontent and dissatisfaction, and sympathisers declined to return a verdict against the people who were charged. Then, said Mr. Birrell, the house of lords says to me "Coward, scoundrel, why don't you enforce the law?" I say in reply "Why don't you pass our measures?"

2

But in private Birrell was more pessimistic. He wrote to Bryce on January 30 that 'the house of lords is clamouring for my head on

1. W.G., 22 Jan.1908.

2. Birrell at Bristol, 28 Jan.1908 (Times, 29 Jan.1908).

a charger' and that 'the figures supplied by the police are not encouraging'¹. Three weeks previously, MacDonnell had presented a memorandum on the state of Ireland in which he anticipated most serious disorder unless there was a 'firm enforcement of the existing law regardless of persons' in the midlands, and a serious warning that unless there was immediate improvement in Galway, Roscommon and Clare, they would be proclaimed under the crimes act.² It is ironic that MacDonnell, who had been so adamant that he would not serve under the Tories to administer a coercionist regime, was now on the point of urging such a course on a liberal government. His memorandum was certainly an indictment of Birrell's policy. But no action was taken as a result of it - by this time MacDonnell was having little or no impact on policy-making, and was really waiting around until such time as he could retire without embarrassing the government by his departure.

Irish 'crime' meanwhile continued. Sheehy advocated driving throughout 1908, as did Ginnell after his release. At Ballinalack on July 5, the latter said that:

...the fly season was setting in, and there would be nothing extraordinary if the cattle all went mad. There should be no slackening of their agitation so long as there was a hazel in the hedges of Westmeath.....They should force Mr Birrell either to flood the country with police and use coercion, or on the other hand to release the land for the men and women of Ireland.

3

-
1. Birrell to Bryce, 30 Jan.1908 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11016).
 2. Memorandum on agrarian agitation by MacDonnell, 10 Jan.1908 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.372 f.60).
 3. Ginnell at Ballinalack, Longford, 5 July 1908 (Times, 8 July 1908).

Ginnell was becoming an isolated force however, and when he spoke at Finea on 2 August 1908 he was interrupted with cries of 'down with sinn¹ feiners and those who associate with sinn fein'. The high point of driving was reached in May. At Ballinasloe on the 12th, 125 men were charged with driving and unlawful assembly, and all were bound over for twelve months; and at Tuam two days later, a further 27 were sentenced after 100 men had taken part in a drive, overwhelming the force of police present.² On May 28, at Birrell's request, the cabinet agreed to a further increase of 350 in the R.I.C., in addition to the increase of 400 the previous year, which brought the force back to its old 1904-5³ strength.

It was not until the last quarter of 1908 that the monthly number of drives fell below the equivalent 1907 figures. But by 1909, as the new land bill began its course through parliament, the problem was fading away. This rather confused picture suggests that the Irish party and the central U.I.L. organisation did not have much control over the agitators in the localities during the period, or at least that they were not prepared to risk exercising it. The trouble on the land died down,

-
1. Ginnell at Finea, Westmeath, 2 Aug.1908 (Times, 4 Aug.1908). These gibes were not totally without foundation: William Ganly, one of Ginnell's closest associates in Westmeath, was a local sinn feiner; and at a meeting of the parliamentary party in October 1908 Ginnell tried to move a resolution that only a portion of the Irish party should attend parliament at any one time, the remainder to be 'on active serviee' in Ireland (W.F.J., 10 Oct.1908).
 2. W.F.J., 16 May 1908.
 3. Asquith to the king, 28 May 1908. (Cab. 41/31/58).

not when M.P.s began to hint rather coyly that it should, nor when the priests ordained it, but when the government fashioned the Dudley report into a bill which was to the west's liking.

4. Towards the amendment of the land act, 1907-9.

The Dudley commission had been expected to report early in 1907. But as the commissioners moved from town to town in the west accumulating a vast mass of evidence (twelve large volumes were published) it became apparent that the report would be a long time coming and that, with so many measures competing for government time, a contentious Irish land Bill would have to wait its turn. In order to pacify their more impatient followers in the west by creating an illusion of activity, the Irish party had introduced a land bill of their own in April 1907, which got as far as a second reading. Birrell had been very much in sympathy with this measure, and felt that if there was time the government should introduce a 'drastic land bill' in 1908,¹ though he did not see much chance of its passing in the house of lords.² MacDonnell on the other hand felt

1. Birrell to MacDonnell, 29 Aug.1907 (MacDonnell papers, c.350 f.15).

2. Birrell to Bryce, 17 June 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).

that the government should 'steer clear of a drastic land bill' if by that was meant anything on the lines of the Irish party's bill: universal compulsion, he thought, was a different matter from compulsion to relieve¹ congestion in Connaught, and would alienate the landlords altogether'. Birrell was concerned less about this last factor than with the continued tolerance of the Irish party. He told Campbell-Bannerman on 30 October 1907 that 'unless our programme contains something too good to be lost, we must bid farewell to Irish support'. He asked for a land bill 'along the lines which Dudley will suggest', admitting that it might be thrown out by the lords: 'but that should not frighten us'².

The royal commission did not finally report until May 1908, by which time a new prime minister was in office, and the bulk of parliamentary time for the year had already been collared by the licensing bill, the Irish university bill, and the third attempt to amend the English education act. But a number of reasons - social, political and financial - made it necessary for the government to demonstrate immediately the seriousness of their intentions with regard to Irish land. The radical nature of Lord Dudley's recommendations, when they finally appeared, made

-
1. MacDonnell to Birrell, typed copy dated 'September 1907' (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.354 f.7).
 2. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 30 Oct.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41240 f.127).

it more difficult to resist nationalist demands. The commissioners found that conditions in the west of Ireland were still extremely bad - 'the poor mainly support the destitute' - and that, although the congested districts board did good work, it was hampered both by the provisions of its originating act and by the interaction of later developments, especially the Wyndham act, on those provisions. The commissioners agreed unanimously on three principles of action: they considered that the board's policy of enlarging holdings to an economic standard was a viable one and should be continued; they approved of the compulsory purchase of untenanted and tenanted land to facilitate this; and they agreed on a method of fixing the price for compulsorily acquiring land. The adoption of these principles involved the break-up of the grazing farms, at least in the west; a large scheme of migration and the acquisition of as much 'untenanted' land as possible from the landlords and large tenants; and the increase in the income of the C.D.B. from £86,000 to £315,000. If all the 'congests' were to be satisfied, there would be little or no land available for¹ 'landless men'.

Thus far the commissioners were in general agreement, but on the question of machinery to carry out the principles there was disagreement

1. Report of the royal commission on congestion, final report, 1908 [Cd.4097], xlii. 729. Hereinafter referred to as the Dudley report.

between MacDonnell and his colleagues. The majority recommended that the whole area proposed as 'congested' (eight whole counties, plus part of West Cork) be entrusted to the C.D.B., with control over all land transactions in that area. They also suggested a revision of the C.D.B. so as to include nine members elected by county councils, and three paid members, in addition to the existing nominated and ex officio members.¹ But MacDonnell agreed with none of this. For some time he had objected to the degree of influence the bishop of Raphoe was exercising over Lord Dudley,² and he privately regarded the draft report as 'a very ill-constructed, ill-written document'.³ He submitted a minute of dissent to the final report in which he advocated as the best policy the abolition of the C.D.B., and the divisions of its functions between the estates commissioners and the D.A.T.I. He objected to the blanket application of relief to whole counties, and wanted more control and direction of finances. He would not give the powers claimed for the board even to a department of state directly responsible to parliament, he said. He felt that the estate, not the county or the electoral division, should be the unit of congestion, and

-
1. The C.D.B., as it had existed from 1891-1908, was an unpaid board consisting of 8 crown nominees, the chief secretary (or his deputy), and a land commissioner. It controlled one-ninth of the population of Ireland, and one-sixth of the area, which was based on individual electoral divisions whose average rateable value came below a £5 'poverty' line (R.B. MacDowell The Irish administration, 1801-1914 (London, 1964) pp.220-2).
 2. MacDonnell to his wife, 23 Jan.1908 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.220 f.65): 'I believe he Dudley will ruin himself with his party and with moderate men thro' his acceptance of the bishop's advice'.
 3. MacDonnell to his wife, 7 Mar.1908 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.56).

whilst he agreed that the difficult policy of migration should be persevered with, added:

I cannot agree with my colleagues in thinking it in the least likely that such an undertaking can be carried to a successful end with expedition and economy by an independent and semi-elective board composed of heterogeneous elements and subject to political and local pressure of all kinds.

Failing the abolition of the C.D.B., MacDonnell wanted it retained with no elected members but one paid member, with the estates commissioners¹ buying all the land, at the instance of the C.D.B. in certain cases.

The Freeman welcomed the majority report as 'thorough and sound' and minimised MacDonnell's viewpoint - 'the objection has nothing in it but² distrust of popular representation'.

○ On the main principles, at least, there was agreement: relief of congestion, compulsory purchase, break-up of the grasslands, and a large increase in treasury grants for the congested areas. Birrell did not think even the landlords would object to these principles, he advised the cabinet on 2 June 1908:

1. MacDonnell's minute of dissent, Dudley report, pp.153-169.

2. W.F.J., 30 May 1908.

provided always they are satisfied that they are likely to obtain what they consider to be a fair price for their lands, whether tenanted or untenanted. The game is up so far as the retention of land by the landlords is concerned; it is all a question of price, and in that question the British treasury is greatly involved.....

I cannot hope to get through the winter in Ireland unless I take a first step of some kind and give Ireland something to talk about.....a bill of course could not be proceeded with beyond a second reading, but it would be subject matter for discussion in Ireland between landlords and tenants, between the followers of Mr Dillon and the followers of Mr Wm O'Brien, and although I am not very sanguine about it, I still think it possible that some agreement might be come to between these parties, although doubtless any such agreement would be one not likely to recommend itself offhand to the British treasury... [but]I cannot part with the question without reiterating the opinion I have already expressed more than once in the cabinet, that in my judgement the present situation in Ireland is one capable of very dangerous development, and that past experience teaches us that we do not in the long run secure economy by simply refusing to listen to Irish demands.

1

A few days later at Leeds, Redmond added credibility to Birrell's private warnings with a demand for a compulsory land bill coupled with a threat that if one was not introduced the government 'will have to face risks and dangers in the coming time of winter which no wise minister could possible contemplate with equanimity'.² But a broad hint was dropped that

-
1. The Dudley report on congestion, a cabinet paper by Birrell, 2 June 1908 (Cab. 37/93/71).
 2. Redmond at Leeds, 7 June 1908 (W.F.J., 13 June 1908).

initially it was the gesture which was required more than the finished statute, a viewpoint which was also implicit in the Freeman comment on June 20. The land bill, that journal observed, 'must be a far-reaching and complicated measure.....in fact [it] would be a good session's work'.¹ A month later, in a speech at Port Sunlight, Birrell greatly eased the position of moderate nationalists by making the required declaration, in handsome terms:

Although he was no liberal, no radical, no land grabber, [Lord Dudley] combined with his companions in coming to the unanimous conclusion that the poor people were right and the government were wrong. This was some justification for the demand they had made, and entitled the government to go forward in that direction and to introduce at the earliest possible moment legislation - not for carrying out radical designs, evil communications and predatory schemes, but the recommendations of the committee presided over by Lord Dudley. That had ever been the curse of our dealings with Ireland - that we postponed reforms until the last moment instead of taking them boldly by the hand and leading the way in the path of amelioration.

2

Dillon indicated the way in which the proposed measure might be used to hitch nationalist sentiment directly to the government's coming struggle with the lords. He told a meeting in King's County:

1. W.F.J., 20 June 1908.

2. Birrell at Port Sunlight, 18 July 1908 (W.F.J., 25 July 1908).

We cannot force the house of lords, but you can...
 I say that if this winter we should fail to secure
 a land bill during the autumn session, the country
 will know where to lay the responsibility.

1

But the house of lords were in this case under some compulsion themselves. Without fresh legislation, the bonus on sales under the 1903 act would cease to be payable on 1 November 1908, whilst it was also known that the general financial arrangements made in 1903 would not hold up much longer. Wyndham's arrangement had been based on a calculation that the land of Ireland could be purchased for the tenants for a total of £100 million, plus £12 million bonus to bridge the gap between what the tenant could afford to pay and what the landlord could afford to accept. The £12 million ^{was} present from the British treasury, and the £100 million was to be provided by the sale of 2 3/4' Irish land stock on the money-market, backed by the credit of the British treasury. Any losses on flotation of through default on annuities were to be covered out of the Ireland development grant, and anything in excess of this was to fall on the Irish rates.
 2

-
1. Dillon at Clara, Kings co., 27 Sept.1908 (W.F.J., 3 Oct.1908).
 2. The Ireland development grant was a sum of about £160,000 p.a. credited to Ireland by the British treasury in lieu of the money spent in England and Wales under the 1902 education act. Nationalists maintained that this money should have been ear-marked for Irish education.

But, as Bryce later recorded, 'George Wyndham's plan seems to have been far too sanguine'¹. It became apparent fairly quickly that £100 million would be nothing like enough to purchase the land of Ireland, and the final figure looked like being rather nearer £200 million. This meant in addition that the £12 million treasury grant would not be enough to pay a 12% bonus in each case. Critics of the Wyndham act attributed this error in estimation to the 'vast' increase in the price of land since 1903 under the operation of the zones system. Furthermore, Irish land stock did not produce the required millions at anything like par: 'known as 'bog stock', it acquired the reputation of not being a good investment, though it was in fact as safe as the British treasury. By 1907 there was extreme concern about this on all sides, since the backing of the Irish rates was intended to cover minor costs and occasional defaults only, not to provide a large scale subsidisation of the stock. The Times reported in July 1907 that the land act:

threatens to break down altogether in regard to the issue of stock. The stock is a 2 3/4% stock absolutely guaranteed by the British government, but for some reason or other it has always stood several points lower than on purely financial grounds it ought to do. On the first issue of £5 million stock there was a loss of £475,000, and the chancellor of the exchequer stated that, had he made a fresh issue last month, he could not have got a better price for it than 83.

2

-
1. Bryce to E.Blake, 16 May 1908 (Blake papers, on microfilm in N.L.I., p.4681 f.17).
 2. Times, 8 July 1907.

In the commons in July 1907 Birrell admitted that only £90,000 p.a. of the development grant still remained between the ratepayers and a heavy loss, and Redmond estimated that the burden would descend within two or three years. Asquith and Birrell agreed that something should be done to prevent the brunt of the burden falling on the Irish ratepayers, and expressed the intention of settling the matter during 1908.¹

At the end of December 1907, Walter Runciman, financial secretary to the treasury, invited Redmond to nominate one or two witnesses to represent the Irish party view before a treasury committee which was examining the problem. Dillon thought that Sexton should be asked to go, though if he did 'it would perhaps be best to send one other witness on our behalf'.² But Sexton refused, and although other nationalist financial experts such as Bishop Kelly of Ross and Robert Donovan of the Freeman were available, Dillon felt it would be better to send no witness:

Now that Sexton has refused.....[The witness would be]cross heckled in a committee room by the treasury experts - He might be trapped into all kinds of admissions which would play the devil with us hereafter, when we come to deal with the treasury scheme.

3

-
1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.176 cols.978-86, 1010-18, 1025-9.
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 31 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Dillon to Redmond, 1 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).

Dillon's change of view was probably not a little influenced by the fear of a committed party being exposed to the criticism of an uncommitted Sexton. Redmond accordingly declined to send a representative, though¹ assuring Runciman of his co-operation in private.

The treasury committee reported in February 1908 (though its findings were not published until April 8). To clear agreements already pending (£40 million) it proposed that no public issue of 2 3/4% stock should be attempted for some years, but that a certain amount, say £4 million p.a., should be provided by the national debt commissioners, and, when this was exhausted in any one year, the landlords should be paid in stock at a minimum rate of 92 (i.e. They would be paid £108. 14. 0. in stock for every £100 worth of land) or wait until cash was available for them. For future agreements a new stock would be issued at 3%, which would only be sold at par. Purchasers' annuities would therefore be higher under the new system,² but a recurrence of the basic problem would be avoided. Sexton, in a memorandum to Redmond, calculated that this method of dealing with pending agreements would still place a heavy burden, something like £70,000 p.a., on the Irish rates for 68¹/₂³ years. The general council of Irish county

-
1. Redmond to W.Runciman, 3 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).
 2. A good summary of the treasury committee proposals is contained in Redmond's 'Note of an interview with Runciman, 3 Mar.1908' (Redmond papers).
 3. 'Mr Sexton's memo' on land purchase finance, n.d. (Redmond papers).

councils passed a resolution that the treasury report:

appears to us to contain certain recommendations the adoption of which by H.M.G. would be wholly incompatible with the fulfilment of the promises made to a deputation of this council in November last to the effect that the ratepayers of Ireland, whose interests this council is charged to safeguard, will be protected from all losses arising from the operation of the land purchase acts, save losses that may arise from defaults in payment of the purchase annuities.

1

This was not surprising, since the treasury committee's terms of reference had been to find a solution of the problem without imposing further burdens on the treasury. As for the increased annuity rate, the committee felt that a purchasing tenant tended to look not at the overall price he would be paying for the land, but at the reduction represented by the difference between his annual repayments and his previous annual rent. If the purchaser held out for the same percentage reduction as had obtained for sales under the 1903 act, the increased interest rate would make no difference to him, and the landlord would have to take a lower price.² Evidently what was in the treasury mind was an attempt to cover losses out of the landlord's profit. But, in view of the increase in land prices since 1903, the Freeman doubted whether the purchaser would in fact be able to secure the same reduction.³

-
1. W.F.J., 2 May 1908.
 2. Report of the treasury committee on Irish land purchase finance, 8 Apr. 1908 (W.F.J., 11 Apr. 1908).
 3. W.F.J., 11 Apr. 1908.

The Irish party met to discuss these proposals on April 28, a meeting which in effect marked the end of the 'reunited Irish party'. William O'Brien divided the meeting on a resolution for a conference with the landlords to find a way round 'the treasury plan for the suspension of land purchase'. He wanted parleys with the landlords with a view to an onslaught on the treasury, rather than parleys with the treasury to with a view to onslaught on the landlords - a course which incidentally would have restored his ascendancy as a negotiator. Without a conference, he argued, the landlords would obstruct a settlement.¹ But the Freeman did not think so:

Irish landlords have been notoriously foolish on many occasions, but they will beat all previous records if they obstruct the measures to be taken to relieve the deadlock in finance, and make still available the remnant of the bonus that will no longer be payable after November 1 unless a new arrangement is made.²

O'Brien's motion was defeated by 42 to 15 (the inflated size of his minority was an indication of the extent of the dissensions within the official party), and a party committee was set up. It reported on June 25 that the treasury report was 'profoundly unsatisfactory in a number of ways'. It called for an increase in the staff of the estates commission

1. W.F.J., 2 May 1908.

2. Ibid.

so as to push land transfer along at a quicker rate than the treasury had proposed; it demanded that loss on flotation for pending agreements should be met by an imperial charge, and that the tenants' annuities should not be increased: and it called for an increase in the bonus grant to cover 12% of the total cost of land transfer (i.e. not simply 12% of £100 million). Finally, the committee demanded that financial reform should be included in a general amending land bill based on compulsion. The bonus, it was urged, should be rearranged so as to be in an inverse proportion to the price obtained for the land.¹

On July 15 the problem was debated in the house of lords. Lord Donoughmore echoed the Irish party's complaints about the slow rate of progress and called for the expansion of the estates commission. He also expressed the opinion that loss on flotation could not be covered without the intervention of the treasury. But there agreement with the nationalist point of view ceased. Both Donoughmore and the more moderate Lord Dunraven considered that cash must continue to be the basis - the landlord who accepted 2 3/4% (or even 3%) stock at 92 when other investments could yield 3 3/4% or 3 1/2% would be a fool, especially when the stock was fact not selling at 92 but around 84 or 85. Dunraven further objected to any change in the annuity rate, while Donoughmore threatened that any

1. Irish party report on land purchase finance, 25 June 1908 (Redmond papers)

revision of the bonus rate 'will absolutely stop land purchase in Ireland'.¹
 For the government, Lord Crewe stated that they were 'not prepared to find any more of the tax payers' money for the working of this act'. He regretted that it had not been decided in 1903 to pay the landlords in stock from the start.² In the course of his speech Donoughmore had sought to explain the reason for the breakdown of the act. The Freeman had an answer for him:

It is the fault of all those politicians, officials, and landlords who conspired, confederated, and agreed, in the year 1902 or before it, to cut down the annuity rate payable by the tenants in order that prices might be artificially raised against them. It is far easier to depart from sound finance than to return to it; and return to the sounder conditions is not possible now unless both the landlords and the exchequer are prepared to recognise their responsibility for what has happened.

3

O'Brien's opposition to the way the Irish party was tackling the land purchase problem came into the open at last in August. In a speech at Cork on the 5th he made a blistering attack on those who were 'muzzling him', and on the government who were attempting to go back on the bargain of 1903. Any more party unity he said would be 'unity of death

1. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.192 cols. 796-803, 823-4.

2. Ibid., cols.818, 821.

3. W.F.J., 25 July, 1908.

for the Irish cause'. Of the government's plan he commented that, 'since the treaty of Limerick was broken with Ireland there never was a worse act of perfidy'. This he attributed to the fact that the chancellor of the exchequer had been allowed to form the impression that 'some of the most eminent representatives of Ireland were not in a violent hurry about land purchase'¹.

Much of what he said was nonsense, in that he refused to recognise that the 1903 act had broken down, that £80 million had already been spoken for and only half of the land sold, and that the money had to be found somehow. But his attack was nonetheless a dangerous one. As it happened, land purchase in Cork had gone better than in some areas; it was hard to deny that any new financial arrangements would be less attractive to the landlords; and it was difficult to believe that they would be more beneficial to the tenants. The Irish party were thus thrown back on the defensive - they were required to make a firm stand against O'Brien's attacks in the Irish countryside, and at the same time give the appearance of standing firm against the government at Westminster. As W.F.Bailey told Bryce on September 22, 'Wm.O'Brien is making the situation very difficult for the Irish party, and chaos seems to threaten.....it is

1. O'Brien at Cork, 5 Aug. 1908 (W.F.J., 15 Aug.1908).

difficult to say what will come of it all'.¹ A few weeks after O'Brien's Cork speech, a party of 'O'Brienites' attacked the platform at a U.I.L. meeting in county Limerick, as a result of which T.M.Kettle had the opportunity to demonstrate his fighting qualities, and Michael Joyce M.P. received substantial injuries.

But against O'Brienite criticisms the Irish party had one very powerful weapon, in the failure of the existing act in the west. In the autumn of 1908 they made a determined effort to tie the problem of western congestion firmly to the problem of purchase. Speaking in Dublin on October 21 Redmond declared:

We are not against the progress of purchase: we are anxious to facilitate it.....but we decline to facilitate that process unless accompanied on the part of the landlords by a willingness to generally amend the act and to provide for a settlement of congestion.

2

The Freeman directed its fire more directly at O'Brien, in attacking:

....the readiness displayed to abandon the congested districts to their fate. An attempt is made to arouse the cupidity and selfishness of the rest of Ireland against the claims of these unfortunate areas, and to represent their claims as an obstructive interference with the rights of the wealthier provinces.

3

1. W.F.Bailey to Bryce, 22 Sept.1908 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).
2. Redmond at Dublin, 21 Oct.1908 (W.F.J., 31 Oct.1908).
3. W.F.J., 24 Oct.1908.

Birrell had already promised that a general land bill would be presented on the basis of the Dudley report, and at the end of October 1908 a small cabinet committee was appointed to discuss details.¹

Birrell circulated to them a memorandum discussing the main questions raised by the Dudley report. He warned that if a bill was not at least introduced, 'there will undoubtedly be disturbances of different kinds in Ireland this winter'. He explained that the present C.D.B. area contained 85,000 holdings, 74,500 of which were under £10 valuation, and that the average of those under £10 was £3. 17. 0. If the C.D.B. area was widened to the limits proposed by Dudley, there would be 131,000 holdings under £10. Of the constitution of the C.D.B., Birrell said:

Nothing can be more unsatisfactory than the present constitution.....It is always at loggerheads with the treasury; it is a purely nominated board; it contains a bishop and a priest from the same part of the country; it has no representative character, directly or indirectly; it meets once a month; and is subject to a very sporadic interference by the treasury at different times when things go really badly. It is practically managed by its chief land inspector, Mr Doran, and by the bishop and the priest, who are always ready to attend its meetings, and know precisely what they want, and do their best to get it. From my experience as an ex-officio member of the board, I entertain no doubt whatever that there ought to be two paid members, and I also think, having regard to the nature of the work done, that some representative element must be merged into

1. Asquith to the king, 28 Oct.1908 (Cab. 41/31/69).

it, in order to give it greater weight than attaches to a bureaucratic board appointed by the government.

As to compulsory purchase for the relief of congestion, there could be no doubt: 'compulsion in Ireland has now really become a matter of price, and who is to fix it. Everybody except Lord Clanricarde is ready to sell, and I dare say Lord Clanricarde would accept a sum were it offered him in sovereigns and did he think it sufficient'¹.

A further paper was put before the cabinet committee a few days later, containing specific proposals. Birrell's plan for the constitution of the board came midway between the existing system and Dudley's proposals. Birrell retained two of Dudley's three paid members, and included four elected members, rather than nine. As to compulsion, he thought it was futile to attempt to fix the principles by which a judge was to determine price, and favoured the arrangement made under the evicted tenants act: an appeal from the C.D.B. or the estates commission² to the judicial commissioner.

On November 4 the cabinet met again and decided that a statement would be presented to the house on the 23rd.³ That afternoon the prime

1. 'Questions raised by the Dudley report', cabinet paper by Birrell, 22 Oct. 1908 (Cab. 37/95/130).
2. 'Irish land bill: heads of clauses', cabinet paper by Birrell, 29 Oct. 1908 (Cab. 37/95/136).
3. Asquith to the king, 4 Nov. 1908 (Cab. 41/31/70).

minister rather surprisingly announced to the commons that if the government's proposals met with general approval in both houses 'it is at least possible that the bill may become law this session'¹. This was a remarkable statement, coming seven weeks before the end of a session in which parliament were about to go into a final struggle on the great licensing bill. Perhaps Asquith had been overcome by the consensus which earlier in the year greeted Birrell's university bill. At all events his hope came nowhere near realisation.

By November 7 Birrell was able to give Redmond an account in some detail of the agreement reached in the cabinet on the various aspects of the bill. Loss on flotation of stock for pending agreements (and for future ones if necessary) would be covered by the treasury, who would also sanction an expansion of the land commission in the hope that it might progress towards an ultimate target of £10 millions' worth of sales per year. As to the bonus, the 'prevalent view' was that it should be graduated, with an average of 5' (as against the existing 12. flat rate): it would, thought Birrell be 'difficult to get anything more'. The income of the C.D.B. would probably be raised to £250,000 p.a. and compulsory powers granted. But there was to be no surrender to the views of Dillon and the Freeman on the zones:

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.195 col.1239.

I can't find anybody connected with the land commission or any of our legal hands - e.g. the Att.Gen. or the Solctr.Gen. - who are in favour of the abolition of the zones. To abolish the zones and at the same time to increase the staff, is simply to take away with one hand what you are giving with the other and to have the pace of the office just where it was. I agree that the upshot of these proposals is to slacken direct sales - but it won't do to take a step which would make it appear that ours was the hand that slew them - From all I hear it really would be an unpopular thing, and as at present instructed, I think an unnecessary thing. If it was made plain that it was the duty of the estates commissioners to inspect whenever they had any case for inspection that would seem to be sufficient. My own belief is that the prodigious efforts made by the landlords to collar the bonus within the last few months have 'scraped the platter clean' - and that for some time to come land purchase will mainly proceed by sales either to the C.D.B. or to the E.C., whether by agreement or with compulsory powers, if we can get these made law, which of course is doubtful.

1

On November 13 Birrell circulated another paper to the cabinet.

It was now apparent, he said, that the total cost of the land to be transferred was not Wyndham's £100 million, but between £160 million and £180 million. Taking the lower estimate, unless the law was changed an extra £528,000 p.a. would fall on the Irish rates. As to the bonus, landlords had rushed to lodge their agreements before November 1, thinking to ensure their 12½ bonus (there were £7 millions' worth of lodgments in one week). Birrell did not consider that in law these men were entitled to the bonus, but felt that it might be wise to include provision for them to receive it under the new bill: 'this will give us some leverage in the

1. Birrell to Redmond, 7 Nov.1908 (Redmond papers).

carriage of the bill'. The future bonus Birrell felt was the most vital point of all. There was no doubt that the new system should include a bonus graded in inverse proportion to the number of years' purchase, but the point in dispute was what the average bonus should be. Birrell had told Redmond on November 7 that 5' would probably be settled on. But on the 13th he asked the cabinet to agree to a larger figure. The presumption must be that Redmond had remonstrated with him meanwhile. Birrell now presented a very strong case for the retention of the existing percentage (12) as an average: 'the whole thing is, I admit, something of an outrage on the economic conscience, but it is in my judgment too late to reform it. Unless the future bonus is dealt with generously, there is no chance whatsoever of any bill passing the lords'¹. The chancellor of the exchequer, however, made a strong protest about this, and the new bonus arrangement was left undecided.²

On November 21 Redmond wrote to Birrell, perhaps with an eye on the latter's unfortunate performance in introducing the Irish council bill, to ensure that he realised what, from the Irish point of view, were the points to be emphasised in his speech to the house. These Redmond considered to be the expansion of the land commission so that it could handle £10 million p.a., and the fact that the treasury had agreed to lift

-
1. 'Proposed Irish land bill', cabinet paper by Birrell, 13 Nov.1908 (Cab. 37/96/136).
 2. 'Irish land purchase finance', cabinet paper by Lloyd George, 17 Nov.1908 (Cab. 37/154).

the entire loss on flotation off the shoulders of the Irish rate-payers:

I hope you will make this quite plain, and the further point that, without legislation, no addition whatever can be made to the £12 million provided by the act of 1903. I consider this all the more important to emphasise in view of the fact which Dillon has just told me, that you intend by notice in the Gazette to reduce the bonus on future transactions to 3%. This ought to exercise a powerful influence on the landlords, when they realise that, if they do not allow a satisfactory bill to pass, they will get no more than 3 on future transactions, whereas the government in their bill propose (as I take it for granted) to make a very substantial increase of the £12 million if their bill is passed.

1

Two days later the bill was introduced into the commons.

Birrell explained that the financial dangers of a slump in stock had been imminent ever since 1903. Irish land stock had never risen above 92 (April 1906) and having sunk as low as 84 in July 1907, was now stable at around 87. Furthermore, in Birrell's opinion, 'prices have ranged a great deal higher than was within the dreams of his [Wyndham's] philosophy, or I think within the expectation of any of the parties to that celebrated land conference'. The bonus would be immediately cut to 3%, though if parliament were prepared to vote more money the government were 'quite prepared to add materially to the figure of £12 million'. But the bonus system would have to be revised, for the 1903 system was, Birrell thought, a 'thoroughly bad

1. Redmond to Birrell, 21 Nov.1908 (Redmond papers).

one':

I cannot understand how any human being could wish to give the duke of Leinster £80,000 for selling his excellent property on which there was no trouble whatsoever at a high number of years purchase, voluntarily and without compulsion - I cannot understand a bonus based on those principles. We propose therefore that the bonus shall be graduated and devoted as far as possible to enable poor landlords to sell.

His scheme involved a bonus scale with 16^p at the top, and no bonus at all for sales at over 25 years' purchase. ¹ The duke of Leinster, incidentally, was becoming the *bête noire* of land purchase finance just as the marquis of Clanricarde had been for years for the western problem.

All this, Birrell thought, was mainly a matter of time and patience, but in the congested districts a question of policy was also involved. The government had decided in favour of the use of untenanted land for the relief of congestion, but it was unfortunate that the hopes of landless people in these areas had been raised, for all the land would be needed for the congests. The C.D.B. would be given compulsory powers to relieve congestion within its area, which was to be expanded in the manner already described. The revised constitution provided, after all, for nine elected men, and at least one paid man (i.e. closer to Dudley's

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 196 cols. 1806-34.

recommendation than to Birrell's first cabinet proposal). The machinery for compulsion would be similar to that under the evicted tenants act. The zones, although they had raised the price of land, would be retained, on the grounds of speed, but with tighter checks. It was obvious, concluded Birrell, that compulsory powers would have to be given¹ to the estate commissioners as well.

Redmond considered this 'a bold and far reaching measure', although there were some defects. He welcomed general compulsion, but felt that the land commission^{should} be expanded so as to proceed at a faster rate than £10 million p.a., and regretted that any increase had been made in tenants' annuities. He insisted that the government should demonstrate their good intentions by going ahead with the bill and threatened that if it proved to be a sham wthe government of Ireland 'would become impossible'.²

O'Brien's denunciation of the measure made an early second reading imperative, and both Redmond and the Freeman's Journal urged the government to act quickly. Dillon thought the measure 'an extremely good one',³ and Devlin said it would 'practically solve the land question'.⁴

1. Ibid..

2. Ibid.

3. Dillon to J.M.Coghlan ~~Bris~~cooe, 16 Dec. 1908 (W.F.J. 26 Dec.1908).

4. Devlin: statement to the press (W.F.J. 19 Dec.1908).

T.M.Kettle declared more boldly that it was 'the bill of the cattle-¹ drivers and the U.I.L.'. Even the Freeman Journal, which in May 1908 had dismissed all hope that a higher annuity rate could be met by lower selling prices, now maintained that such a rate:

.....if the tenants are only strong enough to insist upon getting the same reductions, will not, as has been represented, add to their payments, but lessen them by reducing, though to a small extent, the redemption period.

Though regretting that the bill did not 'deal practically with the principle of the zones', the Freeman was on the whole well satisfied.²

Redmond declared that the measure was 'most far-reaching in its importance', and promised that the party would support it strongly, though he would press for changes in the method of grading the bonus, and in the financing³ of future agreements, which was 'entirely unsatisfactory to us'.

During the closing days of the 1908 session the bill was given a second reading, and Birrell gave assurances that it would be proceeded with in⁴ 1909.

1. Kettle at Battersea, 29 Nov.1908 (V.F.J., 5 Dec.1908).

2. V.F.J., 5 Dec.1908.

3. Open letter from Redmond to Enniscorthy U.I.L., 22 Dec.1908 (V.F.J. 2 Jan.1909).

4. 8 Dec.1908. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.198 col.392.

Some observers were less enthusiastic, and it was not only the opposition and the landlords who opposed the changes. MacDonnell complained on December 28:

Birrell has let things slide: and the only protection for people in the west is the policeman's baton. The courts are powerless: and it was only by a reversion to the practice of selecting juries (abandoned by Cherry with such a flourish of trumpets last year) that a few verdicts have been obtained....the report of the majority of the Dudley commission is taken as the charter of cattle-driving, and the bill introduced by Birrell and read a second time in the house of commons went even beyond the commissioners' report.

1

Even Bryce thought that 'the proposed C.D. board seems dangerously likely to fall into political, or anyhow, interested hands. MacDonnell's objection to it seemed to me to be quite sound'.² In Ireland also the bill aroused some contention, outside the ranks of the official nationalists, though since the opposition was led by O'Brien and the 'conciliationists' those who might otherwise have held out for a more extreme bill, calling for abolition of the zones and a promise to divide all ranch-land, were virtually compelled to hold their peace in the cause of 'unity'. A national convention had been planned for February 1909

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 28 Dec.1908 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11016).
 2. Bryce to Horace Plunkett, 16 July 1909 (Plunkett papers, Plunkett Foundation, London).

to discuss the measure, and any opposition was expected to manifest itself there. The Freeman declared that that assembly might profitably discuss such points as the gradation of the bonus, the arrangement for future agreements, and the action of the treasury with regard to stock, but warned that:

National opinion of the land bill is already to a large extent fixed. It has been accepted by the Irish party and the introduction of it is regarded by Mr Redmond as a triumph for the party and the movement.

1

In fact the convention was the stormiest ever held. The Young Ireland branch and others on the radical wing of the party, notably Ginnell and E.T.Keane of Kilkenny, called on the leadership to adopt a more hostile attitude towards the government once the land bill was out of the way, and by the time William O'Brien rose to speak the atmosphere was already tense. Despite Redmond's please, both O'Brien and Tom O'Donnell, who seconded him, were shouted down, and at one stage a free fight broke out, as a result of which Eugene Crean M.P. sued Devlin and Johnston, the organisers,² for assault. But though it succeeded in its intention of embarrassing the

1. W.F.J., 2 Jan.1909.

2. Report of the national convention (W.F.J., 13 Feb.1909).

leadership, Crean's action was lost, and the Irish party were by and large successful in their attempt to stigmatise Irish opposition to the bill as pro-landlord.¹ As Dillon declared at Battersea on 7 March 1909, the land bill 'will not stop land purchase, but it may knock two or three years' purchase off the price, and that is why the Barrymores and Clanricardes oppose it'.²

On 30 March 1909 the land bill once more received a second reading in the house of commons. Some alterations had been made in the financial clauses, but the main outlines, the increased annuity for future agreements, and general compulsion remained. The Irish unionists, declared J.H.M.Campbell, remained 'unanimously opposed to a bill which would completely paralyse land purchase in Ireland'.³ The second reading was nonetheless passed by 275 votes to 102. But from mid-April onwards the land bill was swept from the centre of the stage by Lloyd George's marathon budget, which multiplied the Irish party's troubles at home just when they seemed to have won their struggle with O'Brien over land purchase. The Irish leaders made an attempt to keep the bill in the public mind, as a counter-balance to the unpopular clauses of the budget, and to tie it up

1. For a more detailed account of this episode, see *infra*, ch.6, p.66.

2. Dillon at Battersea, 7 Mar.1909 (W.F.J. 13 Mar.1909).

3. *Parlt.Deb. H.C.* 5 series, vol.3. col.204.

with the general question of the lords' powers.¹ But by mid-June no progress had been made, and Redmond felt compelled to protest to Birrell that 'people in Ireland are beginning to think that the promises of the government in regard to this [land] bill are all humbug'. He also feared that if the bill was sent up very late to the lords, they would have a far stronger case for rejecting it'.² Birrell assured him that 'there is not the slightest desire felt by any responsible person to delay the passage of the bill by a single day - were it otherwise my position would be an impossible one'.³

These delays, and the unpopularity of the budget, probably accounted for the severity of the Irish party's attacks on the finances of the bill when the committee stage was finally reached. It was only with labour support that, on July 23, Dillon's amendment to give the government an option to issue 'consols' at $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ instead of Irish land stock at 3⁴ was defeated. This renewal of nationalist criticism caused Birrell to call upon the cabinet to adjudicate in another struggle between him and the chancellor of the exchequer. He explained in a cabinet paper on

-
1. Speaking at Swinford on 9 May 1909, Dillon said that 'if the [land] bill is defeated by the house of lords and fails to pass, it will be a terrible misfortune for Connaught'.
 2. Redmond to Birrell, 22 June 1909 (Redmond papers).
 3. Birrell to Redmond, 13 July 1909 (Redmond papers).
 4. Parl. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 8 col. 786.

August 18 that the higher annuity rate would be a great brake on voluntary purchase, and that if the bonus were substantially reduced as well, 'there is only too much reason to believe that the outcome would justify the prediction of the many opponents of the bill - namely, that it will have the effect of completely stopping voluntary purchase'. He thus put before the cabinet a new scale of bonuses, which would add £3 $\frac{1}{2}$ million to the £12 million already guaranteed by the treasury.¹ Despite further protests² from Lloyd George, this scheme was accepted.

But a further concession which Birrell had asked for in the field of pending agreements was refused. The intention of offering landlords stock at 92 (which meant that they would get £108. 14. 0. worth of stock instead of £100 cash) was that it would be an attractive enough offer for the vendors to be prepared to share with the treasury the loss on flotation, in return for an earlier settlement. But this figure of 92 was a Runciman committee proposal, put up when the stock stood at 89. When the bill was first introduced in November 1908 it stood at 87 $\frac{1}{2}$. In August 1909 it was at 85 - 86, and the vendor's £108. 14. 0. worth of stock would only realise £93 cash, which was not an attractive proposition, being a loss of 7% of his purchase money. Birrell now proposed an amendment to give the vendor stock

1. 'The Irish land bill', cabinet paper by Birrell, 18 Aug. 1909 (Cab. 37/100/113)

2. Speech by Birrell, 17 Sept. 1909 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 10 col. 2470).

at 90 for his land - a loss of $5\frac{1}{2}$ which he should find attractive enough in return for time saved. But the cabinet would not agree, and the former figure of 92 was retained.¹

The bill passed its third reading, on September 17, by 174 votes to 51. The government strained to its utmost to appear conciliatory, Birrell talking less about the duke of Leinster and his £80,000 than about the safeguards for vendors which the bill contained. But he was subjected to considerable unionist criticism over the proposed elected members of the C.D.B., and at one point he exclaimed that 'there will not be nine Mr. Fitzgibbons of Roscommon' - a statement which involved him in some correspondence with that gentleman.² He further explained that the full C.D.B. would be advisory only, control of money resting with an inner committee.

Redmond's tone was equally conciliatory. He regretted that the government had not seen fit to give the landlords stock at a more generous rate than 92, but was glad that the old (Wyndham) annuity rate had been extended into 1909. These 'pro-landlord' amendments, he claimed, had been pressed for by the Irish party, as had the bonus arrangement, which meant that the landlords would still get an average bonus of 7% to 8% compared

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., col.2475. For details of the Fitzgibbon incident see The Times, 8 Sept.1909.

with the 3' under the 1903 act as it now stood. Redmond concluded:
 'I should be most anxious to go to any lengths to conciliate opposition
 to this bill so long as its vital principles remain in it'.¹ Dillon
 speaking later, may have felt that the nationalist position was liable
 to misinterpretation as a result of this, for he advised the house to
 'recollect that the mutilation of this bill in another house means the
 rejection of the bill'.²

The land bill was a very important part of the Irish leaders' strategy, for without it the obnoxious sections of the budget would have made it very difficult for them to support the government in the general struggle against the lords. It was thus essential to make the Irish people fully aware of the lords' threat to the land bill, but at the same time to be prepared to accept a moderate bill which the liberals would be willing to fight for in the lords. At Waterford, in September, Redmond said that:

If the landlords are mad enough to reject the Irish land bill, I will advise the Irish people to take vigorous action this winter, and I will not only advise them, but I will be in the front rank conducting the campaign. But it is our duty to see that the land bill is passed if possible.

3

-
1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.10 col.2500.
 2. Ibid., col.2540.
 3. Redmond at Waterford, 12 Sept.1909 (V.F.J., 18 Sept.1909).

The Freeman also settled down at this stage to fill up the cup against the lords in Ireland - a task which none would have thought necessary had it not been for the budget:

It would indeed complete the story of the maleficant influence of the house of lords on the history of Ireland its relations with the British empire, if, at the moment when the continuance of its pernicious power had become the question of the hour, that house were to deal with the Irish land bill as it dealt with other measures of liberal land reform in the past. The action would have about it a dramatic fitness and immediately clear the ground in the coming contest for Ireland.....should another bill be necessary we venture to prophesy that it will have a different second chamber to face after the third reading.

1

5. The lords and the land bill, September - November 1909.

The chances of the land bill passing the lords seems slender indeed, and when Lord Dunraven of all people rose to move its rejection on second reading, it seemed lost. He admitted the principle of compulsion for the relief of congestion in the west, but objected to general compulsion - if the government intended to give land to the landless men let them say so

1. WF.J., 25 Sept.1909.

frankly, but let them also be aware that it would be a 'cruel injustice' to the congests. He moved the rejection with an easy conscience¹ he said, for nothing could block land purchase more effectively than this bill. Much to public surprise however, Lord Lansdowne declared that he would not vote with Dunraven, on the grounds that there would be ample time for revision of the bill: the government, he felt, 'would not be impervious to criticisms'. Nonetheless, he continued, 'you cannot seriously expect the house to pass this bill in anything like its present form'. As the bill stood he thought it afforded encouragement to the claims of the landless men, and free access for them to public money, an idea which was discountenanced explicitly by the Dudley commission. Lansdowne was also opposed to general compulsion but:

If the government can show that the owner has not sufficient reason for refusal, if they can provide him with a proper tribunal, and if reasonable compensation is offered, then I shall be able to discuss with the noble lords opposite whether modified, qualified, compulsory powers might not be given.

2

Ultimately the second reading was agreed to, though it was understood that the bill would undergo vital changes in committee. But it was plain that the unionist lords were not in complete agreement, the

1. 28 Sept.1909. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol.3 col.420.

2. Ibid., col.427.

divergence being in general between the 'official' opposition leadership, which viewed the issue in the context of general unionist policy in relation to the intended crisis, and the Irish landlords and diehards, who took a more personal view. That the opposition leader, Lansdowne, also happened to be an Irish landlord would make it easier for the tory party if they had to force their extremists to accept concessions.

Lord Atkinson soon emerged as the architect of the opposition's bill - for so radically did they intend to alter it that piecemeal amendments would scarcely suffice. The lords were virtually making a new bill, especially with regard to compulsion and the constitution of the congested districts board. At first they proposed an advisory C.D.B., to be composed of those elected members of the council of agriculture who represented congested counties. H. de F. Montgomery, a leading landlord who was also involved in the work of the D.A.T.I., objected to this, he told T.P.Gill, 'because it will tend to injure the character of the council of agriculture by instigating the cattle drivers to take an active part in the nomination of the representatives of the western counties'¹. Gill agreed with him, and hoped the idea would be dropped. He considered that if the C.D.B. had to continue to exist, the existing board was better than

1. H. de F. Montgomery to T.P.Gill, 3 Oct.1909 (Gill papers).

any that was likely to be substituted for it:

I am firmly of the opinion that the soundest course to adopt in the present circumstances is to take this scheme of Lord MacDonnell's as it stands and embody it in the bill. A more practical working scheme could not be devised. Moreover, this is the only alternative with a chance of being accepted by Dillon i.e. Birrell. (The chance I fear is an off-chance, but still it is a chance). It has a chance on this ground, of which a great deal should be made in the debate, that you are leaving the existing board (which has earned such goodwill etc.etc.) to stand: that you are increasing the powers of that board in respect of its settlement work - the really urgent work; that you are increasing the funds of the board for this work; that you are keeping all the money provided in the bill for congestion to its original purpose and promptly tackling the question of congestion outside the present scheduled area (through the E.C. and the D.A.T.I.). To these provisions you must add compulsion, at least for congestion-relieving purposes. If this argument is well and clearly and methodically enough - and often enough - brought out in the lords debate; and if someone takes pains to bring it home behind the scenes to Lord Crewe, to Birrell, and perhaps to Asquith, then it is possible to get the government to stand by the bill in spite of Dillon's discontent. But I confess I see little prospects of these essential tactics being intelligently pursued over there.

1

For a while it seemed as if Gill's advice would be swept aside by the action of the lords. As the time approached for the crucial lords committee on compulsion, the die-hards looked set fair to triumph. Montgomery indeed was one of that number - whilst accepting compulsory

1. Gill to Montgomery, n.d., but must be between 3 and 6 Oct.1909 (Gill papers).

acquisition for a 'public purpose', in which category he included labourers' cottages (as being necessary to ensure the supply of agricultural labour), he felt that applied to the relief of congestion it was a 'dangerous innovation' which would destroy security of tenure and end voluntary purchase. He told Gill on October 6:

The C.D.B. and the Es.Comm. have at this moment more on their hands than they can deal with....The only vestige of a case they have is that they cannot carry out certain symmetrical schemes of Doran's unless they can acquire whole territories, portions of which are not at present to be had by voluntary treaty. Every improving landlord has been hampered in the same wayand these C.D.B. Pashas will have to do the same.

1

Later in the day, a second note from Montgomery (who was at Westminster) suggested that the worst would happen:

The majority of the peers have decided to give no support either to Atkinson's or to Antony's [i.e. MacDonnell's] scheme....They will let the bill be dropped sooner than agree to any compulsory purchase under any form for any part of the country.....if it is given for any part of the country, no part will be safe in the long run.

2

In the event, Montgomery's prediction was to be proved wrong on this point, but not before much of the rest of the bill had been re-drafted.

1. Montgomery to Gill, morning of 6 Oct.1909 (Gill papers).
2. Montgomery to Gill, evening of 6 Oct.1909 (Gill papers).

Part I of the bill was preserved more or less intact, however, for Lord Crewe carried his point that their lordships had no power to alter those clauses which dealt with land purchase finance. A number of opposition amendments had therefore to be withdrawn, and the new bonus scale and the higher annuity rate (both tending to lower the price received by the landlord)¹ went through untouched. But in the matter of the zones the reshaping of the bill really commenced. MacDonnell and Crewe maintained that their intention was to modify and not to reverse the zones system, but Lansdowne considered that the clause did not carry out this intention, and Atkinson's alternative² was adopted. MacDonnell then carried an amendment against the government prohibiting the C.D.B. from acquiring land except through the land commission, and Atkinson denounced the new C.D.B. as a mere machine for the division of the ranches between the landless men and the cattle-drivers.³ Most of the clauses in part III, relating to the constitution of the C.D.B., were struck out, so that the board was returned more or less to its original form and area. In part IV, compulsion outside the C.D.B. area was struck out completely, but alternative schemes of a more limited kind were put

1. 5 Oct.1909. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol.3 col.715.

2. Ibid., cols. 772-808.

3. Ibid., 6 Oct.1909, cols. 813, 842.

down by MacDonnell and Atkinson (MacDonnell told his wife 'we largely agree, but differ as to machinery.....we both want to relieve congestion').¹ Lansdowne declared that since Atkinson's scheme was sufficiently surrounded by a 'zareba' of precautions, he would be prepared to accept it as a basis for compulsion within the C.D.B. area. He asked the government to give serious consideration to the amendment. Atkinson's clause was thus inserted, though opposed by some of the die-hards. It provided that, in order to exercise compulsion within their area, the C.D.B. would have to submit a scheme to the judicial commissioner and two estates commissioners. If they agreed, the proposal would then be considered by a tribunal including a high court judge, with an appeal as to law and fact to the court of appeal. 'Compensation' was to be determined by an arbiter on the principles² laid down in the land clauses act of 1845.

The Times thought Lansdowne's compromise on compulsion was a mistake, but evidently some hard talking had been going on within the unionist³ camp. Horace Plunkett was in London at this time, and played a large part in the discussions which led up to the decision to accept some degree of compulsion. He wrote to Gill on October 10:

Throughout our discussions we have had to give to questions of expediency far more weight than we should wish where constructive legislation of real

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 12 Oct.1909 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.95).
 2. 12 Oct.1909. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol.3 cols. 1119-22.
 3. Times, 13 Oct.1909.

and far reaching importance is concerned. There is no difficulty in pulverising the scheme of part III. It is well known that it was purely a political move. It is further clear that next to getting such an all-powerful political empire as the bill brings under the control of the U.I.L., the authors of the scheme would prefer to reject the bill - or rather to say the lords had destroyed it. They would do this in any case, were it not for the extra £163,000 p.a. provided for the western districts, which the lords retain. Further, the landless man, being a far bigger factor politically than the congest - whose unhappy plight is due to this fact - if the lords do not follow Lansdowne's lead and admit compulsion where necessary to relieve congestion, the bill will be lost and in the new world and the old the callousness of the lords to the woes of the congests will be proclaimed. Therefore I am firmly convinced that the compulsory taking of land for the relief of congestion properly safeguarded against the landless man (except as a residuary legatee of any superfluity in the districts where the proper authority might make an exception) with a satisfactory tribunal for fixing prices, should be conceded if the bill is to be saved. This is the only hope of relieving the pressure of the landless man and getting public support in Ireland for the real uneconomic holder. It will give those of us who work at the problem of congestion a chance to devise a definite scheme, which will require time for fitting this new uneconomic man, to whom the lords will have given the first real hope, to occupy economic holdings. So there is little besides mere expediency in my desire to have this question settled in what I believe to be the only way the nationalists will accept - and this only on account of that £163,000.

8

1

-
1. Plunkett to Gill (memorandum), 10 Oct.1909 (Gill papers).

Gill was full of praise for his former chief, to whom he attributed the success of the negotiations with the die-hard lords. The problem now was to exercise the same centripetal force on the government side. He replied to Plunkett on October 12:

It was only with an effort that I managed to keep the hope that so much would be secured, especially after Montgomery's second letter. You may feel assured of this, that it was beyond any other man's powers to achieve what you appear to have done. The next stage is to see that it produces its effect in getting the amended bill accepted. For this, some work will have to be done with the government - Crewe, Irrell, Asquith. Much will depend on whether there is to be a general election or not. If there is, the rejection of this bill - in consequence of 'mutiliation' - will be a good card for the Irish voters in Great Britain (who without such a cause of quarrel will be in danger of voting with the Tories over the education question) that they will be tempted to seize any pretext.... Redmond's manifesto and T.P.O'Connor's visit to America are a significant symptom. It looks as if they felt certain that the lords were going to give them justification enough to repudiate the bill.

1

If Gill's approach to this issue seems out of key with his background of nationalist politics and his continued personal association with Redmond, one must bear in mind that, by representing the nationalists as wishing to see the bill killed, he was in fact providing reasons for the lords to let it pass. His letter to Montgomery on October 14 illustrates

1. Gill to? (the Ms. is damaged here, but the recipient was without doubt Horace Plunkett) 12 Oct. 1909 (Gill papers).

this more clearly:

You are a bit of a Bourbon over compulsion, and you see Lord Lansdowne has taken (what I consider) the wise course on the question. The chances of the amended bill being accepted by Birrell-Dillon seem to me to be these. If there is not to be a general election over the budget it will probably be accepted; if there is to be a general election it will certainly be thrown out in order to help 'fill up the cup' for the Irish vote in England (and you will get a far worse bill from the landlord point of view when the liberals come back). Such is the philosophy of parliamentary government in our times.₁

Redmond's remarks to a liberal meeting at Ashton-under-Lyne on October 12 seemed to bear out Gill's predictions. Redmond thought at this stage that the lords would probably accept the budget, but he declared that there must be an election nonetheless, on the general question of the lords veto.

He continued:

The land bill as it stands today by their mutilation of it is absolutely dead. The Irish party could not tolerate it in its present shape.....Ireland has been quiet because she believed Mr Birrell would be able to pass a bill to remedy these injustices. If the landlords reject this bill I ask the people of England to put the responsibility for whatever may happen on the right shoulders.....if this bill be wrecked we in Ireland will not tamely submit to it.₂

The advice of the Freeman was similar:

The bill has not only been vivisected, but devitalised. from a measure calculated to expedite the redemption of the west it has been transferred into one to obstruct

-
1. Gill to Montgomery, 14 Oct.1909 (Gill papers).
 2. Redmond at Ashton-under-lyne, 12 Oct.1909 (W.F.J., 16 Oct.1909).

and delay that object. Better add the issue to those which are making the lords and their powers so clear to the intelligence of the democracies of the three kingdoms today. Let the landlords wait for their millions till the peasants get redress.

1

Very soon The Times' Dublin correspondent was detecting the results of this attitude in Ireland. He reported on October 19 that 'it would appear that the nationalist M.P.s have received instructions to work up a popular agitation against the modifications which the land bill has undergone in the house of lords. On Sunday a series of speeches prophesying war were made in different parts of Ireland'. Names mentioned were those of Devlin, O'Dowd, Phillips and Sheehy M.P.s, ² The previous Sunday at Birr, P.A.Meehan had said that if the lords mutilated the bill the Irish people would be invited to join a struggle to end the house of lords, and Michael Reddy had quoted Dillon as saying that the bill must be accepted in its entirety, or else there would be a 'drive in every county'. John Fitzgibbon, at Castlerea on the same day, said that Birrell's bill was the minimum demand, and 'they would take nothing less'. ³ At Riverstown on Octbber 31 O'Dowd promised that the bill would not be accepted by the

1. W.F.J., 16 Oct.1909.

2. Times, 20 Oct.1909.

3. Speeches of Meehan, Reddy and Fitzgibbon, all cited in the Times, 13 Oct. 1909.

Irish party unless every item in it ~~was~~¹ was restored. By the end of October district councils and U.I.L. branches throughout Ireland were passing resolutions to the same effect.² Even Bishop O'Dea, recently translated from Clonfert to Galway, who had not been slow to speak out against extreme measures the previous year, now expressed the opinion that there would be a 'hot time' in Ireland if the land bill did not pass, and that 'for my part I shall never raise my voice against disorder except in so far as it imperils or breaks the ten commandments'.³

Meanwhile, the lords' remodelling of the bill continued during the report stage, on October 19 and 20, and the third reading, on the 25th. These debates in the main finalised the arrangements and attitudes expressed at the committee stage. The matter of machinery for the compulsory acquisition of land by the C.D.B. was raised again, but Crewe declared that the government could vote for neither MacDonnell's nor Atkinson's amendments, and so the latter's scheme was adopted by opposition votes.⁴ On the second day of the report stage an attempt was

1. O'Dowd at Riverstown, 31 Oct.1909 (W.F.J., 6 Nov.1909).

2. See especially W.F.J., 6 Nov.1909.

3. Bishop O'Dea at Gort, 17 Oct.1909 (W.F.J., 23 Oct.1909).

4. 25 Oct.1909. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol.4 cols. 350.

made by Lord Mayo and Lord Oranmore and Browne to re-open the general question of compulsion, but their clause was withdrawn at the request of Lord Lansdowne.¹ On the third reading Crewe regretted that by the lords' action the bill had been 'seriously and adversely affected', and the measure had been changed from one of long-term and perhaps final importance to yet another temporary assuagement of Irish land grievances. Of the 72 clauses in the bill as it left the commons, the 13 concerned with finance (part I) were left more or less untouched. But of the remaining 59, 26 were insignificant, 24 had been struck out, and the remaining 9 materially altered.² In addition, 13 new clauses had been inserted.

Birrell reviewed the position in a memorandum to the cabinet the day after the lords finished with the bill. Only the provision increasing the C.D.B. grant from £86,000 to £250,000 remained unaltered. The lords' attack, he said:

....first destroys the substratum of the government's bill, and then inserts a new measure in its place. The provisions for the reconstruction of the C.D.B.

1. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol. 4 cols. 179-181.

2. Ibid., cols. 360-4.

and the extension of its area have been struck out; the board's existing purchasing power has been taken away and given to the estates commission; and its powers and duties relating to fisheries and industries have been transferred to the D.A.T.I. The provisions for compulsory purchase outside the congested districts proper, whether generally or for the purpose of relieving congestion, have been entirely omitted, while for the relief of congestion inside the old area of the C.D.B. a scheme of limited compulsion has been given which is so hemmed in by restrictions, and so complicated and costly in its methods and machinery as to be quite unworkable and illusory. The Dudley commission indeed might as well never have sat, so completely are its main recommendations ignored in the measure as it stands.

1

In the circumstances Birrell saw no alternative but to follow the unfortunate precedent of the 1906 education bill and reject the amendments en bloc.

ut care would be taken, he said, to avoid giving the impression that the government had already decided to sacrifice the bill and stand on principle: 'a clear intimation of the points on which compromise is possible should be given'. The elective element in the C.D.B. and the power of compulsion other than for the relief of congestion he thought might be surrendered. But the following points were to be presented as vital to the passage of the bill: the reconstitution of the C.D. . including two paid members, the extension of its area, and the retention of its purchasing powers and its non-land duties; the power of compulsion for the relief of congestion inside and outside the C.D.B. area; and the retention of the machinery

1. 'The Irish land bill as amended in the lords', cabinet paper by Birrell, 26 Oct. 1909 (Cab. 37/101/144).

of compulsion as in the original bill. The latter Birrell thought would be the crucial point - the price question was not hopeless, 'but great importance is attached by the house of lords to an appeal in regard to the necessity for the exercise of compulsion in each case'. Other points which he felt the government should insist on were exclusion from zones in certain cases, the fixation of fair rents for future tenants, and the prohibition of advances to purchase in the case¹ of newly created tenancies.

On November 5 the lords' amendments were debated in the commons, and Birrell's statement proceeded along the lines he had indicated to the cabinet. Though his tone was firm, with an eye on the nationalists, he expressed a hope that there might be 'negotiations leading² to reasonable modifications', and Dillon declared his support for this. Dillon also hit back at those who, like Plunkett and MacDonnell ('no worse enemy ever came to Ireland') impugned the motives of the Irish party with regard to the demands of landless men. He said 'it would be a very estimable and magnanimous work to divide these great grass farms along the landless men. That policy however, would destroy, in the western province, the chances of those small holders in the congested districts'.³

1. Ibid.

2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 13 cols. 46-7, 168.

3. Ibid., col. 66.

The exigencies of the budget bill had deprived the commons of a summer recess, and now, in November, they retired for a couple of weeks respite whilst the lords took their turn at the budget. Birrell was not able to go into his customary retreat however, and neither was Lord Lansdowne's time taken up completely with the chancellor's great measure. On November 9 Birrell, along with Crewe and Cherry, had a conference with Lansdowne, Atkinson and Walter Long; there was a further meeting on the 11th; and Birrell and Lansdowne met again on the 15th.¹ Birrell kept Redmond informed of progress by letter. The first meeting on the 9th established in detail the points which each side considered vital to its case, though few decisions were reached. Birrell reported afterwards:

Lord Lansdowne evidently felt himself in a very difficult position - I had no difficulty in assuring him my position was at least one of equal difficulty. On one or two points their attitude was very obstinate, and they confidently asserted they were certain they would not be able to obtain consent to several things I put forward as essential. Coming however as we did to no final conclusion, we averted any actual rupture.

2

On the matter of the C.D.B. constitution Birrell agreed to give up completely the elected members, and the opposition accepted two

^{Ed. - i. n.}

1. Certain other influential figures, 'men of the centre', were not invited to join in these talks. MacDonnell wrote to his wife on 8 Nov. 1909: 'It is probably that some compromise will be come to - I have not heard the details - but it seems that most of my main points will be saved, and that the concessions will be on less important matters. I have not been and will not be consulted; and as I think it is not well to object in debate to settled matters, I am inclined to think I might as well leave' (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.354 f.114).
2. Birrell to Redmond, 10 Nov., 1909 (Redmond papers).

paid men. But on the C.D.B. area there was less agreement – the unionists wanted to throw out 'whole counties' as a basis (arguing that such an arrangement had only been justified by the need for 'electoral colleges'), and were especially opposed to the inclusion of East Clare. The government side 'held out strongly for the geographical limitations, contending that what was required was a separate state which the C.D.B. should rule'. On the matter of compulsion Birrell found the opposition 'in a wobbly state'; they were prepared to recognise the principle, in theory, within the congested area, and might be able to accept it outside the area, on congested estates and untenanted land for the relief of congestion. But they insisted on an appeal to an outside tribunal (i.e., outside the land commission) as to the necessity for compulsion. Birrell thought this would be impossible, for two bad decisions would be enough to ruin the act. On the whole, Birrell felt that if Lansdowne persuaded his followers to agree to compulsion inside and outside the C.D.B. area, it would be a great step forward 'and one it would be very difficult to refuse'.¹

As to the definition of congestion, the lords felt that to increase the limit to include all farms under £10 valuation would be to create new trouble. They called for the restoration of the £5 limit, and stressed the effect it would have on their recalcitrant followers. Birrell felt that a £7 compromise might be worth aiming at. On the zones the tory

1. Ibid.

leaders were 'adamantine' in their opposition to the government clause. They did not attach great importance to it themselves, but it had 'frightened the landlords out of their lives'. Sensing that this might be a point on which Redmond would feel obliged to stand firm, Birrell hinted that perhaps no more than an empty principle was at stake - 'personally, I regard it as locking the stable door after the steed is stolen, because our new financial provisions strike a blow at the zones system'. As to the final outcome, Birrell was at this stage not hopeful. He intended to send a note to Lansdowne and Long, outlining:

.....the kind of thing we might be willing to accept supposing that they accepted the whole of what I put forward. This of course there is no chance of their doing since on the zone point and on the tribunal point and on one or two other points I have conceded nothing at all, but it would be the basis I presume of some further negotiation.....The whole situation is very difficult because it is obvious that no terms can be come to unless indeed it be that the lords are extremely anxious to secure the bill, and about this I am, to say the least of it, very uncertain as to what their state of mind is.

1

If Birrell's account of this first meeting was designed to give Redmond the impression that he was 'standing firm' on principles, his second report brought it home much more forcefully that the corollary

1. Ibid.

would have to be nationalist support for any compromise the government felt justified in making. Birrell told Redmond he felt that the layers of bluff had been stripped away and that the lords had played their last card:

Cross influences are at work. .yndham has, after many heart-searchings come down against the bill, and when the Irish peers are turned on, as they will be next week, there will be stormy scenes.

1

In fact the lords' representatives had given way on what irrell evidently regarded as the crucial point, and he was now looking for the opportunity to compromise with both unionists and nationalists. For though they clogged it with costly restrictions, insisted on the exclusion of East Clare, and rejected the £7 compromise, the lords had agreed to compulsion inside and outside the C.D.B. area. Birrell wrote:

I confess I think the bill can be saved, and having regard to its contents and the uncertainty of what the future holds, I think it ought to be saved.....
 What sort of house of commons we shall find on the 23rd you can judge even better than I can. Our rank and file will think no more of the west of Ireland and the relief of its poverty than of the kingdom of heaven. All they will be thinking about will be how best to abuse the house of lords and I doubt not that on a hint from you (tho' for very different reasons - for many of them hate the best provisions in the bill more than they do the lords' amendments) they will vote it down - and

1. Birrell to Redmond, 12 Nov.1909 (Redmond papers.)

of course during the last ~~ten~~ days of a parliament, party whips count for nothing....But it is quite possible that the lords will kill the bill themselves on Wednesday or Thursday.

1

This was a plain indication to Redmond that the government intended to push on with the bill, and they they would not (or could not) permit the Irish party the luxury of abstention.

On ovember 15 Birrell saw Lansdowne again, and found him 'tough and unyielding.....at the end of his tether'². The opposition leader gave way over the admission of future tenants to the benefits of the land acts, but on other points (zones, £5 limit, tribunal, and East Clare) he was 'immovable'. Birrell gave way on Clare, and held fast on all else, especially the tribunal, which he thought impossible:

I think this is good riding. If the bill is lost, it is lost on a great point viz., that the principle of compulsion, though conceded, was rendered useless by clogging provisions both inside and outside the area. I don't think the lords will give way on this point, and I regard the bill as almost certainly doomed (unless the point is finally conceded). If however they do give way to any substantial extent, the bill is a great victory, all things considered.....In their counsels they were very much divided, and it will perhaps be easier for them, as it may be for us also, to lose the bill than to save it.... my mind, like a barometer,....[is].....settling down on save the bill, if possible.

3

-
1. Ibid.
 2. Birrell to Redmond, 16 Nov.1909 (Redmond papers).
 3. Ibid.

The following day, November 17, the lords met to discuss the commons' reasons for disagreeing, and Lansdowne's speech made it clear that he still hoped for a compromise with the government. The lords had 'justification' for terminating the matter there and then he declared, with at least one eye on the benches behind him, but the government were anxious to compromise, and discussions had been taking place.¹ Thus, although the government's points were not conceded, the bill was sent back to the commons once again and not rejected on the spot.

The final test was now at hand - this time the government (and the Irish leaders) had to make public which of the lords' revised terms they would accept, or else see the bill lost. On the zones, Lansdowne's amendment confined exclusion to cases where arrears of rent had been used unduly by the landlord to force tenants to buy, and where the security was insufficient. Birrell explained that according to the estates commissioners this would render the clause nugatory, but the government had reluctantly agreed to drop the clause in the hope of securing other points.² Dillon deplored this move, and the Irish party voted against the government compromise, though they failed to swing to their side the mass of liberals which Birrell had predicted.³ The same procedure was gone

1. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol. 4 cols. 605-6.

2. Speech by Birrell, 23 Nov. 1909. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 13 col. 24.

3. Ibid., col. 42.

through when Cherry moved to agree to the lords' removal of the £3,000 limit on loans to purchasers. And again the nationalists opposed when Birrell reluctantly agreed to accept for advances under act new tenancies created up to 15 September 1909, and to give up the old barrier of 1 January 1908. This, argued the nationalists, would permit all sorts of frauds and bogus tenancies, which would take land rightfully intended for congests and evicted tenants. More important so far as public opinion went, though of little practical significance, was Birrell's acceptance of the amendment to exclude landless men from specific mention in the classification of persons to whom advances for the purchase of parcels of land might be made when estates were bought by the commissioners. Dillon, in an outburst for which he was called to order by the speaker for calling the lords 'idiot and stupid asses', warned that 'to shut out these young men [i.e. landless men] from a privilege they had enjoyed under a tory government would mean civil war in Ireland'.¹ The amended clause passed nonetheless. The nationalists again opposed in vain the acceptance of a C.D.B. without elected members, and also Birrell's motion to accept the lords' restrictions² on compulsory purchase.

1. Ibid., col.65.

2. For all the above amendments, see Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.13 cols. 17-172.

On the question of the definition of congestion, Birrell asked the House to reject the £5 limit, and adopt one of £7. After much dispute, this was agreed to by the opposition. On the crucial point of judicial appeal on price, Cherry asked the house not to accept Atkinson's amendment providing for an appeal court comprising the judicial commissioner and two king's bench judges, and Redmond declared that sooner than accept it he would see the bill lost. The amendment was rejected by the government, and although the tories divided against it, it was evident from an alternative proposal put forward by Lon¹ that the opposition were unwilling to break on the point.

Two days later, November 26, the lords met, and in a brief one-hour session passed the commons amendments en bloc, Lansdowne only putting on record that their lordships were 'by no means satisfied'.² They thus accepted the judicial commissioner as the final court on price. Their action was predicted that morning in the 'political notes' of The Times, which offered a plausible explanation:

1. Ibid.

2. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol. 4 cols. 1128.

There was a strong feeling on the part of not a few of the Irish peers that the commons amendments should again be modified. If this course had been adopted by the lords today [Friday] however, the bill could not be further considered by the commons until Wednesday. By that time the dominant question with the commons would be the fate of the finance bill, and that house in all probability would have had neither the time nor the inclination to deal with other matters of moment. The temper between the two houses will certainly not be favourable to the progress of amicable negotiation on Wednesday or subsequent days.

Furthermore, the article continued, the commons' attitude on the previous Wednesday, especially Redmond's speech, made it clear that on the outstanding¹ points the government were no longer prepared (or able) to be conciliatory.

MacDonnell told his wife that 'the real reason of the compromise was the unwillingness of Lansdowne to throw out the bill, especially at the present juncture'.² That Lansdowne's adherence to this course was by no means unanimously supported in his party is revealed in a letter from Sir Henry Robinson of the L.G.B., a unionist in politics, but a personal friend of Birrell's, to Mrs. Birrell in praise of her husband's 'extraordinary intuitive power' and 'feat of statesmanship':

He probably foresaw that the landlords would give in. I never did, and believed that on the 'in for a penny in for a pound' principle they would send the bill back with Atkinson's tribunal, which meant it was lost.

1. Times, 26 Nov. 1909.

2. MacDonnell to his wife, 27 Nov. 1909 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.108).

I hear that after Walter Long's summary of the pros and cons at the meeting, the majority in favour of their acceptance - if it had been put to the vote - would have been three to one. I saw the most of them afterwards. Orammore was furious at the "surrender all along the line" as he called it. Atkinson, I think, was a bit disappointed that he hadn't got his tribunal as he regarded it as a necessary complement to the compulsion which he had rammed down the throats of the Irish peers....But they may think themselves very lucky, for if the bill had been thrown out, their rent collection would have been no easy job this winter.

1

The Freeman was less enthusiastic, to say the least. The final proceedings over the bill in the commons it described as 'pitiful',² and regretted that Birrell had not been more resolute in his defiance.

But when the bill passed the lords without the cramping tribunal, its hostility relaxed somewhat. Birrell had now 'withstood them on two points of capital importance' (though in fact neither Birrell nor any of his colleagues had taken any further action since the Freeman's criticisms of the previous week). The conclusion was 'many as are its imperfections and defective as it is in many respects....it contains not a few valuable provisions'.³

-
1. H.A. Robinson to Eleanor Birrell, 27 Nov. 1909 (Birrell collection, Ms. 10.3 f.4.).
 2. W.F.J., 27 Nov. 1909.
 3. W.F.J., 4 Dec. 1909.

The reason for the Freeman's change of attitude is not hard to find. In the interval the lords had surprised many people by passing the amended measure instead of rejecting it. If the nationalists had been going to make capital out of a rejected land bill they would have needed to emphasise the extent to which it had been mutilated. But if they were to profit politically from the bill now that it had been passed (especially after they had already started to build up a case with a view to its rejection) they needed to emphasize the points gained and the concessions won. But whether the bill had passed or not, the 'mutilation' it had received in the lords would have been a useful weapon in the general political struggle:

A house of hereditary brewers dictating a licensing bill or a finance bill, a house of hereditary money lenders dictating a money code, a house of hereditary thieves dictating the law upon stealing, would be quite as respectable a spectacle as a junta of Irish landlords, led by an Irish landlord and assessed by a glorified crown prosecutor, framing the statutes under which public money is to be paid to themselves and their fellows. Such a spectacle, on the eve of the conflict with the mutilators, is however in one respect exhilarating. It clears the issues.

1

This ambivalent attitude towards the bill is apparent also in Dillon's statements. At Waterford on December 11, he declared boldly

1. W.F.J., 27 Nov.1909.

that 'the land question is not settled' by the bill, which the lords 'with the assistance of the Irish factionists' had mutilated, but went on to call the bill 'extremely valuable' and 'a great bill for the west of Ireland'¹. His attitude was reflected in the speeches of Irish M.P.s and the reactions of nationalist bodies generally. A big meeting at Tullamore on November 28, with 3 M.P.s present, resolved that the bill was 'merely a temporary measure', and called upon the Irish party to 'continue their agitation' until such questions as the zones were settled to their satisfaction. Stephen Gwynn declared that 'they did not promise peace as the price of that bill: they promised war'². On the same day at Claremorris, Devlin promised that whatever government was in power next year would be forced to restore the original bill in every clause, and Conor O'Kelly incited the people to remove Lord Oranmore's gates. Denis Johnston, U.I.L. assistant secretary, called for a 'ring of fire round every grazier and land grabber'³. But the threats in general were very vague and empty ones - less a warning to the government than a sop to the people. As the election and Asquith's declaration replaced the land act in the headlines, the nationalists' tone became more amenable. At the

1. Dillon at Waterford, 11 Dec 1909 (W.F.J., 18 Dec. 1909).

2. S.Gwynn, H.Burke and M.Reddy at Tullamore, 28 Nov. 1909 (W.F.J., 4 Dec. 1909)

3. J.Devlin, C.O'Kelly and D.Johnston at Claremorris, 28 Nov. 1909 (Times, 30 Nov. 1909).

Leix convention on December 20, P.A.Meehan M.P. said that 'maimed as it was, it was a most valuable bill'. On the same day J.C.R.Lardner said in Monaghan that the key issue now was parliamentary and public co-operation against the house of lords, and Cullinan in Tipperary called the bill 'mutilated byt worthwhile'¹.

Only from those outside the official party ranks did opposition to the new land act continue in an extreme form - Laurence Ginnell, shortly to be opposed by a party candidate in North Westmeath, said it never had been intended that the bill should do any good, and that the people should 'return to the old methods'. If the landlords still would not sell at fair prices, he called for a no-rent campaign, and a renewal of cattle-driving, coupled with strategic ploughing up of the grasslands whilst the police were hunting the cattle! The new policy, he proclaimed, would be 'the plough and the hazel'².

1. P.A.Meehan in Leix, J.C.R.Lardner at Monaghan, J.Cullinan at Tipperary, 20 Dec.1909 (all in W.F.J., 25 Dec.1909).

2. W.F.J., 25 Dec.1909.

CHAPTER VI. THE RE-ASSERTION OF THE HOME RULE POLICY, 1907-9.

1. Irish party difficulties, 1907.

Those who have been a generation in Irish politics say that they never remember a time when things were so difficult to forecast. I see distinct signs of a new group in Irish politics - of a new moving spirit in the country. A younger generation is coming up and no-one can yet tell what the outcome will be.

On the occasion of these prophetic words, written by estates commissioner W.F. Bailey to James Bryce, was the rejection of the Irish council bill by a national convention in Dublin. Bailey considered that this action on the part of the Irish leaders had 'thrown things back to an extent that it is difficult to gauge'.¹ Despite the official nationalist gloss that their action had cleared the decks once more for full home rule, most independent commentators would have agreed with Bailey. In rejecting the council bill the Irish party had rejected the final fruition of Campbell-Bannerman's Stirling policy, the whole basis of their understanding with the liberal government for almost two years. Redmond had probably never expected an Irish council to be set up in Dublin, but he had expected that, with the assistance of hostile intervention by the house of lords, the scheme would be kept alive until such time as the Irish party were able to demand home rule from the liberals with a more authoritative voice.

1. W.F. Bailey to J. Bryce, 14 June 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).

Instead, having felt obliged to kill the council bill as soon as it appeared, Redmond was left facing his electors with no immediate policy to offer. The situation presented the best opportunity since the split for anyone in Ireland who wished to challenge the parliamentary leadership.

ut the troubles faced by the party in the summer and autumn of 1907, though greatly exacerbated by the council bill episode, were to some extent apparent before that time. If many were disappointed with the council bill because they were expecting virtual home rule, disillusion in others had set in eighteen months earlier, when they realised that 'step by step' meant only procrastination on the part of the liberals and the possibility of some Wyndhamite devolution. This realisation, combined with the unpopular land administration of Bryce and MacDonnell and the failure to amend the land act, produced financial problems for the party as early as August 1906. Subscriptions to the parliamentary fund for the year amounted to £4,021 against a figure of £7,200 for the year ending 25 August 1905, a slump not totally accounted for by post-election slackness. Likewise, the U.I.L. affiliation fees showed a decline from £2,445 to £1,895. Only the great success of the Australian mission of Devlin and J.T. Donavan saved the Irish party from serious financial embarrassment. ¹ Dillon thought that 'an effort must be

1. John Dillon to John Redmond, 25 and 31 Aug. 1906 (Redmond papers).

made to put some life into the movement. At present it is very much
 'asleep. And sinn feinners, Gaelic Leaguers, etc., are making great play'.¹

This loss of enthusiasm was partly occasioned by the absence
 of any great prospect of home rule - one young M.P. told Redmond before the
 end of 1906 that he had 'lost all confidence in the parliamentary movement
 and in the work of the Irish party', and wished to resign.² Others, like
 Alfred Webb, felt that nationalist fervour was being diverted by 'fat
 goose chases in other directions': 'there is liveliness enough through
 the country on other issues - regarding it [home rule] there is, at least
 on the surface, great deadness'.³ Devlin however attributed this decline
 not only to disillusion but to general slackness. He wrote to Redmond
 from Rotorua on 2 January 1907:

...the chief danger to the movement lies more in the
 inactivity of our own friends than in the treachery of
 governments or the malignant operation of factionists.
 If the members of the party kept in touch with their
 constituents and kept the organisation alive and active
 by continued interest in the people's welfare we might
 laugh at any attempt to destroy the movement....but we
 cannot blind ourselves to the fact that not 20% of the
 party trouble themselves, once the elections are over.

⁴

-
1. Dillon to Redmond 22 Aug.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. 'Note of a talk with J.O'Mara' in Redmond's hand, n.d. (Redmond papers).
 3. A.Webb to Redmond, 26 June 1906 (Redmond papers).
 4. Devlin to Redmond, 2 Jan.1907 (Redmond papers).

The fact that Devlin had at this time been nine months in the Antipodes may to some extent explain this slackness, but his awareness (despite his absence) that the slackness existed suggests that the situation was by no means a new one.

Other factors, too, weakened the authority of the party at this time. Concentration on 'secondary issues' had helped to develop a localism which did little to improve the calibre of the party in parliament, and this was exacerbated by the prospect of payment of M.P.s, which aroused purely personal rivalries.¹ The election of T.M.Kettle at a by-election in East Tyrone during the summer of 1906 was a rare exception to this localism. In congratulating Kettle's electors on their choice, Redmond took the opportunity of expressing his opinion that the U.I.L. had gone 'almost too far' in respecting the claims of local men, and that 'in the selection of candidates, one of the elements.....which ought to be considered is the view entertained by the party and the party leader'.² Dillon was eager to send Kettle to the annual convention of the U.I.L. in America, in order to 'give the impression that we are getting into the party good recruits'.³

Extremism was also beginning to make some headway before the collapse of the Stirling policy. Douglas Hyde made a very successful fund-

1. Webb to Redmond, 7 May 1906 (Redmond papers).

2. Redmond at Coalisland, Co.Tyrone, 14 Oct.1906 (F.J., 15 Oct.1906).

3. Dillon to Redmond, 11 Aug.1906 (Redmond papers).

raising tour of the U.S.A. in the early months of 1906, and O'Callaghan complained to Redmond that 'there is no doubt that he allowed himself to be made a Clan utensil'. O'Callaghan thought that three-quarters of the substantial sum collected for Hyde in Chicago could have gone into U.I.L. coffers had the local men worked properly.¹ In Dublin itself, even, the sinn fein challenge was being noticed. Dillon wrote to Redmond in September 1906 that:

Harrington's description of the state of Dublin is perfectly accurate and he has done more than any other man to bring this condition of things about. I have always been of the opinion that the sinn fein business is a very serious matter and has been spreading pretty rapidly for the last year.

2

Another .P., Richard Hazelton, felt that the party should be prepared to meet an electoral challenge from sinn fein in Dublin, although Redmond had apparently 'laughed at the suggestion of their opposition' at the 1906 general election.³

But despite an awareness of the problem on the part of men like Dillon and Hazelton, the activities of J.P. Boland in the establishment of an Irish trade-mark, and the interest of Tom O'Donnell in the Gaelic

1. J.O'Callaghan to Redmond, 10 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).
2. Dillon to Redmond, 29 Sept.1906 (Redmond papers).
3. R.Hazelton to William Field, 17 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers).

movement, the party in general failed to gain any impetus from the rapidly-growing Irish-Ireland movement. Douglas Hyde complained to Redmond at the end of 1906 that party speakers took little interest in his movement

'I would like to support for our movement to come from all parties equally and not to seem in any way the prerogative of one political way of thinking more than another'.¹ Alfred Webb had already warned Redmond of this problem:

I am greatly impressed with the character of the support being given to the Gaelic League - Dr Hyde - and the Sinn Féin movement, as compared with the character of the support we are receiving. The cream of the youth and spirit of the country are being gathered into these movements.... Who are being left in the country? The bishops, who with a few honourable exceptions will leave us to our fate when they have gained their point....the farmers and the labourers, most of them as have not yet got the best of what they want. And when they get it - they appear inclined, like the county Wexford - the county really with the most material commonsense grit in Ireland, to draw away....and we have the rag-bag and bobtail. Suppose Devlin were returning from the U.S.A. tomorrow night - imagine the character of the reception he would meet here compared to that accorded to Dr Hyde!.....We cannot always be content to go on fighting for home rule through the assistance mainly of persons who are only using us for their own purposes and ends, and who care little for the desires burning in our hearts.

2

-
1. D.Hyde to Redmond, 23 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Webb to Redmond, 26 June 1906 (Redmond papers).

It was in the context of these developments that the council bill was put before the Irish people. So keen had both the government and the Irish leaders been to maintain secrecy beforehand that the nature of the scheme, when revealed, caused general surprise in Ireland - and, as we have seen, general revulsion. Many English liberals blamed Redmond for not having done more to prepare his followers for what to expect. or although he had touched on the subject in a number of speeches from September 1906 onwards, he had kept to generalities, placing emphasis on the scheme as a step towards home rule but giving no indication of the way in which it might be expected to fall short of that goal.¹ He had perhaps followed too rigidly the advice of his American colleague John O'Callaghan, who had written at the time that the new government took office:

I do not need to express the hope that you will insist firmly on keeping the home rule question to the front regardless of their devolution schemes or Indian councils or anything else. That is what will tell here.

2

The backlash of the council episode shook the Irish party almost to its foundations. The response of Devlin and his organisation to the crisis was prompt, confident, and firm, but had the sinn fein movement

1. e.g. His speech at Grange, Co.Limerick, 23 Sept.1906 (F.J., 24 Sept.1906).

2. O'Callaghan to Redmond, 15 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

been better established at that time the outcome might have been different. Both from within and without the party the policy of the liberal alliance was denounced. Redmond (perhaps forgetting his previous assertion that the labour party had been the prior recipients of the Irish vote at the general election ¹) stated rather lamely at the party meeting on 11 June 1907 that:

The Irish vote in Great Britain was given to the liberals at the general election, not because the Irish people approved of their policy, or were in any way bound to them, but because Irishmen had to choose between the liberals and the tory party, who were actively engaged in enforcing the coercion act....

2

Although the bulk of the party remained loyal, these arguments did nothing to win over those who had been alienated by the council bill episode. At a meeting of the U.I.L. national directory on June 20 the official resolution announcing the withdrawal of general support from the government and the commencement of 'a really vigorous and sustained agitation' was passed conclusively, but not before Tom O'Donnell had asked for the restoration of O'Brien and Healy (a regular occurrence) and, more significantly, moved an amendment that the party should withdraw from westminster. ³ A few days later the Young Ireland branch of the U.I.L. ⁴

-
1. see U.I.L.G.B. manifesto to electors, 30 Dec.1905 (W.F.J. 6 Jan.1906).
 2. Report of meeting of the Irish party, 11 June 1907 (W.F.J., 15 June 1907).
 3. Report of meeting of the national directory, 20 June 1907 (W.F.J., 29 June 1907).
 4. A very active branch, based on the catholic university college in Dublin.

voted that 'the present condition in Ireland calls for a more active programme than that outlined by the directory' and that 'all agitation for the redress of secondary grievances should be subordinated to the agitation for full self-government'¹. Alfred Webb complained privately to Redmond along similar lines, that 'the land agitation was largely yoked to the national question to draw it. It now appears to have come about that the national question be used eternally to draw every other question. That is what I object to'². Criticisms like these were indications that the educated middle-class idealists, which any nationalist movement needs to direct it, were beginning to find rebarbative and cynical the crude, 'sub-arxian' approach of the party leaders to the problem of mobilising mass support.

But more immediately challenging to the party were the series of by-elections which occurred or threatened to occur in Ireland during the summer of 1907. Not all the resignations were protests against the policy of the leadership, but even those that were purely coincidental necessitated by-elections at a most inopportune time, and added to the public impression

1. W.F.J., 13 July 1907.

2. Webb to Redmond, 4 June 1907 (Redmond papers).

that party unity was cracking. D.J.Cogan, M.P. for East Wicklow, who retired for purely private reasons, felt it necessary to deny publicly that his resignation was against the policy of the leadership.¹ In this case the replacement was John Muldoon, one of the nationalists' leading legal experts,² and Redmond thanked a local rival who had made way for him.

As we have already seen however, the leadership were not often so fortunate in these matters. The resignation of P.O'Hare in North Monaghan (again for personal reasons) led to a considerable humiliation for the central organisation. The party were keen to find a seat for J.T.Donovan, who had accompanied Devlin on the long and successful fund-raising mission to Australia in 1906, and who was also an influential figure in Belfast Hibernian circles.³ A local man, James Lardner, was already active in the constituency, and had the support of most of the priests and the U.I.L. branches. But the A.O.H. divisions outnumbered the League, and Dillon⁴ was of the opinion that Donovan might be carried at a convention. The constituency was then canvassed vigorously by both men, and the convention was summoned for June 10.

-
1. Times, 1 June 1907.
 2. Redmond to E.J.Walsh of Arklow, 18 July 1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Earlier the party had hoped to put him up in S.Westmeath but were foiled because J.P.Hayden's newspaper (eager, doubtless, to select a firm opponent of Ginnell) had already declared for Sir W.Nugent, a local man who in fact secured the nomination. Dillon to Redmond, 27 March 1907 (Redmond papers).
 4. Dillon to Redmond, 11 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

At this meeting the party's position in the row was revealed. The bulk of the delegates were from Hibernian divisions, and it was alleged by the chairman of the county council that many of these had been created 'overnight', and that Richard McGhee, the representative of the national directory, was operating in the interest of Donovan. The reverend chairman upheld the first of these allegations and closed the meeting, at which juncture many delegates left. The Hibernians remained however, and Donovan came in. A new chairman was elected, and McGhee, who had stayed, declared Donovan unanimously elected. Another M.P., Condon, was also present. Those who had departed meanwhile held their own convention and 'unanimously' elected Lardner, in the presence of 'all the clergy' (28).¹ It seemed certain that Donovan and Lardner would contest the seat - an outcome which would have compelled the party organisation to nail its colours to the mast of Donovan, the probable² loser.

The campaign continued for some days, the debate being conducted almost entirely on the question of Lardner's local knowledge against

1. For an account of the two 'conventions', see W.F.J., 15 June 1907.
2. Lardner claimed the following figures for the convention: the 161 Donovanites included 145 A.O.H. delegates; of the 138 Lardnerites 83 were U.I.L., 27 were priests, and 20 representatives of public bodies. Donovan did not dispute these figures, except to claim that three-quarters of his supporters were voters in the constituency (W.F.J., 22 June 1907).

Donovan's services to the movement in general, interspersed with varying estimations of the worthiness of the Hibernian organisation. Finally, on June 18, Donovan returned to Dublin, and the following evening Lardner received a telegram from Redmond announcing that his opponent had agreed to retire.¹ Although Lardner was to become a tolerably loyal member of the party, the incident was an unpleasant blow at the leadership, and at Devlin in particular.² The A.O.H. were revealed as a somewhat sinister force, and one that could be withstood by resolute opposition. The only consolation for the leadership was that other constituencies seeking to emulate the independence of North Monaghan were unlikely to select as good a candidate as Lardner - a young lawyer who proved a capable parliamentary speaker. The more customary champion of localism, the stolid farmer who had supported the local movement since Land League days,³ would look less well on the hustings against a man from central office.

Another affront to the party came in South Kilkenny. James O'Mara had been privately expressing his discontent with parliamentarism since the previous year, and when the council bill appeared he finally resigned his seat.³ Devlin at first feared that he would join the sinn fein revolt and force a contest,⁴ but soon learned that this was not the case: 'the

-
1. W.F.J., 22 June 1907.
 2. Devlin asked that Lardner should not be admitted to the party. Devlin to Redmond, 24 June 1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. J.O'Mara to Fr Brennan (printed in W.F.J., 29 June 1907).
 4. Devlin to Redmond, 22 June 1907 (Redmond papers).

difficulty in Kilkenny is therefore infinitesimal'.¹ But nonetheless the episode did not end to the advantage of the party. Nearby Kilkenny city had long been known as a centre of disaffection, mainly due to the 'mischievous proclivities' of the Kilkenny People, edited by E.T. Keane, a 'factionist' of long standing.² The leadership was therefore not anxious to raise the political temperature between nationalists in that area. Fr Brennan, the leading nationalist in the constituency, had earlier reported that 'there will be wire-pulling in favour of unsuitable local candidates as soon as the vacancy is made public', but in the circumstances his suggestion that J.T. Donovan be put up was not acted on.³ Instead, another Hibernian, Matthew Keating of the London division, was suggested. He was opposed at the convention by a number of local men however,^{and} one of them, N.J. Murphy, received the nomination. Brennan was furious, told Redmond that Murphy favoured 'sinn feignism', and called for a fresh convention on the grounds of irregularities in the first one.⁴ Even Devlin had cold feet about attempting that ruse however. He told Redmond that

-
1. Devlin to Redmond, 25 June 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. His hostility to the party leadership was manifested at both the 1907 and 1909 national conventions.
 3. Fr Brennan to Redmond, 7 Dec. 1906 (Redmond papers).
 4. Fr Brennan to Redmond, 16 July 1907 (Redmond papers). Although not a very successful or long-lasting M.P., Murphy does at least seem to have remained loyal to the policy of parliamentarism.

'Murphy has been selected through bad generalship', and they agreed to let things be.¹ Once again the party had backed down in face of opposition to its own candidate.

More alarming still than these cracks in the party fabric were the events in two other constituencies, where opposition to the party came directly from sinn fein. In North Leitrim C.J.Dolan, a Manorhamilton trader who had been elected only in 1906, announced his resignation from the Irish party on 23 June 1907.² The national directory had a few days previously rejected a motion denouncing the parliamentary policy, drawn up by him and his divisional executive. Having, he claimed, thus gained the support of his constituents, he did not feel obliged to resign his seat. After visiting Dublin and conferring with sinn fein leaders, however, he announced that in view of the attacks on his honour made by the Freeman's Journal he would in fact resign and appeal to his constituents. Devlin thought the case a very serious one, but felt that 'the constituency will go all right if the situation is handled with boldness'. If there was to be a contest, he thought that Redmond himself should attend the convention.³ But U.I.L. workers on the spot were more cocksure. Dolan

-
1. Devlin to Redmond, 17 July 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. For a study of the N.Leitrim affair see R.P.Davis, 'The rise of sinn fein, 1891-1910' (T.C.D. M.Litt.thesis, 1958) pp.65-77.
 3. Devlin to Redmond, 25 June 1907 (Redmond papers); W.F.J., 29 June 1907.

would be 'smitten hip and thigh' wrote McHugh.¹ Dennis Johnston reported that the rebel would command less than 300 votes: 'a better ground could not have been found in which to give the sinn fein humbug its death-blow'.² All the priests in the division were loyal to the party, except "two little curates.....who will in an underhand fashion support Dolan".³ Clerical support was finally clinched when Clancy reported that the new bishop of Kilmore was totally opposed to sinn fein, and would support any party nominee 'except Donovan; and I gathered that he would oppose Donovan'.⁴ Thus when the original party nominee, John Muldoon, left to take^a more immediate vacancy in Wicklow, the unfortunate Donovan was again passed over and F.E.Meehan, another local man - though this time a prominent Hibernian as well - secured the nomination.⁵

Dolan succeeded in postponing the election until February 1908, in the hope that sinn fein would be able to expand both its funds and its support during the interval. But his defeat was a foregone conclusion - the renewal of his candidature at all had been a personal decision, and sinn

-
1. P.A.McHugh to Redmond, 25 June 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. D. Johnston to Redmond, 27 June 1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. McHugh to Redmond, 1 July 1907 (Redmond papers).
 4. J.J.Clancy to Redmond, 29 June 1907 (Redmond papers).
 5. McHugh to Redmond, 29 June 1907 (Redmond papers).

fein had only backed him out of loyalty.¹ The anti-parliamentary resolution passed by the divisional U.I.L. on June 16 had been quickly rescinded: it was clear that they had been deceived by Dolan's paraseology into expressing support for a rival party, when all they had intended was to advocate a more vigorous approach on the part of their own.² Dolan obtained 1157 votes against 3103 for Meehan, in an electorate of 6324.³ It was not a result which encouraged sinn fein to try any further contests with the party. Yet in a constituency dominated by U.I.L. agrarianism it was hardly the steam-roller victory which the party would have liked.⁴

The second appearance of sinn fein in the constituencies had the appearance of being more serious still, in that it involved a senior member of the party, and occurred in an area where extremism had at least some tentative roots. But in fact the episode ended rather pathetically, and indicates, perhaps more clearly than North Leitrim, the haphazard

1. Davis, op.cit., pp.66-7.

2. W.F.J., 27 July 1907.

3. W.F.J., 24 Feb.1908.

4. Davis, op.cit., p.74, discounts the smear implicit in P.A.McHugh's verdict: 'Redmond 3103, Dolan 657, unionism 500, sinn fein 0'.

character of the sinn fein challenge at this time. Sir Thomas Esmonde was the party's chief whip and a well-known figure in North Wexford, which he had represented in parliament for very many years. His association with the Healyites in the 'nineties suggests that he had a past history of reluctance to toe the party line. But when in July 1907, having already addressed a private protest to Redmond about continued association with the liberals at Westminster, he appeared to be embracing the sinn fein policy rather than any more old-established faction, concern was rather deeper than it might otherwise have been.¹ T.M.Kettle denounced him as 'only a disruptionist in a very diaphonous disguise',² but Esmonde's new declaration of faith, made in a letter addressed to a sinn fein meeting at Enniscorthy on July 21 (which he did not attend) appeared to contain a new menace: 'How far...my opinions coincide with yours I do not know.... [but]....I am convinced that parliamentary agitation, as now conducted, has spent its force...'.³ The situation seemed dangerous, for Esmonde had a local reputation which Dolan lacked, and with the near-completion of land purchase in Wexford, U.I.L. influence was very much reduced.

1. Sir T.G.Esmonde to Redmond, 7 June 1907 (Redmond papers); Gwynn, Redmond, p.151.

2. Kettle at N.Wexford U.I.L., 28 July 1907 (W.F.J., 3 Aug.1907).

3. W.F.J., 27 July 1907.

A local contact told Redmond that 'of the local papers only the Wexford Free Press is for the party, and its circulation in this district is small compared with the Enniscorthy Echo and the Enniscorthy Guardian'.¹

Another Wexford party man warned that:

If it goes to an election you will want a strong candidate and best men to speak through the county. Don't undervalue him. I know him wheeling again will disgust a lot of people. But when he will call on some priests he is very suave, and being the Wexford man - good catholic, old family, etc. he will have some wonderful effect and is not to be despised'.

2

It soon became clear however that Sir Thomas, in seeking to make a protest, had instead made something of a fool of himself. He and those who shared his new views, divisional director Donoghue and divisional secretary Irwin, planned to call a convention for August 12, believing that to be the last day of the parliamentary session - thereby hoping to postpone the by-election until 1908. But the session was prolonged by two weeks, and they were caught out.³ The convention assembled as planned, but was accompanied by great uproar. At first Esmonde seemed inclined to adhere to his opinion that repeal should replace home rule as the goal of the Irish

-
1. P.J.Fanning to Redmond, 23 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. J.Bolger to William Redmond, 15 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Devlin to Redmond, 31 July 1907, second of day (Redmond papers).

people, but he made no mention of sinn fein. Then, after some considerable rumpus, the chairman announced that Esmonde would after all remain loyal to the party and would not divide North Wexford, at which Stephen Gwynn M.P. welcomed him back 'as a pledge-bound member'. Esmonde therupon rose again, and although the chairman begged him to 'let it go', insisted on declaring that he was prepared to act with the Irish party 'or any other body of Irishmen who will put the assertion of the national claims of Ireland in the forefront of their programme'. At this the meeting ended, but Redmond immediately wrote to the chairman that 'This won't do. Is he or is he not a member of the Irish party?'¹

Esmonde was in a corner. He evidently regretted his step, and sought to go back on it without losing face. His original letter to sinn fein had been either foolish or simply mischievous. After his speech on August 12 the sinn feinners were disgusted with him, and Redmond had not received him back.² One of Redmond's contacts forwarded the opinion that 'If Sir Thomas could live the last two months again I am sure he would not write that letter. I believe he finds his present situation untenable.... if in short he could be let down easy, I think he would gladly go back to the party'.³ This was the correct interpretation of the situation - though

-
1. Account taken from W.F.J., 17 Aug.1907.
 2. J. Bolger to Redmond, 25 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. P.J.Fanning to Redmond, 23 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).

Esmonde had to wait until the general reunion with Healy and the O'Brienies¹ in January 1908 to slip quietly back into the party. Thus ended the first sinn fein challenge to the Irish party - the Leitrim by-election, when it occurred, was something of an anti-climax, for the party was by then² a reunited one, and deep in the work of a new parliamentary session.

By the end of 1907 it was clear that the Irish party had survived its series of constituency crises unscathed. That it had done was due partly to the absence of a mature opposition, partly to its own prudence in judging where to back down and where to push forward, and partly to the concerted effort made to strengthen the party organisation during these months. At the party meeting on June 11 Redmond had made a policy statement which, said the Freeman, 'means the resumption by the party of an active policy at Westminster, an independent campaign in the British constituencies, and a vigorous agitation at home'.³ A few days later the national directory approved a withdrawal of general support from the government and called on divisional U.I.L. executives to arrange 'a series of great public demonstrations in support of the demand for self-government'.

-
1. Arthur Griffith had retained some hopes of Esmonde: 'Sir Thomas Esmonde's action has been misrepresented in the press. I will win him out all right. Wait a few days'. Griffith to G.Duffy, 14 Aug.1907 (Duffy papers, cited in Davis, op.cit., p.47).
 2. Dillon's comment on Esmonde's taking advantage of O'Brien's amnesty was: 'He is a wretched fellow. I hope you will put a sinn fein stamp on his summons or he may not answer it!'. Dillon to Redmond, 23 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).
 3. W.F.J., 15 June 1907.

A number of other resolutions were passed, demanding reforms in land,¹ education, and the tax system. These plans called forth some criticism from inside the movement - from Sir Thomas Esmonde, who wanted a policy of 'active opposition' to the liberals rather than one of 'independence' only; and from the Y.I.B., who wanted a more direct emphasis on the national demand, and less on 'secondary grievances'.² But these criticisms had little effect: when the whole basis of the parliamentary policy rested on getting the liberals into a position where they would be compelled to introduce a home rule bill, there was clearly no advantage of alienating them completely beforehand. And whilst the leadership did indeed place more emphasis on the national demand itself, and on financial relations, in the following months, it in no way relaxed the agitation over 'secondary grievances'.

On June 22 Devlin issued a circular to all divisional U.I.L. secretaries calling on them to consult with their organisations and their local members for the purpose of arranging a great home rule demonstration in each division. It was, said Devlin:

also highly desirable that you should secure the co-operation of the representatives of the public boards, the Gaelic Athletic Association, and other bodies, so that the manifestation of

1. W.F.J., 29 June 1907.

2. W.F.J., 13 July 1907.

public opinion in favour of the home rule campaign, which is now inaugurated, will make the demand for national self-government irresistible.

1

This plan was to be the framework of the party's agitation during the following months: it would, Devlin told Redmond, 'mean active propaganda up till Christmas'.² But it was really maintenance work, and did little to light new fires in nationalist hearts. Perhaps realising this, and perhaps also in order to counteract the criticisms and attacks that were mounting against the leadership, Redmond spoke out more boldly in a speech at Battersea on July 6. It marked, in the opinion of Sir Neville Chamberlain, a more forward policy than had been declared at the directory meeting.³

Redmond said:

It is true....that all the cranks, all the soreheads, all the political outcasts have been much in evidence for the last few weeks. As an Irishman, I am not ashamed to admit here in England that we in Ireland have our Roseberys and our croaking ravens.....But let no man deceive himself in the matter. These men don't represent Ireland.....I want a great home rule movement this autumn and winter. The people of this country, many of them, have been allowed to keep the illusion too long that our movement in Ireland is a mere agrarian movement; that we should have been satisfied by the mere removal of grievances. I ask for a movement this autumn and winter which will show to England that no removal of the material kind of grievances will touch the soul of our national movement and that the real Irish demand is a demand for the recognition of our nationality.....

4

-
1. W.F.J., 29 June 1907.
 2. Devlin to Redmond, 22 June 1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Monthly R.I.C. reports (1668/S), report of the inspector-general, July 1907 (S.P.O.).
 4. Redmond at Battersea, 6 July 1907 (W.F.J., 13 July 1907).

But although this was a more fiery speech than any Redmond had made since the liberals had taken office, he could not in fact throw over 'secondary grievances' in the way that the Y.I.B. and others wanted because they were, for the time being, his main argument against the adoption of sinn fein abstentionism. To the question 'while home rule is in abeyance, why send men to Westminster?', his answer had to be that without the presence of those men Ireland would remain without her national university, her amending land bill, her housing bill, etc`.

Sinn fein meanwhile was making a lot of noise in Dublin, where it already possessed considerable influence in municipal if not in national politics. Throughout the summer of 1907 meetings were held and protests made by the minority party on the city council against the policy of the parliamentarians. Their efforts in combating this challenge gained prestige and influence in moderate nationalist circles for men like Lorcan Sherlock and, especially, J.D.Nugent and his Hibernians.¹ The U.I.L. was an engine powered very much by agrarian grievances, and in areas where these were not present the national organisation was generally weak. Thus the Irish party became dependent on the A.O.H., with its social activities, its pomp, and its benefits, to organise catholic nationalists in Dublin and the towns of Ulster.² It was in the towns that sinn fein was most

1. See T.Harrington to Redmond, 29 Sept.1907 (Redmond papers).

2. See appendix I.

able to make its challenge: the secretary of the Town Tenants League, J.M.Coghlan Briscoe, advised Redmond in August 1907 that 'it would be a good thing for the party if the rank and file members attended the town meetings in their constituencies as it is in the towns that the sinn
¹
 feinners are finding any semblance of support'.

But even in the towns the extent of the sinn fein expansion was very limited - 'there does not appear to be any sinn feinners in Waterford',
²
 Briscoe reported. A few weeks later another of Redmond's contacts, F.B.Dineen (who appears to have acted as a spy within the sinn fein camp), told him that sinn fein:

...have no notion so far of doing anything outside Dublin, but I think an attack may be made at some meeting in Kildare or Newbridge. They do not intend to interfere in parliamentary elections beyond Dolan's, but they say the least they should do there was to stand by him, as he went out on their programme.

3

About the same time the Hearst newspapers in the U.S.A. reported a rumour that Redmond was about to resign the party leadership, and that Dillon had gone over to sinn fein - an indication of the impression that sinn fein

1. Briscoe to Redmond, 12 Aug. [1907] (Redmond papers).
2. Briscoe to Redmond, 7 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).
3. Dineen to Redmond, 30 Sept.1907 (Redmond papers).

had made on the public mind.¹ But it was an impression based on the appearance of a new political grouping distinct from the old 'factionists', and not on the weight of support behind that grouping. As William Bulfin wrote to Devoy in August, 'parliamentarism has got a shock, but it wants another knock or two, so far as I can see'.² Dillon wrote to Blake, about the same time, that 'Redmond and the party are having a strong time, but I do not take a gloomy view of the outlook'.³ Thus when the great Dublin home rule demonstration, which was the centre-piece of Devlin's new campaign, took place at the Mansion House on September 4, sinn fein could do no more than organise a mild rumpus during Redmond's speech - a form of protest which was quickly subdued, for Devlin had arranged for 'fifty or sixty good men to guard the doors and act as stewards in the hall'.⁴

In Dublin city however, it was admitted that sinn fein constituted a danger, and concrete attempts were made to combat the challenge. In August 1907 Redmond asked Timothy Harrington (the leading party organiser in Parnell's time, who had in later years shown little enthusiasm for the work of the party), to form a central branch of the U.I.L. to serve as a

-
1. Telegram from U.I.L. HQ to Redmond, 23 Sept.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Bulfin to Devoy, 14 Aug.1907 (Devoy's Post Bag, ed.W.O'Brien and D.Ryan Dublin 1953. vol.ii, p.358).
 3. Dillon to Blake, 30 Aug.1907 (Blake papers, microfilm in N.L.I., 4683 f.586).
 4. Devlin to Redmond, 31 July 1907 (Redmond papers).

fortnightly platform for the party in the capital: 'I am convinced that a reaction is setting in in Dublin against these sinn fein people, and that a re-organisation of the national forces is possible.'¹ Harrington's reply was both a good description of the state of Dublin and an illustration of the disillusion which had lately overtaken him:

You may take it from me that Dublin is really as sound as ever it was, but it requires a little special treatment. The sinn fein have no real grip in the city. They are composed of two classes who were always hostile to us and who are not a bit more influential today than they ever were only that owing to mistakes on our own part they have been allowed to become a little more prominent. The really active forces in it are the representatives and the agents of the clan-na-gael, such as P.T.Daly and Griffith and Henry Dixon. They have for the moment been joined by the doubters and censors, both lay and clerical, who have always been on the track of the parliamentary party to decry them and the movement. A little activity on our part and particularly the disappearance of all differences amongst ourselves would in a few weeks extinguish these forces.....

.....All we have really to do is to keep half a dozen mischief makers out. I shall put that before Devlin. I know he will see that my views are correct, but I am afraid he may leave himself too much in the hands of some of the men who are vigorously organising the A.O.H. here. Their programme so far as I can learn of preferring a catholic first in everything and a hibernian to every other catholic is in direct opposition to our policy of inviting all creeds and classes of Irishmen and though at the present they are all right and giving us good services, the day of division and dissension will come.....

1. Redmond to Harrington, 19 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).

....I believe your own position would be easier and more pleasant with the strong old hands such as O'Brien and Healy and if possible Sexton around you than to be in the position to be checked by every recruit within a few months or years of his admission to Irish politics. That thought was forcibly impressed upon me by the speeches of some of the young gentlemen at the last meeting of the party I attended....

1

Harrington sounded out opinion amongst influential men in Dublin (for it was the leaders of opinion rather than mass support which Redmond was concerned about) and could soon report hopefully, September 18, that:

....most members of the corporation will join, several members of the bar and many of the old supporters. The spirit I am glad to say has been very much improved by the Mansion House meeting. It has shown Dublin people that these fellows can be brushed aside, and such a lesson is always useful here.

2

By the middle of October the new branch was inaugurated. It would be, in Harrington's words, 'a platform directing attention to home rule, which must interest Dublin in a special degree, the financial relations, industrial development, and housing accommodation in our cities'.

3

This reflects the general attempt made during these months to widen the basis of the Irish party's appeal: the series of speeches made around Ireland by Redmond in the autumn of 1907 as part of Devlin's propaganda drive, though intended primarily as an attempt to re-establish home rule as a living policy among the people, in fact concentrated as

-
1. Harrington to Redmond, 20 Aug.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Harrington to Redmond, 18 Sept.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Harrington to Redmond, 16 Oct.1907 (Redmond papers).

much on expanding the breadth of the party's social programme, previously¹ somewhat restricted to aspects of the land question.

Harrington's co-operation in the new drive was in itself an indication of another way in which the party attempted to increase its strength during the second half of 1907. His lack of enthusiasm for the party during the previous years had been occasioned partly by personal factors, it is true, but also partly by a feeling that the official party leaders were not completely in the right. He had taken part in O'Brien's abortive land conference at the Shelburne Hotel in October 1906 despite² Redmond's strong disapproval. But now in October 1907 he declined an invitation to one of O'Brien's great 'unity' demonstrations at Tralee. 'I have given him my views very strongly about the way in which his paper is conducted and especially its treatment of the Mansion House meeting,'³ he told Redmond. His change of attitude marked a general feeling among the more uncommitted Irish nationalists that the cause was in a bad way - not because the situation had been mishandled (as critics were to claim over the budget and the land bill, in 1909), but because an attempt was being made by English politicians to ignore nationalist demands, an

1. Later edited by J.G.S. MacNeill and published as a pamphlet (Dublin, Irish Press Agency, 1908).

2. See chapter 5, p.446.

3. Harrington to Redmond, 16 Oct.1907 (Redmond papers).

attitude which could best be met by a united demonstration of national determination. The situation was such that only the extremists could benefit from a denunciation of official nationalist policy. Public hostility to the council bill suggested that there was no political advantage to be gained by an appeal to 'moderate influences' such as O'Brien might have made against Redmond's policy of rejection. Equally, the official nationalist leadership lacked the solid body of achievements which would have enabled them to call with any confidence for the destruction of the 'factionists'. It was clear on the other hand that the internal quarrel¹ among the parliamentary politicians was productive of nothing but harm. Thus re-union by agreement was a natural policy at this juncture.

Earlier in the year the quarrel within the party had been accentuated by the legal action brought by O'Brien against the Freeman, at which time neither side had been willing to give way. Cardinal Logue had written urging Redmond to end 'these unfortunate disputes', but the reply had been stony.¹ Redmond adhered at this time more to the view of Dillon, who warned, 17 February 1907: 'As for O'Brien - the Cardinal and all his priests detest him - and look to him now only as a

1. Logue to Redmond, 7 Feb.1907; Redmond to Logue, 9 Feb.1907 (Redmond papers)

instrument to break the party and resurrect Tim [Healy] ', Dillon felt that if the party was more active, and if the Freeman was more co-operative then 'we could afford to treat all the enemies of the party with contempt'.²

This attitude remained the view of the party leaders down to the middle of the autumn. In reply to a party worker in Wexford who urged on him the need for re-union, Redmond wrote on August 19:

My candid opinion is that, so far as Mr Healy is concerned, the country does not believe that he would be likely to work loyally with colleagues in the Irish party if he returned to it. And so far as Mr Wm O'Brien is concerned, my personal opinion is that he will continue to refuse to rejoin the Irish party and take the pledge.²

In September Logue denounced the party leaders for 'entering into an alliance with secularism and socialism under the pretence of securing home rule for Ireland'.³ About the same time he publicly spurned an appeal by the Tuam R.D.C. to attempt a reconciliation of the party: he could not, he said, risk the prospect of 'having his interference in the disputes resented and possibly repudiated by the larger section of the party'.⁴

1. Dillon to Redmond, 17 Feb. 1907 (Redmond papers).
2. Redmond to P.J. Fanning, 19 Aug. 1907 (Redmond papers)
3. Logue at Derry, 29 Sept. 1907 (Times, 16 Sept. 1907).
4. Letter to Tuam R.D.C., printed in Times, 16 Sept. 1907.

O'Brien himself had for most of the year been out of politics and, indeed, out of Ireland. But on October 2 he returned to the fray with a major speech in Cork city. Speaking of Redmond's rejection of the council bill, he said that he returned to politics to find that the party 'had not only damned home rule for the present parliament....but had led the Irish people into the ridiculous position of saving the house of lords the trouble of damning home rule by their own will and deed....'. But O'Brien concluded his otherwise predictable attack by offering an 'olive branch' which he pressed the party leaders to accept. Either by private conference or compulsory arbitration, he said, reunion must¹ be achieved.

Dillon meanwhile had got wind of O'Brien's new move, and on the eve of the Cork meeting wrote to warn Redmond:

O'Brien, I hear, is organising an active campaign - but he has done that often before....O'Brien has no staying power, and after a month or two will get sick of the fight and go off. The one real difficulty and danger is the difficulty of raising money - no effort should be spared to work up the parliamentary fund in connection with the present meetings. If the party fund can be kept strong, O'Brien and sinn fein can easily be worn out.

2

-
1. O'Brien at Cork, 2 Oct. 1907 (Times, 3 Oct.1907).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 1 Oct. 1907 (Redmond papers).

This attitude clearly boded ill for any genuine attempt at reunion, and probably conflicted with the main stream of nationalist opinion at this time. But Dillon had been out of politics for many months and, furthermore, could not have been aware that O'Brien's speech would contain so strident a call for reunion. Indeed, in view of the attacks which had preceded that call, nationalists far more tolerant of O'Brien than was Dillon might have been pardoned for not regarding it as anything more than another ruse. Redmond was convinced of O'Brien's intentions, not by his public utterances, but by a lengthy exchange of letters with contacts in the south of Ireland. On October 10 he heard from a friend in Youghal, E.Lahiff, that O'Brien was very eager to meet him: 'He may be found using a good deal of "guff" in public, to keep his followers in line, but the truth is that he is anxious to be again within the fold'¹. Redmond replied cagily that 'wholesale condemnation, and, I am sorry to say, abuse' in O'Brien's speeches and in his Irish People scarcely conduced to this belief.² Lahiff passed this on to O'Brien, who promised that he would 'make the path of peace smoother for Mr Redmond at Tralée next Sunday!'³. Encouraged by these assurances, Redmond publicly acknowledged O'Brien's advances, at

-
1. Lahiff to Redmond, 10 Oct.1907 (Redmond papers)/
 2. Redmond to Lahiff, 12 Oct.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Lahiff to Redmond, 17 Oct.1907 (Redmond papers).

Drumkeerin on October 27, and though he cautiously stressed that 'the national policy has been decided upon by the national directory and by the Irish party', he expressed a readiness to consult with O'Brien and 'to meet him half-way and more than half-way'¹.

During November these expressions of goodwill were slowly transformed into a practical arrangement. On the 1st, Captain Donelan M.P. had a talk with George Crosbie, editor of the Cork Examiner and an experienced go-between for O'Brien and the party, and found him under the impression that 'Wm O'Brien means business on this occasion'². On the 9th Crosbie wrote to Redmond confirming this and passing on O'Brien's request for a 'conference', which, however, was to be treated as absolutely confidential in the event of its breaking down. Crosbie was optimistic about the results of such a meeting (as editor of the party's organ in 'rebel Cork' he might be said to have had a vested interest in reunion), though he feared 'that on some points there exists a divergence of opinion'³. Redmond demurred at the reference to a 'conference', and suggested instead an informal talk.⁴ O'Brien did not, on this occasion, insist on the

-
1. Redmond at Drumkeerin, 27 Oct.1907 (W.F.J., 2 Nov.1907).
 2. Donelan to Redmond, n.d. (but must be 1 Nov.1907) (Redmond papers).
 3. Crosbie to Redmond, 9 Nov.1907 (Redmond papers).
 4. S. O'Mara to Redmond, 15 Nov.1907 (Redmond papers).

retention of his pet slogan, but at once put forward four points as a basis for agreement.¹ The first three of these, declaring legislative home rule to be the minimum demand, adopting a land bill and a university bill as short-term aims meanwhile, and welcoming the co-operation of all classes and creeds towards these ends, were sufficiently broad or ill-defined to present no problem. The fourth, calling for a clear definition of the party pledge, was more dangerous, in view of its potential for arousing old conflicts, but since O'Brien called for a definition only, and expressed a willingness to accept ² either the strict or the freer interpretation, it did not seem likely to wreck the discussions.

Redmond was now convinced that whether or not O'Brien really was in earnest, public opinion necessitated his being treated as if he were: nothing could be lost by a display of good intentions. Probably Redmond's acceptance of the overtures was in fact genuine, but in view of Dillon's relations with O'Brien since 1903 it was not surprising that in writing to him Redmond laid emphasis more on the tactical dangers of refusing to co-operate. He wrote, November 16:

-
1. Crosbie to Redmond, 15 Nov. 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. For a full discussion of the pledge and the debate between O'Brien and the leadership during these weeks see F.S.J. Lyons, The Irish Parliamentary Party 1890-1910 (London, 1951), pp. 117-122.

I feel very strongly that if Crosbie's letter [he meant the one of Nov. 15] were published alongside of an absolute refusal by us, the effect would be extremely bad and many of our best friends would think us in the wrong.....I fear very much our being represented as being anxious to keep O'Brien out, and of course I am not and I am sure you are not either. If a bitter fight goes on I foresee very serious results and for myself I am about sick of it.

1

The following day, in a speech at Ennis, he once again invited O'Brien to rejoin the party, and suggested an informal¹ meeting to discuss any difficulties.² At Ballycullane, on November 24, O'Brien accepted the invitation: although 'no less than nineteen' nationalist M.P.s had testified to the absence of unity and at least three of the four archbishops agreed with them, and although the 'amount that was contributed for the whole of Ireland for the past twelve months is considerably less than half what used to be contributed by one single Irish county I could name', O'Brien admitted that 'a considerable body of opinion' in Ireland, even in parts of Munster, had not been in agreement with his views, and he accordingly agreed to a meeting, and felt 'considerable hope that all nationalist representatives might soon be brought together in the same camp and under the same flag'.³

1. Redmond to Dillon, 16 Nov. 1907 (Redmond papers).

2. Redmond at Ennis, 17 Nov. 1907 (Times, 18 Nov. 1907).

3. O'Brien at Ballycullane, 24 Nov. 1907 (W.F.J., 30 Nov. 1907).

As has already been suggested, there were a number of reasons why Redmond and the party should have been eager to receive O'Brien back into the fold if it could be achieved without loss of face. Political developments since the liberals' accession had forced the Irish party into a corner, and if the pressure of O'Brien and his followers could be relieved by an accommodation, Redmond's freedom of action would in consequence be increased. He might, for instance, be able to take a firmer line against the agrarian extremists who were embarrassing Birrell's¹ sympathetic administration. Sir Antony MacDonnell wrote to his wife on November 24:

His [Birrell's] hope, I fancy, is that the better judgment of the leaders will tell them that outrage will not pay. That hope is a broken reed to lean on. If union were established between O'Brien and Redmond, with Healy added on, there might be some slender basis for Mr Birrell's hope....Otherwise his policy seems to me to be one of despair....

2

MacDonnell's opposition to the principles governing Birrell's administration of the country led him to take a pessimistic view of the nationalists' efforts for unity. But he had a slight opinion of the nationalist members and their supporters, and almost certainly underestimated

-
1. 'It is one of the results we may look forward to from a reunion of Irish nationalist members that more definite action on the subject of cattle-driving will inevitably, and I hope unanimously, be taken...'. O'Brien in an interview with the Morning Post, (W.F.J., 14 Dec.1907).
 2. MacDonnell to his wife, 24 Nov.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.217 f.50).

the weight of their desire for unity at this time. One M.P., William O'Malley, wrote to Redmond on November 20 to urge conciliation:

With O'Brien outside, and strengthened by his apparently sincere overtures for union, your position would be weakened in parliament, where you would be more or less driven to a fireworks display in order to meet the attacks of O'Brien and his friends: whereas with him being in the party you could pursue a policy of prudence and caution or such a policy as would be to the advantage of the cause, feeling that you had the whole country with you and with no serious party attacking you on one flank.....

1

Other elements in the party however were extremely uneasy about the new developments. Whether or not the absence of Dillon from the centre of affairs was a crucial factor Redmond's conciliation of O'Brien; it certainly looked that way to the more irreconcilable of O'Brien's enemies within the party. At Carrickmore, on November 3, Stephen Gwynn expressed a hope that the informal talks might be successful, but warned that 'they were not going to bring back Mr O'Brien at the price of throwing Mr John Dillon to the wolves'.² On the same day T.M.Kettle demanded to know, before this 'sham unity' went any further, whether its chief proponent was a home ruler or a devolutionist, whether he was the O'Brien of '87

-
1. O'Malley to Redmond, 20 Nov.1907 (Redmond papers). As another argument in favour of a rapprochement, O'Malley mentioned the imminent danger of 'our friend' being publicly exposed. This remains a mystery, unless it be a reference to T.P.O'Connor and a divorce scandal which in fact remained concealed.
 2. Gwynn at Carrickmore, 3 Nov.1907 (I.W.I., 9 Nov.1907).

or the O'Brien of '03.¹ Later in the month the Y.I.B., with their customary disregard for both expediency and caution, passed a resolution calling on the directory to act promptly in Cork with a view to opposing the O'Brienites at the next election, and urged Dillon to return to the party ranks, 'where his absence leaves a gap that cannot be filled, and subjects the Irish party to the danger of an unworthy compromise and a lowering of the national flag'. Another resolution disapproved of any overtures being made to O'Brien.² Gwynn and especially Kettle kept up their attitude during the following weeks, to the extent that The Times (admittedly a paper peculiarly partial to a taste of disruption in the nationalist ranks) commented that 'it is believed that a strong section of the party resents Mr Redmond's overtures and adheres to Mr Dillon's policy of exclusion'.³

It seemed at first that the conjectures about Dillon's position were correct. On November 26 George Crosbie forwarded to Redmond a telegram from O'Brien which ran as follows: 'Much disappointed as you can imagine at interview and virulent tone of D.'s letter, but will take no further

-
1. Kettle at Downpatrick, 3 Nov.1907 (I.W.I., 9 Nov.1907).
 2. Y.I.B. meeting, 29 Nov.1907 (Times, 2 Dec.1907).
 3. Times, 24 Dec.1907. .

1

step for the present. O'Brien'. But it seems that Dillon's attitude was in fact one of benevolent neutrality - his absence from the conference table, like Healy's, was intended primarily to avoid a clash of personalities rather than to escape commitment to the decisions arrived at. He wrote to Redmond on December 11:

I feel it is hardly necessary for me to assure you that the proceedings at Castlecomer [where a local body had objected to the attempts to conciliate O'Brien].....and Kettle's speech at Sligo were entirely against my wishes, and that I have done everything in my power to prevent such manifestations.

2

Nonetheless Dillon was extremely wary of the whole business, and was probably sceptical about its eventual outcome. The presence of Bishop O'Donnell as the second party representative was doubtless intended as a re-assurance for him and for those who shared his views. (O'Brien also took clerical weight to the conference table, in the person of Fr Clancy of Cork). The Bishop's attitude, expressed to Redmond a few days before the conference, suggested that he too was sceptical as to its chances of success. He wrote, December 8: 'In reading Mr O'Brien's speeches I find one thing that creates a fresh difficulty. How does he speak of the men he is rejoining in his conciliation speech? He endorses to say the least of it, very offensive statements....'³

-
1. Enclosed with Crosbie to Redmond, 26 Nov.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 11 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Bishop of Raphoe to Redmond, 8 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).

The conference met at the Mansion House on December 13, and reached rapid agreement on most of the problems.¹ The sole point of contention at the first meeting was the old one about the party pledge. In O'Brien's account of the proceedings, he and Fr Clancy expressed a willingness to accept either a narrow or a broad definition, one binding simply at Westminster, or extending to the public platform and press as well. The broader definition had been applied by the party since 1900, though O'Brien had always maintained that Dillon's attacks on the Wyndham land act had been at variance with this ruling. O'Brien thus feigned to mingle surprise with his acquiescence when Redmond and the bishop now insisted on the strict interpretation. He and Clancy nonetheless agreed with the proviso² that the consent of both Dillon and Healy should be secured. But in Redmond's account, O'Brien and Clancy made plain their opinion that the strict interpretation of the pledge, on which Redmond insisted, was impracticable, and it was therefore decided to adjourn for a few days.³

Nonetheless, Redmond was at this stage still optimistic, though he was unable to transfer this feeling to his colleague. Dillon wrote on

-
1. ~~This paragraph is based on Lyons, Irish parliamentary party, pp. 117-122.~~
 2. O'Brien to Redmond, 19 Dec. 1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Redmond to O'Brien, 22 Dec. 1907 (Redmond papers).

the following day that 'I did not gather from the bishop quite so favourable an impression of the interview as your letter would convey. O'Brien seems to have been in an exceedingly contentious temper'¹. A further meeting was delayed for some days whilst O'Brien contacted Healy and Bishop O'Donnell attended the Dudley commission in London, and during this period Dillon's attitude hardened. On the 17th he told Redmond that 'a great deal of mischief has been done during the last three weeks - and O'Brien has to a certain extent got a new start and gained ground'². Four days later a longer letter put forward his considered views, and clearly implied that he had washed his hands of the business. He thought that Redmond should make it clear to O'Brien that he would publish a statement immediately, if the conference was broken off, and that in any case the conference should not be allowed to drag on while O'Brien arranged 'unity' meetings:

I am bound to tell you that I consider that a very serious situation has arisen. O'Brien with great astuteness has to a very considerable extent out-maneuvred the party - and he is now appearing before the country as the champion of unity - always

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 14 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 17 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).

a popular cry, the poor people not being in a position to see the grotesque absurdity of his position, as the case for the party is not put before them.....There is in my mind the gravest danger that a series of meetings will be held.....O'Brien and his followers were unable to get a meeting in Mayo or in any part of Connaught. But now the idea has gone abroad that you are more or less in sympathy with this agitation - your name and mine are listed on bills - and so the meetings will be arranged, and if this is allowed to continue I feel the effect on the position of the party will be disastrous.

1

Redmond was still, however, committed to another meeting with O'Brien, which had been arranged for December 23. But their intervening communications suggested that a new point of controversy was appearing. On the 19th O'Brien wrote that 'only one important subject of discussion remains - viz. the date and constitution of the national convention by which alone any effect can be given to our agreement'. Redmond replied sharply that 'this was not one of the subjects which we assembled to discuss. Had this formed a fifth proposition in your Ballycullane speech, I am afraid our meeting could not have taken place'. At their second meeting, however, O'Brien adhered to his demand that a special convention be called to ratify the

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 21 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. O'Brien to Redmond, 19 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. Redmond to O'Brien, 22 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).

agreement and that the basis of representation at conventions be revised,¹
 by a committee consisting of Devlin, Harrington, and Fr Clancy of Cork.
 On these points the conference broke up, Redmond and O'Donnell maintaining
 that there was no need, and indeed no authority for a special convention,
 which was a matter for the national directory of the U.I.L., as was the
 question of representation.²

O'Brien's new demand had patently been made with a view to his
 personal political advantage, and was therefore not compatible with his
 expressions of eagerness to return to the party. Redmond would not
 countenance such a demand, and would certainly not have had Dillon's
 acquiescence had he wished to do so. He had been warned by Lahiff,
 his friend in Youghal:

O'Brien wants an immediate convention because he is satisfied
 that hardly anyone will go to but his own followers, and that
 this would be the case I am confident; then goodness knows
 what would happen. You are thoroughly right in the position
 you have taken - stick to it and the people will stick to you.
 I say this notwithstanding the friendly feelings I have for
 O'Brien.

3

O'Brien's public actions following the conference confirmed the views
 of those in the party who had been sceptical of the whole proceeding.

-
1. Revised so as to include all paid-up branches of the U.I.L. which had
 been in existence in 1903, and both factions of the predominantly O'Brienite
 Land and Labour Association.
 2. I.W.I., 4 Jan.1908.
 3. Lahiff to Redmond, 29 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers).

At Buncrana on 1 January 1908 he declared in an outspoken speech that if unity was not an accomplished fact, the fault was not his. Reunion would be an 'utter faree' without a national convention and had been opposed for this very reason, he claimed, by the enemies of peace.¹ This apparent return to intransigence on O'Brien's part was almost welcomed by Dillon, as a clearing of the air:

After O'Brien's speech at Buncrana there can I think be no longer any doubt as to that gentleman's intentions....and to my mind he has got a new start by these negotiations. Before they were started he was at the last ditch. Now if he is not met firmly and promptly he will undoubtedly make headway, and in a very short time you will have the whole party broken into factions.....Believe me, unless you make a strong personal appeal you will have the country in a wild state before many weeks are out.....

2

He wanted Redmond to issue a public warning to people to ignore the so-called 'unity' meetings. On January 5 at Aughnacloy T.M.Kettle ridiculed O'Brien's pose as 'the great unitarian', and referred to Redmond's 'almost excessive desire for peace and reconciliation'.³ Devlin's attack a few days later on Lord Dunraven as 'one of the most sinister influences that has lately come into Irish politics' was an equally firm gesture of opposition to compromise with the centre.⁴

-
1. O'Brien at Buncrana, 1 Jan.1908 (I.W.I., 4 Jan.1908).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 2 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).
 3. Kettle at Aughnacloy, 5 Jan.1908 (W.F.J., 11 Jan.1908).
 4. Devlin in Dublin, 7 Jan.1908 (I.W.I., 11 Jan.1908).

Had O'Brien's private political activities during these days also been known to his critics in the party, their resolve against him would have been even greater. Probably with the ultimate aim of panicking the party into agreeing to his demands (rather than with any clear idea of a 'new departure'), he was seeking to ally the strength of his movement in Cork with that of the sinn feiners in Dublin. Only five days after concluding his talks with Redmond he was reporting the results of his new feelers to Dunraven. The sinn feiners, he said:

....jumped at the idea....they quite recognised that there must be no attempt to turn the demonstration into one in favour of their own peculiar doctrine. They are quite content with the one principle of national unity on the broadest possible basis with a view to settling Irish questions among Irishmen themselves.

He had arranged that a big joint meeting should be held, and hoped that the Dunraven group of moderate landlords would attend also. But although Dunraven, after some hesitation, agreed, the sinn feiners subsequently backed out, and the meeting never took place.¹ Thus although Dillon, as well as O'Brien himself, considered that the latter had gained ground

1. O'Brien to Dunraven, 28 Dec.1907, and other material cited in K.R.Schilling, 'William O'Brien and the All-for-Ireland League' (T.C.D.B.Litt. thesis, 1956), pps.47-9. For an examination of the episode from the sinn fein side, see R.P.Davis: 'The rise of sinn fein' op.cit.p.82: 'The only explanation for these events is that though some members of the resident Dublin executive favoured the plan, it was realised that the movement as a whole would condemn it'. Griffith was probably the most enthusiastic, Hobson, Hegarty and the I.R.B. element the least so.

over the episode, it soon transpired that this was not really the case. Lahiff told Redmond before the new year that 'it would surprise you to know what an undercurrent is setting in against O'Brien in Cork since the publication of the conference proceedings.'¹

Perhaps because they sensed this weakness on the part of their opponent, but more probably as part of their general attempt to discredit O'Brien's claim that he was all for unity and they all for dissension, the national directory of the U.I.L. on January 15 passed a resolution which, while opposing an immediate convention and approving Redmond's actions, called upon all nationalist M.P.s to rejoin the party.² This hint was made broader on the following day by a resolution, introduced by none other than Dillon, and passed by the parliamentary party, repeating the invitation to reunite, on the basis of the limited agreement reached at the conference.³ Whether he was impressed by the name of Dillon so prominently displayed in the invitation, or by the strength of the party's resolve not to accept his demand for a convention, or more by the failure of his own brief bid for the support of sinn fein and of the public at large, O'Brien immediately conferred with Healy, and they and the other nationalist rebels rejoined the party

-
1. Lahiff to Redmond, 29 Dec.1907 (Redmond papers),
 2. It was moved, significantly, by Rev.M.B. Kennedy, a leading opponent of O'Brien in Co.Cork, and J.T.Donovan, a well-known Hibernian.
 3. W.F.J., 25 Jan., 1908.

1

on the terms offered.

Although the unity was short-lived, it enabled the party to go into the new session undivided, it avoided the possibility of O'Brien's intervention on behalf of Dolan in North Leitrim,² and it enabled the party leaders to take a firmer line against the agrarian disorder in Ireland which was so impeding the efforts of the chief secretary to help them.

2. Attempts to restore the home rule policy, 1908-9.

By the end of 1907 the Irish party had averted the immediate challenge, and, at least for the time being, secured its position in Ireland. But this small success was partly the result of their tactical skill in outwitting very modest opposition, and partly because they were able to point to ameliorative measures, notably a university settlement and a major reform of the land purchase act, in the offing at Westminster. As a home rule party their position was no further advanced than it had been when the council

-
1. O'Brien to Redmond, 17 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers). As well as Healy and the O'Brienites - D.D.Sheehan, A.Roche, and J.O'Donnell - who were at that time outside the party, Esmonde also took advantage of the truce. But Dolan felt that, on grounds of policy and loyalty, he should stand firm. See his letter to O'Brien of 20 Jan.1908, among O'Brien's letters in the Redmond papers,
 2. 'The reunion of the parliamentarian sections has undoubtedly lessened my chances of re-election'. Dolan to O'Brien, 20 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).

bill was forced under by the contempt of Irish public opinion. Once the university and land reforms were achieved the party would be at the end of their tether - further material improvements could be expected only as part of the government's general social programme, and would therefore provide arguments in favour not of home rule but of retention of the union. At the next general election only a clear indication of how and when home rule might be achieved would justify the continued supremacy in Ireland of the parliamentary party.

Birrell was intensely aware of this situation, and of the threat it presented to his administration. In October 1907 he urged on C.B. the advisability not only of ensuring that the proposed social reforms were acceptable to the Irish leaders, but of making some further gesture:

Redmond's position is a ticklish one. I think he has saved himself for the present, but only by the skin of his teeth. He has very little personal control - he would stop the cattle driving if he could but he can't, and he knows he can't. This next session will be watched with scrutinizing eyes by the whole country. He can't rest on his oars for a single moment. He must be up and doing from the very first. The impression is general in Ireland that the parliamentary party have allowed home rule to be shoved under and that it can't emerge for at least a decade. Were that impression to become a belief, Redmond and his whole party would be kicked into space. Their maintenance fund would disappear and the sinn fein - who are the fenians and ribbonmen and separatists in new clothing and with some new ideas, would reign in their stead. Redmond, who has still got hold of the machine at Westminster, must therefore make great play, somehow or other, next session. If he can't gain our support then he must fight us tooth and nail and at least half his supporters would be just as well pleased if he decided to fight us. 1

1. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 30 Oct. 1907 (C.B. papers, B.M. Add.Ms.41240 F.127).

Redmond was insistent that the government should commit itself by a resolution in general terms to the principle of home rule.¹ Speaking at Birr, deep in the heart of cattle-driving territory, On November 11, he told his audience that he had not come to vent any particular grivance, but to give testimony to 'that all-embracing, that undying devotion to the cause of self-government, of making Ireland a free nation.....the coming parliament will not be one week in session before the home rule flag is raised'.² At the end of November he embarked on a speaking tour of Great Britain, in which he expounded in detail the advantages to Ireland, and to England, of home rule. In addition he made plain his practical policy. Firstly, 'no remedial legislation could settle the Irish question'.³ Furthermore, the question of the government's relationship with the house of lords had been raised in such a way that parliament would soon be dissolved:

.....and before and when it came to an end the Irish party would have to take such steps in and out of parliament as would make it certain that not only the question of the house of lords but the question of home rule for Ireland would be fairly and squarely put before the electors at the next general election.....

4

Referring to the Irish council bill, he said that there could be 'no half-way house between despotism and home rule'.⁵

-
1. Birrell to Campbell Bannerman, 30 Oct.1907 (C.B.papers, B.M.Add.Ms.41240 f.127).
 2. Redmond at Birr, 10 Nov.1907 (W.F.J., 16 Nov.1907).
 3. Redmond at Merthyr, 27 Nov.1907 (Times, 28 Nov.1907).
 4. Redmond at Motherwell, 1 Dec.1907 (Times, 2 Dec.1907).
 5. Redmond at Sheffield, 2 Dec.1907 (Times, 3 Dec.1907).

But the government, though they had earlier in the year ignored MacDonnell's entreaties to forge ahead with the council bill regardless, now seemed eager to retain it as a talking point. Though most ministers in practice probably had no more enthusiasm for devolution than had Birrell, who thought that 'our mistake was to touch devolution at all',¹ it might still serve to maintain cabinet unity pending a decision on home rule. At Belfast on November 23, even Birrell referred to the benefits his plan would have brought the Irish people - 'the one thing they ought to have at the earliest possible moment was the responsibility of the administration'.² His speech, commented the Freeman, was an indication that the government were still 'engaged in exploring the old via media'.³ Haldane declared at Dunbar on 9 January 1908 that the council bill had been on 'true lines', and that 'the public opinion of the country was against the extreme step of home rule'.⁴ At the end of 1907 it seemed that the cabinet were not in any position to take a decision on such vital matters. Haldane told his sister that:

...sooner or later a crisis will come. C.B. is the only person who can hold this motley crew together, and he is not

-
1. Birrell to C.B. 24 May 1907 (C.B. papers, B.M.Add.Ms. 41239 f.250).
 2. Birrell at Belfast, 23 Nov.1907 (Times, 25 Nov.1907).
 3. W.F.J., 30 Nov.1907.
 4. Haldane at Dunbar, 9 Jan.1908 (Times, 10 Jan.1908).

there - I should like to liquidate the concern and start afresh. This is just what I fear H.H.A. will never do.

1

Birrell, too, feared that such was the climate of opinion within the cabinet that Redmond's request for a home rule resolution was 'impossible - although personally I am always ready to vote for home rule whenever asked to do so'.² John Burns still regretted the rejection of the council bill, and from time to time urged Redmond to reconsider it. He observed in his diary: 'Do they [the nationalists] really want home rule? If so, there will have to be several bites at that cherry, and when it comes the stone will be larger than suspected'.³

Redmond however was determined, indeed had to be determined, to stand out for full home rule. In spite of the inauspicious state of feeling within the government, and in spite of their vast parliamentary majority, he was not totally without influence over them, for the liberal party as a whole would be reluctant to sever the links which Gladstone had forged. If Redmond's resolution were sufficiently moderate (without exposing him to further attack in Ireland), then it would be difficult for the government

-
1. Haldane to his sister, 1 Feb.1908 (Haldane papers, National Library of Scotland, Ms.6011 f.40).
 2. Birrell to C.B., 30 Oct.1907 (C.B.papers, B M.Add.Ms. 41240 f.127).
 3. John Burns's diary, 31 Mar.1908 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46326).

not to support it. Accordingly he submitted a draft resolution to Birrell before the opening of the 1908 session, expressing a willingness to accept modifications suggested by the prime minister. Birrell advised C.B.'s secretary that 'if there is to be a home rule resolution at all, and we can't prevent one, the ballot may give him a day even if we don't. I don't think it could be more harmless in its verbage'.¹ The preamble to the resolution, which criticised the existing Irish government as being inefficient and giving 'no voice' to the Irish people, had been supported by the liberals in opposition in 1905, and presented no problem. The key passage in Redmond's draft was:

that the reform of Irish government is a matter of vital and urgent necessity and that in the opinion of this house the only effective solution of the present difficulty is to be found in conferring upon the Irish people full legislative and executive control of all purely Irish affairs.

2

Birrell told Redmond that he had no objections to the language, 'though I daresay there may be some people with still "unsettled convictions" to whom it will be exceedingly distasteful. I have just communicated with the P.M. and hope to get his opinion tomorrow'.³ Perhaps more worrying

1. Birrell to Vaughan Nash, n.d. [22 Jan.1908] (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41240 f.206).
2. Various draft resolutions in Redmond's hand, with alterations by Birrell (C.B. papers, B.M.Add.Ms. 41239 f.206).
3. Birrell to Redmond, 22 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).

to the Irish leaders, because less expected, were Birrell's remarks about the weak state of C.B.'s health. Dillon thought this 'very serious'.¹ Indeed C.B. was already well on the way towards surrendering the supreme authority: the time he took for consideration in fact meant time to consult Asquith, who replied to him on January 23:

I return this. Some such motion is inevitable, and in principle we cannot resist it. But in the form which R. proposes, it appears to me to be open to two formidable objections; the preamble doesn't much matter, for it seems we all accepted that part of it in '05.

- 1) "Vital and urgent necessity". I don't think we can possibly agree to these words; for if it is both "vital" and "urgent" we admit a case for immediate legislation.
- 2) "Only effective solution" "conferring full legislative and executive control". This is, or would be construed as a condemnation of the council bill of last year, which fell short of the "only effective solution".

I would suggest, as an alternative which R. ought to be pressed to agree to, if he wants the maximum demonstration of opinion from the present H. of C.

"That the reform of Irish government is a matter of vital interest to the U.K. and can only be attained by giving² to the Irish people control of all purely Irish affairs".

Birrell's next letter to Redmond, reporting "the prime minister's opinion", exactly reproduced the arguments and proposal of Asquith, except that it (tactfully) omitted point 2),³ about the council bill.

1. Dillon to Redmond, 24 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).
2. Asquith to C.B., 23 Jan.1908 (C.B.papers B.M.Add.Ms. 41210 f.303).
3. Birrell to Redmond, 24 Jan. 1908 (Redmond papers).

Redmond reacted to these proposals without enthusiasm -

....some of them are simply impossible. I suggest however the following words, which go a long way to meet your view, and I certainly think I could not give notice of a resolution of a milder character. To do so would be worse than not to propose a resolution at all. I suggest these words, to come immediately after the preamble:

"...that the reform of Irish government is a matter vital to the interests of Ireland, and calculated greatly to promote the well-being of the people of Great Britain, and the solution can only be attained by giving to the Irish people legislative and executive control of all purely Irish affairs".

1

But neither CB (nor Asquith) nor Loreburn were quite happy with these words. Still conscious of the danger of an admission that action should be taken at once or that a devolutionary measure was of no value, they insisted that the words 'fully and completely' be inserted before 'attained'. They also wanted the inclusion of some such expression as 'subject to the supremacy of the imperial parliament' in order to avoid the charge they were in favour of Irish 'independence'.² Redmond therefore asked for an interview with C.B. himself, and a meeting appears to have taken place on January 29, after which Morley requested a short talk with Redmond.³

-
1. Redmond to Birrell, 25 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).
 2. Birrell to Redmond, 26 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).
 3. Vaughan Nash to Redmond, 29 Jan.1908 (Redmond papers).

We have no information as to the points made at these discussions, but they must have agreed to differ, for when the resolution finally made its appearance in the commons it was in essence the same as Redmond's last draft, and was supported by the government after the addition of an amendment proposed by Simon safeguarding imperial supremacy, which, he said, was 'the essential condition of which liberal home rulers....¹ declared themselves to be home rulers'. Redmond considered the amendment 'unnecessary and superfluous', but having made the point, for Irish consumption, that he was accepting nothing which Parnell had not² accepted, agreed to the amendment.

But in the meantime C.B.'s health had collapsed completely, and threatened to take home rule down with it. The debate on the resolution had been fixed for February 17. Redmond saw CB on the 12th and received an assurance that he would himself wind up the debate with a strong declaration for home rule. The following day C.B. suffered what was to be a fatal relapse. Birrell also was unwell. Asquith decided to proceed without them, despite Redmond's protest, but after a message from C.B., conveyed by Lloyd George, the government notified Redmond on February 14 that the debate would be postponed. In an article in the Nation Redmond

1. P.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.187, cols.237.

2. Ibid., col.120.

stated that CB, in his note, had threatened to leave his sick-bed and speak himself if Asquith would not postpone.¹ Vaughan Nash however, who had been CB's secretary during the last months, wrote to Redmond that there was 'no ground for the suggestion that Sir Henry used any threat in the matter or that he was at variance with any of his colleagues as to the course to be pursued'.² Redmond accepted this explanation and took the matter no further, but he did not conceal his opinion that C.B.'s death had been a heavy blow for the home rule cause.

The debate on the resolution, when it finally took place on March 30, was indeed another disappointment for the Irish leaders. Its adoption, Redmond had hoped, would mean that the government's hands would be free, and home rule would become a 'great issue' at the next general election: the liberals would not again be allowed to trick the Irish into voting for them and then plead 'no mandate for home rule'.³ The resolution was adopted by the commons by 313 votes to 157, but the government had succeeded in giving their votes whilst withholding their aid. The tenor of their speeches nullified their support for the resolution, and pledged them not at all as to future action. MacDonnell reported to his wife, not without relish, that Redmond's object:

1. Quoted in W.F.J., 23 May 1908.

2. Vaughan Nash to Redmond, 19 May 1908 (Redmond papers).

3. Redmond at Manchester, 15 Mar.1908 (Times, 16 Mar.1908).

... was to get the government to put home rule in the forefront of the next election; he failed....The Irishmen were dumb. It was the nemesis. For their action in regard to the council bill they now see themselves out in the cold for God knows how long!

1

The triumph of the day was Lord Percy's speech for the unionists.²

Birrell's speech began with a long ramble which boiled down to an apology for not having advocated the council scheme with more energy. He then declared that 'it is not in the power of anybody to say how or to what extent home rule can be made a practical issue at the next election. But I am persuaded that the liberal party will maintain the position they have occupied as strong advocates of home rule'. He concluded most unfortunately with a request to the Irish party to 'make perfectly plain' what their proposals were!³ Asquith was equally strong in his general affirmation

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 30 Mar.1908 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.217 f.67).
 2. By careful reasoning and clever use of Redmond's speeches he argued that the Irish leader's distinctions between ameliorative measures and home rule proved that the Irish case rested not on past or present injustices, but on 'nationality, and nationality alone'. From there he had no difficulty in going on to denounce home rule as separatism in disguise (P.De'b. H.C. 4 series, vol.187, cols.137-53).
 3. Parlt.De'b. H.C. 4 series, vol.187, cols. 153-163. Dillon called this 'a sentence much better left unspoken. It was irritating and offensive to our ears'. Speech in Dublin, 15 Apr.1908 (W.F.J., 25 Apr.1908).

of the home rule policy, and equally firm in refusing to commit the party to it at the election. His speech, wrote John Burns, 'was not suffused with hope or sentiment sufficient to give Irish or liberals¹ the encouragement necessary for the situation'.

The nationalists might at least have reflected that a resolution in favour of home rule in principle had been passed in the commons by the large majority of 156. But even this figure was 200 below the nominal anti-unionist majority. Even allowing for a certain amount of laxness on the part of the huge majority, the voting was scarcely re-assuring as an indication of continued liberal faith in home rule. 20 liberal M.P.s voted against the motion, but the number of wilful abstentions, though virtually incalculable, was probably much higher. The Liberal League wing of the party held a protest meeting prior to the debate which, according to the Tory press, was attended by 80 M.P.s.² The Manchester correspondent of the Weekly Freeman alleged eleven liberal³ abstentions in Lancashire alone. Renewed disillusion in Ireland was widespread, and for a few days it looked as if Redmond's work since the setbacks of the previous summer had been wasted. Many would have agreed with the Independent's sour comment: 'in view of what happened in Monday's

1. Burns' diary, 30 Mar.1908 (Burns papers, Add.Ms.46326).

2. Report in I.W.I., 28 Mar.1908.

3. W.F.J., 18 Apr.1908.

debate, we cannot see that the passing of Mr Redmond's resolution is a matter of much moment'.¹ Alderman O'Mara urged Redmond either to withdraw the party from parliament or else remain and 'by all means, fair and foul, drive this government of frauds from office'.² Throughout the country U.I.L. branches expressed disappointment and disgust at the government's attitude.³

Redmond had, therefore, to give a new lead: 'To remain on the old terms, in view of what has happened, would be an act of political pusillanimity' was the verdict of the Freeman.⁴ He had somehow to appear fierce with the government, without at the same time casting himself naked into the wilderness. Since the demise of 'Wyndhamism' within the unionist party, 'independent opposition' for the Irish party could mean only aimless opposition.⁵ Thus if he was not to abandon the game

1. I.W.I., 4 Apr.1908.

2. O'Mara to Redmond, 31 Mar.1908 (Redmond papers).

3. See especially W.F.J., 18 Apr.1908.

4. Ibid.

5. From time to time during these years, especially between April 1908 and November 1909, press rumours appeared to the effect that feelers were out for a tory-nationalist alliance to pass home rule and tariff reform. Stephen Gwynn hinted at it at this time, in the Westminster Gazette of all places (16 Apr.1908). But most of the rumours were wishful thinking, or mischief-making. Most tories realised that the liberal party's home rule heritage was something of a millstone and had no desire to share it.

to sinn fein, Redmond had to define a new and convincing attitude to the liberal party. Continued co-operation on certain ameliorative measures was justified by simple expediency, but the party's general attitude to the government was more problematical. Nonetheless, when Redmond and Dillon appeared together at the central branch of the U.I.L. in Dublin on April 15 they put on a bold front - they had decided to bluff it out. Redmond talked of the 'unaccountable surprise and somewhat exaggerated disappointment in certain quarters' following the home rule debate; Dillon did not 'in the slightest degree share in the general croakings and lamentations of the last fortnight. I do not believe that home rule is either dead or dying'. Redmond laid stress on the fact that nothing in the debate had barred home rule at the next election, and he sought to present the government's action as a challenge to the Irish people - 'it is now, in my judgment, clearly for the interest of Ireland to hasten a dissolution of parliament'¹.

This last point was the crucial question - Redmond's bluff could scarcely hold out if the government decided to postpone an election until the end of 1912. At one time a 1908 general election had seemed likely, but the government, alarmed, probably, at their by-election failures, had

1. Redmond and Dillon speeches in Dublin, 15 Apr.1908 (W.F.J., 25 Apr.1908).

made no mention of it in the king's speech, whilst the death of CB could not but postpone a decision further. Asquith's succession to the premiership was indeed another hurdle for the Irish leaders to surmount, for CB's ability to inspire confidence as a home ruler had far outstretched his achievement in that direction. Lloyd George's elevation to the exchequer and the retention of Birrell were regarded as encouraging signs, but Asquith's past association with Rosebery and the Liberal League, and his continuing friendship with Grey and Haldane, meant that he assumed the highest office with no residue of trust at all, so far as the Irishmen were concerned.

But at this stage their luck turned. For at this time it was still the practice for MPs elevated to cabinet office during the course of a parliament to submit themselves for re-election. Asquith's promotion made a place in the cabinet for Winston Churchill, a man as yet uncommitted to home rule, and the occupant of a (normally) marginal seat at North-West¹ Manchester, where there happened to be a large Irish vote.

This situation was at first seen by the nationalists simply as a good opportunity to register a protest against liberal treachery. T.M.Kettle,

1. Most of the material used in this account of the by-election is to be found in either E.P.M.Wollaston, 'The Irish nationalist movement in Great Britain, 1886-1908' (London Univ.M.A. thesis, 1958), or in R.S.Churchill, Winston Spencer Churchill, vol.2, The young statesman, Neither of these writers has made use of all the material however.

in a speech in London, said that perhaps Irish voters 'might not take the trouble to record their votes on the occasion, or if they did they might record them against the nominee of a prime minister who had wiped home rule off the slate'.¹ The London correspondent of the Freeman reported that:

The view is generally held that no liberal candidate who does not pledge himself to do all that he can to make home rule a party issue at the general election should receive Irish support. Many indeed go further than this and say that, pledge or no pledge, the liberals should be opposed at this juncture merely to teach them what they may expect at the general election unless they consent to change their tune.....

2

Redmond himself was at this stage in the latter category. When approached privately by Churchill early in April he replied that he was unwilling to give him the Irish vote 'under the existing circumstances':

No doubt if you made a very strong and explicit home rule declaration and if he [Whitley, a local U.I.L.G.B. leader] strongly advised them to do so, a portion of the Irish vote might be got to go for you - but only a portion, and you probably would lose quite as many votes because of your declaration.

Further, I think we would, in any case, have great difficulty in asking the Irish voters to support the government just at this moment.....

3

-
1. Kettle at London A.O.H., 8 Apr.1908 (W.F.J., 18 Apr.1908).
 2. W.F.J., 18 Apr.1908.
 3. Redmond to Churchill, n.d. but before 7 Apr.1908 (R.Churchill, op.cit., p.445).

Redmond was evidently more eager to make a gesture towards his followers in Ireland than to secure the declared allegiance of Churchill to his ¹ cause.

Indeed, the position of the government as revealed in the home rule debate rendered any immediate co-operation almost impossible. If there was to be a rapprochement in North-West Manchester, a new basis for it would have to be put forward from the liberal side. It was surely with this danger in mind that the Westminster Gazette of April 13 stressed that, whilst the principles of liberalism were clear and immutable, the party should for the present proceed only on the basis of what was wise and what was possible: ² Nothing should be done which could impair the unity of the free trade movement. But Churchill was, naturally enough, desperately keen to secure the Irish vote, and, within strict limits, might count on the co-operation of his new cabinet colleagues to this end. He was extremely fortunate in that the leader of the U.I.L. organisation in Great Britain was T.P.O'Connor, whose desire to maintain the liberal-nationalist alliance was just as strong (and rather more firmly rooted) than his own.

1. His admission, in the letter, that a Home rule declaration by a liberal candidate might 'lose quite as many votes' as it would gain, was a quite extraordinary one for a nationalist leader to make.

2. W.G., 13 Apr. 1908.

Early in the campaign therefore, Churchill transferred his attentions from Redmond to O'Connor, who found his proposals tantalising:

He seems ready to take an advanced, and even an individual, position during the election....He made the observation several times that in his new position he could speak for the cabinet, and that he did not think there was any likelihood of his being disavowed. He seemed to think that we could get over the non possumus of Asquith and the other liberal imperialists.

1

Redmond was still adamant however, and two days later, April 15, told a meeting of the U.I.L. central branch in Dublin that 'he did not see how they could ask the Irishmen of Manchester to vote for Mr Churchill'.²

But O'Connor persisted. On the day of this speech he sent a telegram to Dillon, who was also in Dublin:

Manchester Irishmen red-hot for Churchill.....I think magnificent opportunity of retrieving impossible situation lost if we don't support Churchill. Harcourt told me yesterday delighted if Churchill forced Asquith's hand. If we leave decision to local men all our influence lost and priests will come out tory. All members of standing committee [of U.I.L.G.B.] including O'Kelly declared for support Churchill if adequate pledges given. Myself quite sure we ought to.

3

-
1. O'Connor to Devlin 13 Apr.1908 (J.F.O'Brien papers, N.L.I., quoted in Wollaston, op.cit., p.115). Wollaston guesses that this letter, together with other material relating to the by-election, was added to the papers of J.F.X.O'Brien (d.1905) by his daughter Annie, who was employed at the U.I.L. headquarters at this time.
 2. Redmond in Dublin 15 Apr.1908 (W.G., 16 Apr.1908). This passage is omitted from the later report of the speech in W.F.J., 25 Apr.1908.
 3. O'Connor to Dillon, telegram, 15 Apr.1908 (J.F.X.O'Brien papers, q.Wollaston op.cit., p.116).

J.J. O'Kelly was the ex-fenian M.P. for N. Roscommon.

Thus, by their independent action, O'Connor and his friends on the U.I.L.G.B. forced Redmond to once more open his mind on the matter. It was announced¹ that the London executive of the League would meet to frame a declaration.

It remained for Churchill to devise the necessary 'advance' in the government's home rule position. He, together with Lloyd George, saw O'Connor again on April 16. From telegrams which O'Connor sent to Dillon and to Devlin, it would appear that at this meeting it was stated that Churchill would advocate home rule strongly in a speech, and that the government would draft another Irish council bill, on the understanding that the Irish party would guarantee support. On the vital point, the Irish demand that their parliamentary representation should be the nucleus² of any new council, Churchill agreed at once and Lloyd George 'seemed to'. But whatever had been O'Connor's personal response to the last proposal, it was immediately ruled out of court by the leadership generally.

Churchill told Asquith on April 18:

The Irish are not at present, according to my information, in a state to receive with any thankfulness the suggestion that the 'halfway house' is still open to them if they themselves will take a real responsibility for it. They are very rueful³ at having lost it. They dare not now admit

-
1. W.G., 18 Apr.1908.
 2. O'Connor telegram sent to Dillon and to Devlin, 16 Apr.1908 (J.F.X.O'Brien papers, q.Wollaston, op.cit., p.117).
 3. R.S.Churchill, op.cit., reads this word, wrongly I think, as 'grateful'.

their error or ask for it again. I have no doubt that before the end of this parliament a conjunction favourable to councils bill will occur. But it would as you apprehended be useless to say anything now. I shall not therefore use the discretionary power you gave me yesterday on that point.

The local Irish leaders are going to fire these three questions tomorrow at a public meeting. I enclose these with the answers I propose to give. They have taken me a good deal of pains to concoct; and I should be glad to have had an opportunity of discussing them with you, but that is impossible. I adopted L.G.'s phrase, on which I understand from him you agree, about "a free hand next time".....TP thinks that the full and active support of the Irish party will be secure these lines in the present contest. It may be however that all the central body will do is to leave the decision to the local people. In this case some of the catholic voters may go wrong. In no case will there be any hostile action by the politicians. It is no joke fighting such a contest as this.

1

That evening Churchill was back in the constituency, and saw Devlin and Kettle, who had been sent by Redmond to negotiate the final declaration.² This was made by Churchill in a speech on April 20. At the last election, he said, the government had been pledged, 'I think I am prepared to say wrongly', not to introduce a home rule bill. The next election he thought was still a long way off, and any opinion as to what the main issues might be was necessary very speculative, but, with this proviso he concluded:

-
1. Churchill to Asquith, 18 Apr. 1908 (Asquith papers, Bodleian Library, Ms. 19, f. 285).
 2. Churchill to Asquith, 19 Apr. 1908 (Asquith papers, Ms. 19 f. 287).

When this parliament has reached its conclusion I am strongly of the opinion - and I say this with the full concurrence of my ~~Wt. Hon. friend~~ friend the prime minister - I am strongly of the opinion that the liberal party should claim full authority and a free hand to deal with the problem of Irish self-government without being restricted to measures of administrative devolution of the character of the Irish council bill.

1

The advance had been made: home rule had been restored almost (but not quite) unequivocally as a 'live' policy of the liberal government. The Freeman blazoned across its front page 'Home rule - The premier pledged'.² The Westminster Gazette blinked, and observed that 'this is a very important and interesting declaration; we must at the moment be content to put it on record'.³ The following day the manifesto of the U.I.L.G.B. appeared, advising Irishmen to vote for Churchill, and bearing the signatures of O'Connor and Redmond:

We have elicited on the authority of the prime minister that home rule in the sense of Mr Redmond's resolution will be put by the government before the electors at the general election. Without such an authoritative declaration it would have been impossible for us to ask support for Mr Churchill as a member of the cabinet.

4

-
1. Churchill in N.W. Manchester, 20 Apr. 1908 (W.F.J., 25 Apr. 1908).
 2. W.F.J., 25 Apr. 1908.
 3. W.G., 21 Apr. 1908.
 4. W.F.J., 25 Apr. 1908.

The new prime minister had become alarmed at the trend of events, however, and wired to Churchill on the morning following the U.I.L. manifesto that 'of course I cannot accept Redmond's interpretation of what you said. It goes much beyond anything that you said or I authorised'.¹ He was concerned because the manifesto had said 'will', whereas Churchill had only implied 'might'. But Churchill was naturally unwilling to re-open the matter, and felt that no outright denial was called for.

He replied, April 22:

Redmond's manifesto was unpleasant and unwarranted in its form, though satisfactory in its result. I have not committed myself, and still less you, beyond the point on which we agreed. We are not bound by Irish gloss, but only by precise and carefully considered words.....When your telegram arrived I consulted Lloyd George, and decided to repeat the ipsissima verba of my original statement: I did this in a friendly speech so far as the Irish are concerned; but the declaration made in public the same day that Redmond's manifesto appeared will be quite sufficient at any future time to guard me - and still further you - from any charge of having acquiesced in his strange interpretation. It would be most injurious to my candidature to indicate a difference in any direct or aggressive manner. The Irish here were perfectly satisfied at my words and were delighted at their repetition. The fight is harder than any I have known: but I feel we have now definitely got the upper hand.

2

-
1. Asquith to Churchill, copy of telegram, 22 Apr.1908 (Asquith papers, Ms. 19 f.291).
 2. Churchill to Asquith, 22 Apr.1908 (i) (Asquith papers, Ms.19 f.295).

But that evening Churchill was asked in public if he accepted Redmond's interpretation, and Joynson Hicks, the unionist candidate, telegraphed the same question to Asquith.¹ Asquith therefore instructed Churchill 'to make it quite clear that I do not assent to R.'s gloss on your language, and that it is not in my power or anybody's to give pledges at this time as to what issues will be before the country at the general election'.² Churchill agreed therefore to make it clear that he was bound only by his own utterances. But Hicks's question, he said, was not as to the issue at a general election, but as to whether the liberals were bound, by Redmond's gloss, to an independent parliament!³ Thus in his final Irish speech of the campaign on April 23, Churchill made it clear that the government were bound by Redmond's declaration only as modified by Simon's amendment, and that he and Asquith were bound only by the words they used.⁴ He did not however do what Asquith had asked him to do - that is re-iterate that the liberals were not committed to home rule at the next election. Redmond moved a resolution at an Irish party meeting on April 28 that 'the declaration of Mr Churchill at Manchester marks a distinct advance in the progress of the home rule cause',⁵ and for the following eighteen months nationalists upheld, and liberals tacitly consented to the

-
1. Churchill to Asquith 22 Apr.1908 (ii) (Asquith papers, vol.19, f.298).
 2. Asquith to Churchill, copy of telegram, 23 Apr.1908 (Asquith papers, Ms.19 f.300).
 3. Churchill to Asquith, telegram, 23 Apr.1908 (Asquith papers, Ms.19 f.301).
 4. Churchill to N.W.Manchester, 23 Apr.1908 (Times, 24 Apr.1908).
 5. W.F.J., 2 May 1908.

myth that the prime minister was committed on home rule. Dunraven¹ observed that 'the incredulity of the Irish party is pathetic'. Devlin declared at Battersea on May 3 that the home rule debate and Churchill's declaration had committed the government to making full home rule an issue at the election.² T.P.O'Connor said that 'if home rule had ever been wiped off the slate the Irish party's action at Manchester had put it on again'.³ Sir John Brunner M.P., introducing Asquith at a liberal meeting on April 30 'welcomed Mr Asquith on account of the declarations that were made at Manchester' in regard to Ireland - but Asquith said nothing about Ireland, and restricted his comments to a defence of the citadel of free trade.⁴

-
1. In a letter to the Irish Independent, 16 May 1908 (I.W.I., 30 May 1908). His acid comments on the situation, though they attracted little attention, were close to the truth: 'All that has been got out of the liberal party is a declaration that they will not have anything to do with the problem of Irish government this session or during the life of this parliament, that they will not pledge themselves to take it up at the general election if it does not suit them, and that they will not pledge themselves not to take it up at the next general election if it does suit them. This absolutely neutral, non-committal statement is magnified into a binding promise wrung by the Irish party from a cowed and trembling liberal government.....'.
 2. Devlin at Battersea, 3 May 1908 (W.F.J., 9 May 1908).
 3. O'Connor at Leeds, 6 June 1908 (Times, 8 June 1908).
 4. Asquith in London, 30 Apr. 1908 (Times, 1 May 1908).

But Churchill had meanwhile lost his seat at Manchester to the unionist.¹ It was not at all unpredictable - the seat was normally marginal,² and the government's by-election record was already poor. But it was nonetheless a surprise to Churchill and the party workers on the spot and was made much of by the tory press - 'Winston Churchill is out, out, out'.³ He had won the seat in 1906 by a majority of 1,241: now he lost it to the same unionist candidate by 429, the intervening socialist receiving only 276.⁴ But the post-mortem was complicated by the fact, highly embarrassing to the nationalist leadership, that a sizeable part of the Irish vote (estimated to total over 1,000, and unequivocally given for the liberals by the U.I.L.G.B.) had in fact voted for the unionist on the education question. The number of renegades is of course incalculable, but Churchill was not alone in thinking that 'but for those sulky Irish catholics changing sides at the last moment under priestly pressure, the result would have been different'.⁵

-
1. He was immediately offered a safe seat in Dundee, which he retained comfortably. His home rule declaration there was in substance the same as that he had made in Manchester, though it was stated more briefly (see W.F.J., 9 May 1908).
 2. At Peckham on Mar.24 a liberal seat had gone to the unionists by a majority of 2,494.
 3. Standard, 24 Apr.1908; see also R.S.Churchill, op.cit., p.451.
 4. W.F.J., 2 May 1908.
 5. Churchill to Miss C.Hozier, 27 Apr.1908 (Churchill papers, cited in R.S.Churchill, op.cit., p.260).

The emergence of the religious factor in the Irish vote was not new. It had threatened, ever since the Liberals took office pledged to revise the 1902 education act. During the 1906 crisis Redmond had been able to avert a showdown by careful diplomacy and some co-operation from Birrell and from Archbishop Bourne, Many English catholics had resented this balancing trick, and, from 1907 on, their policy of pressure on Redmond changed to that of opposition to him and his party. They were joined by a number of catholics in Ireland, notably Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick, who tended towards general opposition to the Irish party, and some Irishmen in England who wished to cut the ties between liberalism and nationalism. As early as January 1907., when the possibility of Churchill's elevation to the cabinet was first rumoured, the problem had been apparent even to the firmly pro-liberal T.P.O'Connor, who warned Redmond;:

Owing to the uncertainty in which we are placed as to the character of the measure the government intends to bring in [he meant the council bill], and many other incidental things in the situation, as well as our still greater uncertainty as to what Winston Churchill may do, I did not think we could enter upon a fight for a liberal candidate in face of the probable opposition of the bishop and clergy, and Crilly's report as to the state of feeling in Manchester confirmed these views.

1

1. O'Connor to Redmond, 18 Jan.1907 (Redmond papers).

Thus when the vacancy did occur, in April 1908, there was immediately a meeting in Manchester between the U.I.L. and the Catholic Federation, at which it was decided that the direction of the Irish vote should be left to the Irish party. But although local Irish opinion was satisfied with Churchill, the leadership, as we have seen, were considerably less decisive. Whilst they pondered, the catholic priests in the division drew up a manifesto in favour of the unionist which the U.I.L. were unable to stifle before it reached the press. At the same time the Catholic Federation in the area (a body which included many Irish nationalists), after a heated meeting, called on the people to vote for Johnson Hicks. On the day of the election, April 24, the bishop of Salford declared that no catholic could vote for Churchill but should in fact vote¹ for Hicks.

Thus, although the Irish leadership was cheered by what it was permitted to claim as an advance in the liberal position at N.W. Manchester, the actions of the Catholic Federation and of the bishop threatened in the long run to destroy one of their most powerful weapons, and the one which carried most weight with many liberals - the Irish vote in Great Britain. Part of this threat might on future occasions be met by more prompt action

1. This account is taken from W.F.J., 2 May 1908.

on the part of the U.I.L. policy makers.¹ But if the trend was allowed to become general - and similar splits had already been revealed at Peckham and at East Wolverhampton² - the party would have suffered a major and permanent set-back. On May 9 the U.I.L.G.B. executive accordingly issued a statement to the effect that such actions 'strike at the roots of the existence of the organisation of the Irish party, and even of the Irish national movement', and warned that any future renegades would be ejected from the U.I.L. They argued that the Irish party were in the long run the best guardians of the catholic schools - and were greatly helped by Joynson Hicks's first action on entering parliament, which was to vote with the Ulster minority against the transfer of^{the} Irish universities bill, to a grand committee, in opposition to the bulk of English conservatives.³

-
1. Arthur Murphy of Glasgow, president of the powerful Home Government branch of the U.I.L.G.B., and a prominent national executive member, declared just a week before the election that so long as Asquith remained prime minister, the liberals must be opposed - home rule statements by individual candidates were worthless while he was at the helm. A week after the election Murphy said that it would have been 'ridiculous' not to have supported Churchill, a cabinet minister pledged to home rule (W.F.J. 25 Apr. and 2 May 1908).
 2. W.F.J., 28 Mar.1908 and 16 May 1908. At Wolverhampton, a rumour was spread that Archbishop Bourne and all his bishops were on the side of the U.I.L. Bourne at once telegraphed that neither side had authority to quote him, and that the guidance of catholics was left to their local leaders. This in practice meant the bishop of Birmingham, who had already declared for the unionist (Times, 4 May 1908).
 3. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.188 col.870.

But the only sure way of keeping the Irish vote for home rule was to hold out some hope of success, and the Irish leaders once again put on a bold front. Asquith, when questioned by Walter Long in the commons about Churchill's Manchester declaration, stated that his new minister 'did not make any statement in Manchester which was in any way inconsistent with the previous declarations of the government'¹.

Nonetheless, Redmond, speaking at Leeds on June 7, claimed that whereas there had been 'universal uncertainty' about the position of home rule earlier in the session 'today that uncertainty and obscurity had disappeared'. There would soon be a general election, at which the liberals would be returned to power with a considerably reduced majority.² At Wrexham later in the year he pronounced that 'we are back upon the Gladstonian standard'³. In Dublin Dillon asserted that the home rule question was 'nearer than even in the brightest days of our movement'⁴.

From time to time an utterance by a leading liberal gave some credence to these claims: Churchill at Swansea on 15 August 1908 said that 'nothing would strengthen the British people in their march along the path of history....[as much as].....such an act as Mr Gladstone contemplated as

1. 30 Apr.1908. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.187, col.1414.
2. Redmond at Leeds, 7 June 1908 (W.F.J., 13 June 1908).
3. Redmond at Wrexham, 13 Nov.1908 (W.F.J., 21 Nov.1908).
4. Dillon in Dublin, 1 Sept.1908 (W.F.J., 5 Sept.1908).

the culminating glory of his long career'¹; Lewis Harcourt said on October 2 that 'he did not despair of seeing in the near future....a solution arrived at which might give to the Irish race that measure of limited autonomy which they so ardently desired'²; at Port Sunlight on July 18 Birrell said of home rule that 'the sooner they got it, in my judgment, the better it will be, not only for them but for us'³. But the Westminster Gazette warned that 'the question of giving to Ireland this responsibility is one of the most controversial of all controversial propositions'⁴. In another speech Birrell indicated that home rule could not be expected to take the stage until such time as the house of lords had been dealt with.⁵ When Churchill again referred to home rule, at Dundee on October 9, Asquith stated in the commons that the remarks had been made on Churchill's own responsibility, and that he (Asquith) had given no pledges on home rule other than those made during the home rule debate.⁶

-
1. Churchill at Swansea, 15 Aug.1908 (Times, 17 Aug.1908).
 2. Harcourt at Rosendale, 2 Oct.1908 (I.W.I., 10 Oct.1908).
 3. Birrell at Port Sunlight, 18 July 1908 (W.F.J., 25 July 1908).
 4. W.G., 23 Oct.1908.
 5. Birrell at Bristol, 22 Oct.1908 (W.F.J., 31 Oct.1908).
 6. 20 Oct.1908. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.194, col.953.

So the public attitude adopted by the Irish leaders on home rule during these months was something of a bluff. Privately indeed they were far less optimistic. Redmond told Dillon on July 22:

I have been trying to arrange a conference with L.G. and the P.M. until I have given up the attempt in utter disgust. It is quite clear that these men do not want a conference, do not see any importance in it, and are trying to let the whole question drift. I feel really humiliated in having run after them the way I have done, and I will ask them for no further interviews.

1

Others too saw through the facade. W.F.Bailey told Bryce that 'Wm O'Brien is making the situation very difficult for the Irish party, and chaos

2

seems to threaten'. A new nationalist M.P., W.McM.Kavanagh, in a speech which elsewhere made clear that the speaker was loyal to the party and in no way tinged with O'Brienism, declared that:

There were a great many differences of opinion as to whether the question of home rule was advanced or went back during the last session. In his humble opinion he could not say it had advanced.....Mr Churchill perhaps advanced a step in that way, but the subject still remains one of doubt as to the future policy of the liberal party. The fact was that the liberal party.....would go on voting for resolutions in favour of home rule individually and collectively, but until they were in a corner, and were dependent upon the vote of the Irish party to keep them in power, they would never bring in a home rule bill.

3

-
1. Redmond to Dillon, 22 July 1908 (Dillon papers, q.Lyons, Irish parliamentary party, p.249).
 2. W.F.Bailey to Bryce, 22 Sept.1908 (Bryce P.vol.19).
 3. Kavanagh at Carlow, 16 Aug.1908 (W.F.J., 22 Aug.1908).

In a debate on home rule prospects at the Young Ireland Branch:

Mr Skeffington said they understood home rule had been recently in sight from the meridian of New York [Redmond had been to the U.S.A. for the U.I.L. convention there], but in Ireland they had not been able to perceive its advent. The cause of that was, in his opinion, to be attributed to the tactics of the Irish party.

1

Even in February 1909 the Independent could claim that 'so little has been heard of the question in Great Britain within the last few months, and so large have loomed other issues on the public horizon, that the chance of home rule or even devolution being given a prominent place in the programme of any British party in the immediate future is slight indeed...'

2

Meanwhile yet another incident impeded the attempts of the Irish leaders to continue their public co-operation with the government. At the end of July 1908 Archbishop Bourne had obtained permission from the metropolitan police commissioner (himself a catholic) to hold a ceremonial public procession, in which the Host would be carried, in London, at the end of the eucharistic congress in September. Militant protestants complained, the king supported them, the cabinet were dispersed for the summer, and the home secretary was indecisive, giving Asquith conflicting

1. I.W.I., 19 Dec.1908.

2. I.W.I., 13 Feb.1909.

reports as to the likelihood of public disorder. Eventually, on the eve of the procession, Asquith had to ask his sole catholic colleague, Lord Ripon, to persuade Cardinal Bourne to abandon the liturgical aspects of the procession. Disorder was thus avoided, but Ripon made the affair the occasion of his retirement from public life, and Bourne insisted on making plain that he withdrew only at Asquith's insistence.¹

Catholic opinion, which was of course predominantly Irish, was deeply offended at the apparent (and actual!) slight from the government, and those who had criticised the Irish party leaders over their conduct of education policy were once again prominent in denouncing any degree of co-operation with such a government. Redmond and O'Connor were away in the USA at the U.I.L. convention, and Dillon was left to make a rather lame explanation. Asquith's action, he said was 'ill-judged and most weak' but he did not believe that 'any insult was intended or offered' - Asquith had not actually forbidden the procession in its original form, he had merely intimated to the archbishop that it was not a very good idea!² But the furore caused by the government's action coincided not only with the absence of Redmond and O'Connor, but also with a by-election in Newcastle, where the Irish vote was estimated (by the Independent at any rate) at between four and

1. Jenkins, Asquith, pp.189-193.

2. Dillon at Clara, King's Co., 27 Sept.1908 (W.F.J., 3 Oct.1908).

five thousand. The Independent urged opposition to the Liberal candidate, and Crilly, the U.I.L.G.B. secretary, sent a telegram to the constituency to the effect that as the standing committee was without a quorum (happy circumstance?) he could only leave the decision to the local branches. The liberal candidate had shown no enthusiasm for home rule, and all branches except one (Byker) instantly instructed their members to vote for the tory, who won comfortably thanks to the intervening socialist.¹

Many nationalists in Great Britain agreed with the Independent, which welcomed the result as an antidote to the impression created by U.I.L. policy at N.W. Manchester, where, it claimed, 'the liberals got the Irish vote for next to nothing, and at the same figure they rated it. Mr Asquith as a witness for home rule is a figure to excite derision'.² But the Irish action in Newcastle was an empty gesture of defiance, and the 1908 session ended on a note of disappointment for the Irish party. Despite the findings of the Dudley Commission, the passing of the universities act, and the adoption of the home rule resolution, the Irish leaders had been unable to find in themselves or instil into their followers

1. Renwick (U.) 13,863
Shortt (Lib.) 11,720
Hartley (Soc.) 2,971

The voting in 1906 had been: Hudson (Lab) 18869
(2 members elected) Cairns (Lib) 18423
Plummer (U.) 11942
Renwick (U.) 11223

2. I.W.I., 3 Oct. 1908. For an account of the by-election see also I.W.I., 19 and 26 Sept. 1908. I.W.I., 3 Oct. 1908. The debate in the Glasgow 'Home Government' branch of the U.I.L. illustrates the conflicting nationalist opinions (W.F.J., 3 Oct. 1908).

any real confidence in the government's intentions on home rule. Only the introduction of a satisfactory land bill, and its subsequent postponement to 1909, enabled them to maintain co-operation with the liberals as the guiding principle for the following session.

Meanwhile, faction had once again appeared at home. The reunion with O'Brien was short-lived. In April 1908 he divided the party meeting over the question of land purchase amendment and then withdrew, taking with him Healy and most of his old followers. By August he was stomping the Irish countryside denouncing his former colleagues as strongly as ever. Again the dispute, on the surface at any rate, was on a matter of policy - the attitude that nationalists should take towards the landlords, and the government's proposal to amend the land purchase scheme. Once the government introduced their bill, at the end of November, O'Brien was presented with a concrete target and the party could no longer oppose him merely with calls for 'unity' and 'an end to faction'. His points about land purchase required to be met, and it soon became apparent that the national convention of February 1909 would be a crucial one.

There was trouble even before the convention assembled. O'Brien claimed that 170 branches of the Land and Labour Organisation had been denied representation, and that the so-called 'bogus' U.I.L. branches of Cork, Kerry and Limerick, which had also been excluded, were in fact the genuine ones in these areas. It was alleged that the convention had been

'packed' by Devlin and Johnston with paid rowdies of the A.O.H., in order to prevent any independent discussion of the party's policy. Both at the convention and during the later court case the expression 'Belfast braves' was banded about by O'Brien. It was his contention that these 'hirelings' had been brought down from Belfast by special train for the first day of the convention only, and that when confronted with a 'popular' demand that the debate should be continued and the decision taken on the second day, the organisers resorted to unscrupulous and violent methods¹ to bring the debate to an earlier conclusion. Like all O'Brien's allegations, this one had any element of truth in it - there was (scarcely surprisingly) a special train from Belfast, the Hibernians were the leading nationalist organisation in the north; doubtless Devlin as U.I.L. secretary did tend to use Hibernians where possible for national work, as being more loyal to him personally; Redmond admitted that it was the intention to debate the land question of the first day. But from these facts O'Brien sought to claim that the whole nation was being muzzled, a nation which² otherwise would have flocked to his banner.

1. See report of court case, W.F.J., 20 Mar.1909.

2. See K.R.Schilling, 'William O'Brien and the All-for-Ireland League' (T.C.D.B.Litt.thesis, 1956), for an analysis of O'Brien's position in Ireland at this time.

At the convention the early part of the first day was taken up by a motion of the Young Ireland branch that, once the land bill was passed, the Irish party should 'oppose and embarrass' the liberal government in every way possible until they adopted home rule unequivocally. ¹ The leadership could do no more than deny that there was a liberal alliance, and, through Devlin, appeal to the majority in rather crude terms: 'Who is better entitled to deal with a difficult situation, to declare a policy in parliament when an immediate policy is required - John Redmond or Sheehy-Skeffington?'. E.T. Keane of the Kilkenny People proposed that all nationalist M.P.s be called upon to resign from the National Liberal Club, and Ginnell tried to move that all MPs be withdrawn from Westminster pending a change in the parliamentary balance. These speakers, and Skeffington, and William O'Brien and Tom O'Donnell who followed in the debate on the land question, were all shouted down by the majority, despite Redmond's protests, and were mostly unable to finish their speeches. At one point a scuffle broke out ² on the platform, and Devlin ordered Eugene Crean M.P. to be ejected.

-
1. It was alleged during the court case that this was part of a filibuster arranged by the Y.I.B. and Wm O'Brien, an 'unholy alliance' between the extreme and the moderate critics of the party. These groups found common ground in their hostility to the 'dictation' of a leadership whose authority was based on the support of 'unthinking' Hibernians. But the arguments of Cruise O'Brien and Skeffington were certainly more than a filibuster - they reflected a feeling among home rulers of independent outlook, which had been increasing since the council bill affair, that their leaders had no policy on the national question, but were simply drifting along with the liberals and pacifying their followers with material or 'secondary' gains.
 2. Report of the convention, 9 and 10 Feb. 1909 (W.F.J., 13 Feb. 1909).

As a result of this incident Crean brought an action against Devlin and Johnston for assault, and the ensuing case was used by O'Brien to expound his views as to how the national movement had been taken by a sinister and vicious secret society, the A.O.H. or 'mollies'.¹ One of the party's legal experts, John Muldoon, told Redmond on February 28:

The charges against Devlin and Johnston are not serious from the legal point of view, but of course what O'Brien is at is to expose that there were at the convention stewards armed with batons.....We must show that previous meetings there had been attacked, that men scaled the walls and blocked the doors and prevented people being admitted, that the police refused to interfere, and that we had to take precautions this time to prevent such mischief. The directions given to all stewards was very proper, and make for peace. O'Brien and Crean have declared that we could not hold a meeting in Dublin, Cork or Limerick, and Crean can be cross-examined on his speeches.

2

In the event O'Brien was unable to make the charges stick, despite having hired the services of T.M.Healy for the occasion, and the case was dismissed. He and his (few) followers had been unfairly treated at the convention, but not in a way that could be redressed by law. Discrimination against them had been, in the crudest way, democratic. 'Honest violence' was endemic in nationalist politics, and in Dublin O'Brien was in a minority. Equally rough treatment was handed out to party speakers who addressed meetings in

-
1. He explained his case fully in the books he wrote later in the year: An olive branch in Ireland and its failure (Dublin, 1910).
 2. Muldoon to Redmond, 28 Feb.1909 (Redmond papers).

the Munster countryside.¹ The A.O.H. did not introduce these techniques into Irish politics.

But the case nonetheless directed public attention to the activities of the A.O.H., and rallied existing pockets of hostility to it, such as the local U.I.L. in North Monaghan. Cardinal Logue, in his Lenten Pastoral for 1909 denounced vice ('mingling of the sexes and drunkenness') which, he said, characterised many A.O.H. social gatherings. Somewhat mischievously, he mentioned that the social activities of the Gaelic League were often more wholesome.²

The Hibernians had, however, become an important part of the parliamentary movement during the previous five years, and those critics who talked of 'severing their grip' on the movement were being unrealistic. The Hibernians were the national movement to all intents and purposes in many parts of the north. It was argued that an organisation with so blatantly sectarian an appearance was scarcely the ideal vehicle for spreading nationalist ideas, but this was not quite fair. Hibernians acted as willingly as anyone else against catholic unionists and in favour of

1. In August 1908 a party platform in Co.Limerick was raided by 'O'Brienites'. T.M.Kettle and M.Joyce were involved in a fight, in which Joyce was injured (see W.F.J., 15 Aug.1908).

2. W.F.J., 27 Feb.1909.

protestant nationalists in Ulster constituencies (e.g. in North Tyrone in 1906 and 1907) whilst in January 1910 William O'Brien defeated the protestant Irish party member, William Abraham, in North-East Cork, which Abraham had represented for 25 years. Moreover, no other way had been found of organising the urban north for nationalism. That this had to be done through a sectarian organisation was not good, but it was more a symptom of the degeneration of politics in Ulster than a cause of it.

Nonetheless, some of O'Brien's mud seemed likely to stick, and during the early summer of 1909 the national directory took a close look at the U.I.L. constitution, and revised that part of it which had caused most discontent, the rules for the summoning of divisional (constituency) conventions. While each U.I.L. branch would still send six delegates, public bodies would be reduced to four and other organisations (A.O.H., Land and Labour, Irish National Foresters, Town Tenants League, etc.) might only send three, instead of an equal number, as before. ; These organisations were also to be restricted to one branch per parish, as was the U.I.L. This clearly re-established the U.I.L. as the main nationalist organisation, and gave the impression that they were putting their house in order with regard to the A.O.H. But the new limitations applied equally to the Land and Labour Association, or any other O'Brienite organisation. Other changes - the provision that delegates be nominated for a year and receive their invitation cards from U.I.L. head office; and the provision that delegates' names were to be on the books for a month

before they could act - were more plainly designed to cut out not only confusion, but also chicanery on the part of local men, whether they were O'Brienites 'subverting' the U.I.L. in Cork, or U.I.L. men kicking¹ against A.O.H. centralism in Monaghan.

Thus the party met the challenge on the land question which had been in the air since early 1908, and which O'Brien has sought to tie in with a crusade against Hibernian 'domination'. Although O'Brien's decision to form a new party might constitute a new threat, it was also a public admission that his influence in the U.I.L. had been reduced to² nothing. And when illness took him away from Ireland in mid-1909, before the new venture had got off the ground, it seemed as if the Irish party were in the clear.³ But in England they were still confronted with the problem of extracting a meaningful home rule pledge from the government, and the Lloyd George budget was about to present them with a new and more serious challenge in Ireland itself.

-
1. The new rules are set out in W.F.J., 10 July, 1909.
 2. Wm.O'Brien, an open letter to the Irish people, 12 May 1909 (printed copy in the Redmond papers).
 3. It was no real surprise for the party when O'Brien's former seat in Cork city was won by T.M.Healy's brother Maurice by a good margin from George Crosbie, the party's candidate. 'Rebel' Cork had long been written off as a centre of 'faction'.

At the end of November 1908 the house of lords rejected the government's licensing bill in so imperious a manner that for an instant it seemed that the issue between the two houses had reached a climax. Birrell's speech at Warrington on November 28 appeared to foreshadow prompt action, and was welcomed by the Freeman, which enthusiastically¹ threw the support of the Irish people into the struggle for democracy. But although Asquith invited the liberal party 'to treat the veto of the house of lords as the dominating issue in politics', he made it clear that their lordships could not be permitted to determine the timing of that conflict: 'but one thing is certain, that the budget of next year will stand at the very centre of our work'.² The liberals were not yet willing to face the electorate. Further, Asquith's speech implied that home rule (of which he made no direct mention) would certainly come no higher than fourth in the liberals' list of priorities, behind the constitutional question, the budget, and the inevitable defence of free trade. Even³ the Irish land bill, already promised, might find its future threatened. The Freeman's enthusiasm had been somewhat premature.

-
1. Birrell at Warrington, 28 Nov.1908 (W.F.J., 5 Dec.1908).
 2. Asquith at the National Liberal Club, 11 Dec.1908 (Times, 12 Dec.1908).
 3. 'If the lords reject the budget and there is an early election, the land bill will not be reached' (I.W.I., 16 Jan.1909).

Not only the Irish nationalists, but also the radicals in the Liberal party were somewhat depressed by the prospect of another lengthy prolongation of the ineffectual parliament of 1906. Asquith's carefully worded speech had not succeeded in rallying the whole party to the government's aid. Arthur Ponsonby, C.B.'s former secretary, who had entered parliament in 1908, provoked a 'panicky feeling in the lobby' at the commencement of the new (1909) session by proposing on behalf of the radicals an amendment to the address calling upon the government to introduce a bill to deal with the lords during the coming session.

The Independent reported:

Statements were gravely made by prominent ministerialists that in the event of the government being outvoted they would resign. The divisbn - intended to be taken early - was delayed until the last moment, so that the liberal whips would have time to talk the revolvers into reason.

1

In the event, the amendment was routed by 225 votes to 47, only fourteen liberals and six labour men going into the anti-government lobby along with the twenty-seven nationalists. The extent of the liberal revolt was disappointing, but the rub for the Irish leaders was that they would now have to sustain the confidence of their supporters for another twelve months at least.

1. I.W.I., 16 Jan.1909.

2. W.G., 23 Feb.1909.

Ideally, in view of Asquith's stony attitude on home rule, an alternative to the strait-jacket of the liberal alliance would have been most welcome. As early as January 1908, the press had been alive to rumours that the adoption of a home rule programme was being considered in certain conservative circles, and during the year it was intimated in a number of places that there might be common ground between the tariff reformers and the home rule party.¹ In August T.M.Kettle declared that '80 votes were worth something to tariff reform',² and in October a link between the two interests was openly proposed in the columns of the Morning Post.³ But the interest of the Irish leaders was tinged heavily with scepticism. Dillon announced at Preston that:

We will not sell the liberty of our country for loaves and fishes. We will not sell it for tariff reform, but we are quite prepared to deal with either English party provided they come to us offering us any substantial advance towards the liberty of Ireland.

⁴

At the opening of the 1909 session there were indications that these feelers might be taken further. After a heated debate in the shadow cabinet the amendment to the address dealing with the state of Ireland was pushed from pride of place by the tariff reformers, whose amendment for the first

1. I.W.I., 4 Jan.1908.

2. T.M.Kettle at Stewartstown, 16 Aug.1908 (W.F.J., 22 Aug.1908).

3. Morning Post, 25 Oct.1908.

4. Dillon at Preston, 18 Oct.1908 (W.F.J., 24 Oct.1908).

1

time made special reference to Ireland as a beneficiary. Much public interest was aroused by this, for the country was at the time thick with all sorts of rumours about a small pressure group known as the 'confederates' which was dedicated to force tariff reform on the tory party and on the country by any means possible, and whose membership was rumoured to include leading members of the ^{tory} party. Redmond spoke on the amendment, but appears to have been as ignorant about what was going on as anyone else, and more sceptical than most. There was, he said, 'a great deal of indifference' about tariff reform in Ireland - both protection and free trade had operated to her disadvantage in the past:

I want to know whether the confederates stand by the Morning Post declaration, or by the declaration for coercion. Is this resolution including Ireland, mark you, for the first time, by name, is this an invitation to us to fight for tariff reform, as part of the great constructive policy, including the extension of self-government to Ireland? Or is it put forward with the ridiculous purpose of getting us to walk into the lobby with the unionist party upon this resolution tonight, and then to find Ireland pounded by them with all their artillery next week on the other resolution? (Ministerial laughter). Now hon. gentlemen opposite are too previous....
I do not desire to say that the unionist party are insincere in this resolution. This resolution may be introduced with an honest desire to grapple in some sensible way with the Irish question. At any rate, I am in the dark as to what it means, and my colleagues are in the dark; and certainly in the present state of my mind I will not vote for this amendment nor against it.

2

-
1. A. Chamberlain, Politics from the inside (London, 1936) p.140.
 2. 18 Feb. 1909. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 1, cols. 263-4.

He got no very firm answer. An extreme tariff reformer, but not a leading one, J.W.Hills, repudiated for himself any interest in home rule, and expressed the opinion that the Morning Post did not represent any large body of tory opinion, whilst Lord Robert Cecil said that only a 'very small section of tariff reformers' had any idea of a rapprochement - but then he was a free trader.¹ In fact no more came of the idea - the 'unionist' element in the tory party were as powerful as they appeared to be, and few people had any intention of adding a second major policy rift to the tory troubles. One of the leading tariff reformers, Chaplin, was most distressed about the state of Ireland under U.I.L. dictation, and Austen Chamberlain considered this equally shocking, though ^{he did} not expect² to gain many votes by denouncing it. Redmond and Dillon were no doubt well aware of this - their speeches did leave the door open, but they evidently expected little to come of it. In fact events scarcely moved far enough for anyone to feel alarmed. The strait-jacket remained.

The nationalists' policy had to be one of hanging on, whilst attempting to persuade or force the liberal leadership into re-adopting home rule. But they were not always in agreement as to how best this goal might be reached, or, apparently, as to how much they had achieved.

1. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.1, cols. 265-72, 278.

2. Chamberlain, op.cit., p.141.

Devlin, speaking in his citadel of Belfast on 29 January 1909 said of home rule that 'whereas twelve months ago the position of the government and the liberal party on the question was indecisive, today their position is clearly ascertained and fully defined'.¹ Dillon however, speaking in the same city only a fortnight later, admitted that C.B.'s death had complicated matters, that there could be no trust in Asquith, and that the liberal party was split:

We are waiting to see which of these sections will get the upper hand, and our future relations with the liberal party will depend upon which of these sections will get the upper handthey will very soon have to decide. We will know it this session, and this will be a momentous session... the sooner we have a general election in England the better for both of us and the liberal party. The sooner we know what the programme of the liberal party at the election is going to be, the better for all concerned.....

2

Meanwhile the by-election procedure worked out at N.W. Manchester was being continued, partly to keep the Irish vote in fighting order, partly to present the illusion of activity to supporters on both sides of the Irish sea. It would scarcely be possible to bring the liberal party back to the home rule standard by extracting pledges from individual candidates only, but while Asquith refrained from committing his government, the Irish leaders had to continue facing day to day problems. Between the national

1. Devlin at Belfast, 29 Jan.1909 (W.F.J., 6 Feb.1909).

2. Dillon at Belfast, 12 Feb.1909 (W.F.J., 20 Feb.1909).

convention and the outbreak of the budget controversy, there occurred what Dillon called a 'miniature general election' in Scotland, almost all the seats involved having a sizeable or even a 'decisive' Irish vote.¹

In each case, especially when the liberal candidate was something other than a full-blooded home ruler of long standing, problems were created for the leadership by conflicts at local level: English catholics, sometimes supported by Irish priests, wanting to support the tory over the education question; sympathisers with O'Brien or men of independent outlook wanting to hit the liberals wherever possible rather than help them wherever possible; and, at the other extreme, Irish radicals, perhaps with liberal links going back to union of hearts days, who could not be dissuaded from supporting any liberal but the most outspoken Roseberyite.

In Dumfries in July 1909, where the Irish vote was estimated at 300, the liberal was returned with a majority halved to 292.² Local priests campaigned for the tory, although the UIL mandate was for the Liberal, Gulland. The Westminster Gazette, motivated perhaps by a desire to belittle both the influence of the UIL and the extent to which British electors had swung against the government, claimed that most of the Irish had voted Tory.³ The Freeman correspondent however estimated that not more than 30 nationalists

1. Dillon at Edinburgh, 28 Feb.1909 (W.F.J., 6 Mar.1909).

2. 20 July 1909: J.W.Gulland (Lib.) 1,877
J.B.Duncan (U.) 1,585

3. W.G., 21 July 1909.

defied the U.I.L. mandate.¹ In Croydon, where there were 600 Irish claimed, no mandate was given, since both liberal and labour candidates, in a 3-cornered contest, were home rulers. It was however estimated that the labour candidate had no chance and that 500 Irish votes would go to the liberal.² At South Edinburgh Dewar, an old established home ruler, received the mandate with no trouble. As he was entering the government, great stress was placed on his second pledge, that he would use all influence to put home rule in the forefront at the general election, Dillon³ claiming that this indicated that he had obtained authority from Asquith. In Hawick Burghs the liberal was elected by Irish votes, according to the claim of the Freeman.⁴

But two other cases caused rather more difficulty. At Glasgow Central the candidate was T.Gibson Bowles, a former tory who had been ejected from King's Lynn in 1906 by a Chamberlainite, had immediately opposed Balfour in the city of London as a unionist free trader, and had joined the liberal party in 1908. The problem posed for the directors of nationalist policy was a delicate one. The Westminster declared that Glasgow Central, like N.W.Manchester and a number of other seats, could

-
1. W.F.J., 24 July 1909.
 2. W.F.J., 3 Apr.1909.
 3. Dillon at Edinburgh, 28 Feb.1909 (W.F.J., 6 Mar.1909).
 4. W.F.J., 13 March 1909.

only be won by a liberal if he could collar both the home rule and unionist
 free trade elements.¹ Bowles's address consequently advocated for Irishmen
 'ample powers to deal themselves in their own country with exclusively
 Irish affairs' subject to the supremacy of the imperial parliament. This
 was construed as being a satisfactory acceptance of home rule in principle,
 but a waiting policy was declared, since Bowles appeared reluctant to
 agree to press his government to adopt it at the general election. The
 powerful Home Government Branch debated the issue, and the prevalent
 attitude was that Bowles was still at heart a unionist free trader and
 should be so dealt with.² Devlin went to Glasgow and talked to Bowles,
 but the Freeman correspondent formed the impression that 'the candidate was
 not explicit or straight enough on the question of home rule'.³ So
 concerned were the Irishmen (their strength was estimated at 2000), that
 the case was referred to Westminster. On February 26 Redmond recorded that:

Master of Elibank read me a telegram which he had sent to Bowles
 in which he said Asquith, Lld. George, Churchill, Harcourt and the
 Whips authorised him to say that they all thought Bowles should
 say he was "strongly of opinion that home rule should be a leading
 issue at the next general election".

4

-
1. W.G., 3 Mar.1909.
 2. W.F.J., 20 Feb.1909.
 3. W.F.J., 27 Feb.1909.
 4. Memo.dated 26 Feb.1909 (Redmond papers).

Bowles accordingly made the required declaration at the last moment. But although the Liberal had won the seat in 1906 by a majority of 400, Bowles was beaten by over 2000. Crilly and Derrick (Scottish U.I.L. organiser) both, when interviewed, insisted that the Irish vote had been solid for Bowles - Crilly said the liberal organisation was poor, Derrick blamed the opposition of a group of Scottish radicals who regarded Bowles's position on the general Liberal programme as evasive.¹ The result was a dire embarrassment for the Freeman, which had earlier proclaimed 'to whatever side the Irish vote goes, that side will win.....'.²

At East Edinburgh in April the outcome was an equally mixed blessing. The Liberal, Lord Provost Gibson, was unable to convince the Irishmen of his sincerity on home rule. On the evening following Crilly's announcement of the standing committee's decision to advise no action, Gibson did say he would do all possible to advocate home rule, but the decision was not referred.³ Gibson was elected with a majority reduced from 4,174 to 458 - it was a severe blow for the liberals, and a result which, said Arthur Murphy of Glasgow, should satisfy all nationalists.⁴ But although satisfying

-
1. W.F.J., 6 Mar.1909.
 2. W.F.J., 27 Feb.1909.
 3. W.F.J., 17 Apr.1909.
 4. W.F.J., 24 Apr.1909.

to local men like Murphy as an indication of the strength of the Irish vote, the situation was less clear-cut for the nationalist leaders, who knew, whatever they said, that the future of home rule lay with the liberals, if at all. T.P.O'Connor wrote to the liberals' Scottish whip, the master of Elibank, on 14 April 1909:

I very much regret the turn things have taken in East Edinburgh, but I feel myself quite helpless. Indeed I think we have done a good deal in keeping our people from actually voting tory, as they are strongly inclined to do. This attitude has been increased by what I must call the incredible stupidity of Mr Gibson. While expressing his faith in home rule, he declined to pledge himself to use his influence to have it made one of the issues at the next election. In addition he declares in favour of convent inspection, a point on which all catholics feel intensely. I have gone over the ground with you so often before, and we are in such substantial agreement, that it is unnecessary for me to argue whether we are justified in insisting on the second of our questions being answered satisfactorily as well as the first. I limit myself to saying that there is a majority of 300 in favour of home rule for Ireland in the present parliament, and nevertheless home rule will not be proposed, merely because a certain number of liberal leaders set the example of excluding it from the questions to be settled in this parliament. We should be insane if we allowed such a state of things to occur again, at least so far as we can prevent it. I warn you - of course in the friendliest spirit, and with the desire to prevent what I regard as a catastrophe - that the time is fast approaching when we shall be able no longer to resist the trend of our people to vote for the tory rather than support a liberal who, by reducing home rule to a pious opinion, practically postpones it to the Greek Kalends.

What makes the situation more aggravating is that all this could be transformed by a few simple words from the head of the government, expressing his determination to make home rule one of the issues at the next general election. The rank and file, I am sure, are only too ready to accept such a lead if he gave it; but so long as they feel uncertain about his attitude they will continue to wobble after the fashion of Mr Gibson, and in the end there will be a collision between the two great democratic forces whose union may accomplish so much good, and whose disruption may lead to so much evil.

1

1. O'Connor to Elibank, 14 Apr.1909 (Elibank papers, N.L.S., Ms.8801, f.213).

As it became clear that the forthcoming budget would, one way or the other, be the prelude to a general election, the statements of the Irish leaders (and they were well aware of this) assumed considerable importance with regard to the general political situation. No longer were they simply holding their own ranks together by explanations, justifications, admonitions and sheer bluff and bluster, until the time came for action. By Easter 1909 the time to initiate action had arrived. Asquith however had given no indication of any new step towards home rule, and for a while it looked as if Dillon, at least, among the Irish leaders, was anticipating the possibility of a new departure in politics. During these months the dreadnought crisis in the cabinet and the country reached its peak, with Lloyd George and Churchill (apparently) irreconcilably opposed to those in the cabinet and in the tory party who called for increased defence expenditure. At Dunferline, on March 1, Dillon attacked the tory concept of 'continuity' in foreign policy. The two-power standard had become ridiculous, he said, in the light of developments in the U.S.A.: the liberal party should be true to its traditions (which he interpreted as Gladstonian, rather than Palmerstonian or Roseberyite), and refuse to dally with imperialism.¹ A week later, at Battersea, Dillon sought to maintain that the cabinet was split over matters other than defence. Liberal home rulers and liberal imperialists would not be reconciled, he said, and if the

1. Dillon at Dunfermline, 1 Mar. 1909 (W.F.J., 6 Mar. 1909).

imperialists won then it was 'quite as likely that home rule will be given by the tory as by the liberal party'¹. To a considerable extent this was mere histrionics, but Dillon's general point, that a struggle vitally relevant to Ireland's future was going on within the liberal cabinet, was one which seriously concerned Irish leaders at this time. Redmond, at Liverpool on March 28, declared that:

I see signs of what I may call the Liberal League members of the liberal party gathering their forces and endeavouring to get control of the councils of the party. Now let me say this emphatically and clearly, that unless the leaders put home rule in the forefront of their programme at the next general election, it will be our duty to advise every son of Ireland in Great Britain to cast his vote against the liberal candidate.

2

Redmond hoped that this would answer those liberals who argued that the adoption of home rule would wreck the party. If he meant what he said, non-adoption of home rule would wreck the party. But very soon the cabinet arrived at a compromise on ~~dradnoughts~~, and hopes of widening the split and forcing a decision on home rule were dashed. In addition, a great new crisis arose to challenge the whole basis on which the Irish leaders hoped to be able to give the liberals their electoral support.

3. The people's budget.

Since the end of 1908 the country had been aware that the next budget would be a measure of more than usual significance. Lloyd George had

1. Dillon at Battersea, 7 Mar.1909 (W.F.J., 13 Mar.1909).

2. Redmond at Liverpool, 28 Mar.1909 (W.F.J., 3 Apr.1909).

tactless enough to declare that 'he would be looking for somebody's hen-roost to rob', and Asquith had promised in more sonorous terms that 'the budget of next year will stand at the very centre of our work'¹. The government were conscious of a depressing crop of by-election failures, of an increase of about £16 million in expenditure as a result of the old age pensions and the admiralty's call for dreadnoughts, and of a need to refurbish their image (somewhat tattered after three years of fighting losing battles over sectional issues) as a great 'engine for securing social reforms'². A far-reaching budget might solve all these problems, and be allowed through the house of lords unscathed. If it was not (though this seemed unlikely) then the cup would indeed be full, and the sands not ploughed in vain.³

It soon became clear that the measure would contain provisions distasteful not only to the landed and moneyed classes of Great Britain but also to many among whom the Irish party traditionally looked for support. Redmond felt it necessary to state his view forcefully some days before the budget saw the light of day:

-
1. Lloyd George at Liverpool (Times, 22 Dec.1908).
Asquith at National Liberal Club, 11 Dec.1908 (Times, 12 Dec.1908).
 2. Lord Crewe had written to CB in October 1905 that 'the liberal party is on its trial as an engine for securing social reform'.(CB.papers, B.M.Add. Ms. 41213, f.337).
 3. The background to the budget is discussed in R.Jenkins, Mr Balfour's poodle (London 1954) pp.39-42.

We look at this question from the point of view of a country that is admittedly overburdened by unjust taxation; and if we are asked in this budget to consent to tax ourselves for vast sums of money for the purpose of enlarging the naval armaments of the empire, it will, I need not say, be our duty with reference to this budget, with reference to all these enlargements of the armaments of the empire, to resist the impost so far as Ireland is concerned by every means in our power.

1

Redmond's apprehensions were to be justified, though the cost of the old age pensions (from which Ireland especially benefitted) was considerably greater than the cost of the dreadnoughts. The bulk of the extra £16 million was to be collected by widening the traditional channels of income tax and death duties, and by the addition of a super tax, which was scarcely likely to trouble Ireland to any great extent. But the land taxes and the stamp duties, though intended to catch the great landlords and property owners, seemed also to threaten the Irish peasant proprietor. Worst of all from the Irish point of view, liquor licence duties were to be revised and greatly increased; 3/9d per gallon was added to the spirit duty; and 8d per pound added to the tobacco duty. Lloyd George estimated that Ireland's share of the new burden would be about £640,000 or $4\frac{1}{2}\%$ of the whole, as against her share of existing U.K. taxation, which was $6\frac{1}{2}\%$ of the whole.

1. Redmond at Dublin, 20 Apr.1909 (W.F.J., 24 Apr.1909).

2. Lloyd George, in answer to a question, 3 May 1909 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.4, col.739). The estimated £640,000 increase was made up of: spirit duties £169,000; tobacco £180,000; liquor licences £104,000; stamp duties £26,000; others £160,000.

Redmond's first reaction was a strong one - 'I desire at the earliest possible moment to declare that we will oppose this budget. It is amost extraordinary budget'¹. But by the following week he had channelled his criticisms more carefully, and was anxious to ensure that his earlier comments were not misinterpreted, either by the government or by the unionists. The budget, he said, was of considerable importance with regard to the 'great social questions':

The members of this house who are specially interested in the great democratic reforms promoted by this budget need be under no apprehension whatever that we will act the part of wreckers with reference to measure of reform to which we have devoted our best energies all our lives. But we must look at this budget from the interests, first of all, of our country, and from that point of view there are some proposals in this budget which we regard as oppressive and unjust.

Indirect taxation in Ireland, he said, was 73^d% of the whole, because the people were so poor that the only way the government could extract revenue was by taxing their 'food'. His biggest criticisms were levelled against the new whisky duty, which he estimated would raise not £169,000 but more like £750,000. It penalised heavily a beverage favoured especially by Irishmen and Scotsmen, and struck a heavy blow at one of Ireland's few remaining industries (he was trying here to have it both ways - if the duties significantly reduced the sales of the distillers, Irish industry would be damaged, but the increase

1. 29 Apr.1909. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.4, cols.579-583.

in Irish taxation would of course be proportionately less great). But he also heavily criticised the tobacco increase, as hitting at a 'necessity of life' for the Irish poor; the stamp duties on the transfer of land; and the new licence duties.¹ These last introduced new minimum limits, which varied according to the size of the town, but which would have the overall effect of 'levelling up' duties at the lower end of the scale, with those at present paying the lowest duties sustaining the heaviest increases. Nearly all these, the smallest public houses, were in Ireland, as T.P.O'Connor explained. Furthermore, they were not tied houses, as was usually the case in England, and so the burden would fall directly upon the publican. The bulk of these places carried on mixed trading, the sale of liquor normally being only a moderate proportion of the trade, but under the new scheme² the size of the whole premises was to be the basis of the assessment.

Lloyd George was at first not greatly swayed by nationalist arguments. There was more than a grain of truth in his reply that 'the only tax that is popular is a tax on somebody else'. Redmond's jibe about dreadnoughts he thought irrelevant, for three-quarters of the tax increases were necessitated by the cost of old age pensions. But the chancellor's next point, that Ireland's share of the new burden was only $4\frac{1}{2}\%$ as against herenormal $6\frac{1}{2}\%$, did

1. 3 May 1909. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 4, cols. 783-794.

2. T.P.O'Connor, 10 May 1909. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 4, cols. 1475-82.

not really meet the nationalist argument, which was that, regardless of questions of parity, Ireland as a poor country could not sustain the same density of indirect taxation as was necessary in a prosperous country like England. But Lloyd George did admit the possibility of some modification¹ of the licence duties.

Nationalist hostility to these provisions in the budget has to a considerable extent been dismissed as deference to the wishes of 'The Trade'.² Yet there is no firm evidence to support this allegation, which was a recurrent one among liberal nonconformists, and was the twin of the legend (used to belittle nationalist condemnation of the council bill in 1907) of clerical domination of Irish politics. T.M.Kettle declared in the commons on May 10 that he would concede all the new duties on spirits and licences, if the Irish tea duty were removed.³ Hazelton explained that although he had been a strong supporter of temperance legislation in the past he could not support the new duties, because they were new burdens on Ireland.⁴ Indeed, the Irish party's record on temperance measures is in itself a refutation of the allegation that they were in the pocket of the Trade,

1. 4 and 10 May 1909. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series vol.4, cols. 987-1006, 1556.

2. e.g. Jenkins, Asquith, op.cit., p.205: 'They [the Irish party] regarded the £1,200,000 increase in the spirit duty as a blow at the Irish whisky trade, and they were even more dependent on liquor interests than were the tories'.

3. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.4, cols. 1573-7.

4. 3 May 1909. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.4, cols. 960-7.

at least compared with the record of the unionist party. It was usual for the decision on such measures to be left to the individual member and, as in the case of the specifically Irish temperance bill of 1906, they tended to divide about equally for and¹ against. This is not to deny that in doing so they aroused a certain amount of opposition from the liquor interest. Dennis Johnston warned Redmond at the time of the 1906 bill:

...The licensed vintners trade is up in arms against the party on account of the proposed temperance legislation. Last week when I was collecting in the Inns Quay ward there was no objection, but this week there was an organised boycott of the fund, and last night, when I tried to collect in North Dock ward, with a deputation of ward nationalists, we were actually hooted out of the houses we went into. In view of this attitude, it might be as well to let the city collections stand over for a few weeks. In the meantime I am having collections made in Clontarf and such districts, where the Trade interests are not militant. P.S. I have just seen Mr Fogarty, and he and other prominent members of the licensed vintners trade will take energetic steps to prevent a recurrence of what happened last night.

2

But whilst indicating that the Irish party was subjected to a certain amount of pressure from the trade in these matters, this indicates how limited, both in strength and area, that pressure was. It was inevitable that a nationalist party, claiming more or less to offer a panacea for all the ills, should experience opposition from various pressure groups now and then.

1. Parl. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 157 cols. 1563-1633.

2. D. Johnston to Redmond, 5 Apr. 1906 (Redmond papers).

But there seems little reason to suppose that the trade occupied a dominant position behind the scenes. If the Irish party was in anyone's pocket so far as general support went, it was surely that of the small farmer. If there was any sinister link between the publican and nationalist politics it was no more than the very crude one that if a mass meeting was held in a village on a Sunday, the publicans sold more liquor. Financially there seems no reason to suppose that the Trade wielded great influence in the party: Johnston's letter is an indication of the sort of level at which that problem arose. Almost all nationalist funds came from small subscriptions, and apart from certain small urban areas the Trade's part in this would be negligible. The leading representatives of the Trade had never had close links with the party (Guinness even stood to benefit from the increased brewers' licences, which might cut their smaller competitors out of business). Dillon alleged that the budget had for the first time caused the great brewers and distillers to stop sending cheques to the unionist 'carrion crow' campaign.¹ Healy told William O'Brien on 5 May 1910 that: 'I hear that the vintners offered Redmond £15,000 to vote against the budget, and sent a deputation which he refused to see'.² In fact, the total amount of money collected in Ireland for the nationalist cause was overshadowed by the much larger sums collected regularly from the Irish in America and also from Australia.

1. Dillon at South Dublin, 12 Aug.1909 (W.F.J., 21 Aug.1909).

2. T.M.Healy to Wm. O'Brien, 5 May 1910 (Wm O'Brien papers, N.L.I., Ms.8556).

The Irish party's opposition to the budget, then, was not prompted to any significant extent by vested interests. It was straightforward opposition to an increase in the taxation of Ireland. It was in part the sort of attack which any opposition party might be expected to make on a 'predatory' budget; and in part an argument for home rule - if the chancellor was unable to grasp that the new taxes could only be operated in Ireland to the detriment of the economy and the people, that was but another indication of the unsuitability of the British government for running Irish affairs. T.M.Kettle called the budget 'a perfect example of legislation by accident....extended to Ireland with a complete indifference to the difference of social structure and the tenure of property in Ireland'¹. Dillon thought the budget 'a most striking illustration of the ruinous effect upon our country being governed from London'².

In Ireland itself public opinion mobilised at once, local bodies throughout the country expressing their hostility to the new proposals.³ Both the leading nationalist dailies were forthright in their condemnation. The Freeman declared that 'Mr Redmond and his party will fight the imposition every inch of the road', and considered the duties an attempt by the government to take back what they had given in old age pensions, though it was careful

-
1. 18 May 1909, Parl. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.5, col.268.
 2. Dillon at Swinford, 9 May 1909 (W.F.J., 15 May 1909).
 3. See reports in W.F.J., 8 and 15 May 1909.

to avoid making a general attack on the budget, which was 'sensational',
 and 'even richer in suggestion and promise than in actual achievement...'¹
 The Independent took a sterner view - 'Ireland up in arms against robbing
 budget' ran its front page headline on May 8, followed by an unqualified
 condemnation of the whole measure.² An 'All-Ireland' meeting was called
 at the Mansion House to protest. Redmond and his leading colleagues,
 perhaps fearing that their later freedom of action might be compromised by
 statements which so heated a gathering would demand, sent apologies from
 London, but the lord mayors of both Dublin and Cork were present, and were
 joined on the platform by such diverse characters as Col. Nugent Everard,
 Andy Kettle and Timothy Harrington M.P. A letter condemning the budget
 from Lord Dunraven was read out, and Andy Kettle declared that the measure
 should be opposed even at the risk of losing the land bill in reprisal.³
 Indeed, this last issue was something of a godsend to the 'conference and
 conciliation' men - "I am perfectly prepared to do without the land bill"
 Healy told an Independent reporter.⁴ Speaking in Dundalk on May 9 along
 with his fellow M.P., Joseph Nolan, and the local brewer T.C. Macardle, Healy
 said that Irishmen might be forced:

-
1. W.F.J., 8 May 1909.
 2. I.W.I., 8 May 1909.
 3. Mansion House meeting, 12 May 1909 (I.W.I., 15 May 1909).
 4. I.W.I., 8 May 1909.

...to welcome relief from any quarter, even if it came from the house of lords...he regarded this budget as a new starting point of policy in the minds of Irishmen. There were some people in the liquor interest who were glad of the budget. The Guinesses and other big brewers would be glad if the smaller men were wiped out.

1

Very quickly however there was talk of concessions in the liberal press. The Freeman threatened the government with disaster if they did not materialise, but felt that reductions 'may be confidently expected'.²

It soon became apparent that the Irish party wished, by defining their objections more precisely, to slow down their attack on the budget - perhaps because it was creating the wrong impression in liberal circles, perhaps because they were afraid the campaign in Ireland might run on too fast, to the advantage of Healy. J.C.Flynn in the commons called it a 'courageous, a great, a democratic budget', with the exceptions of the spirits, licence, and tobacco duties.³ The Independent sharply reminded him that the increased stamp duties on land transfer was 'one of the most iniquitous proposals', and that this, together with his three exceptions, added up to about thirteen fourteenths of the entire budget.⁴ 'If Irish members are to fight this budget by first singing its praises, then, with all respect, we think they

1. Healy in Dundalk, 9 May 1909 (W.F.J., 15 May 1909).

2. W.F.J., 15 May 1909.

3. 24 May 1909. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.5, col.887,

4. An assertion which took no account of the income and super taxes, the motor tax, the death duties, and the new land taxes.

might as well remain dumb. The Irish members, if they are mindful chiefly of the interests of their own country, must give determined and earnest opposition to the finance bill in all its stages'¹.

The contention of criticism of this sort was clearly that any sort of friendly association with the liberals must be terminated. In the words of Healy, 'when this government goes out of office we shall not have had home rule, and we shall have had £2 million of extra taxation'. But the party leaders could not afford to take so stark a view of the situation. - if there remained any possibility of the liberals accelerating, or being forced to accelerate, their home rule promises, then the budget argument was minor by comparison. Further, Irish votes could not in any case defeat the budget by opposition, whereas conciliatory methods might well obtain negotiated concessions. But in the meantime, in view of the widespread hostility to the budget in Ireland, and the obvious intention of Healy, the Irish Independent, and other critics of the party's pro-liberal policy, to make political capital out of it if they could, Redmond had no alternative but to oppose the second reading. T.P.O'Connor explained to the house 'we do not object to the budget as a whole....Most of us - nine tenths of us - are even ardent supporters of the budget'². The second reading was passed by 366 liberal and labour votes to 209 unionist and nationalist votes.

1. I.W.I., 5 June 1909.

2. 10 June 1909. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.6 cols.499-510.

Gestures of firmness having been made by all sides, parliament settled down to a long committee stage. Birrell said at Bristol on July 3 that the budget was 'an honest attempt to raise money', and that the government would listen to criticisms of detail, though not of principle.¹ Redmond at Arklow declared that although the budget was 'unjust to Ireland', so too had been every other budget since the act of union, with the exception of the bill of 1908. He picked out clearly those points to which the Irish party were opposed, but stressed also that there were 'certain portions of this budget which the Irish party has decided unanimously to support'. He went into considerable detail to demonstrate that the land taxes were aimed not at the farmer but at the great landowners and urban landlords like de Vesci and Pembroke, and made clear that the party would not join with the tories in attacking these provisions. Nationalist opposition would be independent and selective, and in no way associated with that of the tories and the lords, who, he said, would not reciprocate support when it came to concessions for Ireland on spirits and licence duties. He also answered those in Ireland who called for a withdrawal from parliament:

In our absence the budget would be passed. No voice would be raised to mitigate its injustice to Ireland; no effort would be made to obtain concessions or improvement; the budget would pass; our enemies in the house of commons would be delighted at our absence; and into the bargain the land bill on which the whole future of Ireland depends, would go by the boards. Fellow-countrymen, that is an insane policy.

2

-
1. Birrell at Bristol, 3 July 1909 (I.W.I., 10 July 1909).
 2. Redmond at Arklow, 4 July 1909 (W.F.J., 10 July 1909).

Nationalist resolve to reach agreement with the government was stiffened by the dramatic development of the dispute in England. The Limehouse speech and the activities of 'the dukes' raised the political temperature and accomplished the government's end, to present the budget as a great crusade for democracy, to such an extent that at the end of July Lansdowne declared that the lords would not swallow the bill whole without 'wincing'. Churchill at Edinburgh immediately took up the challenge on behalf of (though, it later transpired, without the permission of) the government.¹ The Freeman put the Irish position:

Mr Churchill in his speech at Edinburgh has taken up Lord Lansdowne's challenge. The budget, the whole budget, or a dissolution, is his answer. It is the only possible answer for a believer in the principles of representative government. But it will not dismay the peers, if a dissolution promises success to their new pretensions. In such a contest, at least in its first stage, there is, however, the obvious danger that people will vote, not upon the principles asserted by the hereditary legislators, but according to their view of Mr Lloyd George's proposals. If the democratic forces are to work together, the chancellor should remove those features of the budget which prevent such co-operation.....[If they are removed].....the Irish democracy will not stand aside in the contest with the traditional enemies of their interest and their cause, upon the understanding that the fight is not to be a sham battle, but a fight to a finish, in which the right of the lords to reject a home rule bill shall be as boldly challenged and revised as their right to reject a finance bill.

2

-
1. Jenkins, Asquith, pp.199-200.
 2. W.F.J., 24 July 1909.

Between July and September the Irish party were able to gain a number of concessions from the government, some on points where the chancellor had originally failed to realise the difference between British and Irish conditions, others by hard bargaining, Agricultural land and smallholdings were specifically exempted from the operation of the new land taxes - not a great financial concession, but one of considerable political importance in Ireland; the stamp duty increase would not apply to land under £500 in value. ¹

In the case of the liquor licence duty the struggle was harder, and the wiles of Lloyd George appear to have been encountered by the Irish leaders for the first time. The proposed changes included much higher scales for licences; the substitution for Griffith's valuation of a new 'English' basis, which would include the value of the licence; and the introduction of a high minimum duty, common to England and Ireland. ² On August 26 Redmond and a number of his colleagues had an interview with Lloyd George, who soon agreed that Griffith's valuation be retained as the basis for taxation in Ireland. He also conceded that, provided the cabinet agreed, the new minimum limit for Ireland would be abolished. Four days later he informed Redmond that he could not, after all, do any more than reduce the minimum limit. ³ Redmond protested strongly:

-
1. J.J.Clancy, 'The budget and the Irish party', in W.F.J., 20 Nov.1909, gives a full (though, of course, partisan) summary of these concessions.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Redmond to Asquith, 2 Oct.1909 (Redmond papers).

We regarded the understanding....as final subject to the consent of the cabinet, which I afterwards understood from you had been obtained. You suggested that we should put down the amendment and that you would accept it. Now you inform me the whole situation is changed. An alternative limit is no use. It will not satisfy anyone in Ireland and it will rouse just as much odium against you as if you stood by your first proposition.

I don't think this is fair treatment and we feel it very badly.

1

Lloyd George did not acknowledge this letter, nor did he communicate its contents to Asquith, which Redmond had expected him to do. Accordingly, when the matter came up for debate on September 1, Asquith publicly ruled abolition of the minimum out of court. Only nationalist tolerance had permitted him to get away with this, as Redmond later reminded him:

You will remember the debate took place on the following Wednesday, the first of September, and I refrained from making any statement with regard to the undertaking given to us, from reasons which you will appreciate, and the same night, in three divisions, the Irish members abstained from voting, when, had they gone into the opposition lobby, they would have defeated the government.

2

Asquith's attitude was courteous but unbending. There was 'no ground for charging him [L.G.] with breach of faith' for having found 'on reflection and after consultation with his colleagues' that the concession was not possible.

3

-
1. Redmond to Lloyd George, 31 Aug. 31 Aug.1909 (L.G.papers, Beaverbrook Library c/7/3/1).
 2. Redmond to Asquith, 2 Oct.1909, op.cit.
 3. Asquith to Redmond, 1 Oct.1909 (Redmond papers).

Redmond's motion to exempt Ireland from the new licence duties was defeated by 250 to 62, the nationalist minority being augmented only by four back-bench unionists, two liberals and a labour man. The majority included not only the members of the government, but also Balfour and Carson and old radical home rulers like Burt and Byles.¹ This situation did at least provide Redmond with a further argument against those who urged an anti-budget alliance with the tories. In Waterford on September 15 he said, with slight exaggeration, 'the other day I moved in the house of commons a motion to exempt Ireland from all these new licence duties. Every tory in the house of commons voted against me'.²

But the Irish leaders were in private still extremely concerned about the situation. They had gained no relief on the whisky tax (apart from temperance considerations, the government desperately needed the revenue from it, and it was difficult to make out a case for separate treatment for Ireland)³ and whilst the licence concession reduced the new burden on publicans by about 50% overall, it still bore heavily on the larger towns, whilst the brewers and distillers had gained no relief on their licence

1. Parl't. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol 10, col. 510.

2. Redmond at Waterford, 15 Sept. 1909 (W.F.J., 18 Sept. 1909).

3. Writing of the 1910 budget, T.P.O'Connor told Redmond, 4 June 1910: 'L.G. cannot drop the whisky tax; says it would cost him five millions; would bankrupt him, add compel him to seek replacements in taxes on tea and sugar' (Redmond papers).

increases. In the absence of a clear-cut home rule declaration from the government the situation looked black as the time for the third reading of the finance bill approached. T.P.O'Connor wrote to Lloyd George on September 25:

I am getting from Dillon and others most gloomy and alarming letters about the state of opinion in Ireland. You will understand how far the feeling has gone when Joe Devlin - one of the most sanguine, ablest and truest men in our party - said to me on Friday night that Healy was right; that we ought to have fought the budget from first to last. Of course I remain of the opinion that from the Irish point of view, that would have been a foolish policy, in view especially of the land bill; but it is an indication of Irish opinion; and when I wrote to Dillon about it, his reply was that it faithfully reflected the depression in our ranks in Ireland. Of course that depression will be increased if, as seems probable, the lords mutilate the land bill beyond acceptance. On Friday night I took the immense risk.....of quietly hinting to some of the men that they need not vote when things were so critical. You know also how Redmond has had to take the same risk on a previous occasion when the budget and the government were at his mercy. But our position is becoming impossible. You may have seen that Archbishop Bourne has declared war against us in England; and I gather from other quarters that he and the Tories are probably already in secret alliance. This will make it a very bitter fight - especially in Lancashire. I don't fear a fight provided things are not made too difficult for me. Healy's outbursts - disgusting and disgraceful, especially in his personal treatment of you - are symptoms of a morbid situation. He thinks that we are so discredited by the budget that he can defy us and beat us. You know how disastrous I consider it to be ever to divide the democratic forces in the two countries. Such a division would be a gigantic disaster at the moment when we are apparently about to enter on the life and death struggle with the House of Lords.

I believe the situation comes down, in the ultimate analysis, to a small point: namely the licence duties. If we could win on that, we could defy all our enemies: the church, Healy, etc. And that again reduces itself to infinitesimal figures. I have heard

suggestions of 50% reductions in the smaller towns and 66% in the larger. This would mean that you would get little or no money. Would it not be better to abolish the minimum licence altogether for Ireland? Financially it makes practically no difference to you.....The refusal of Asquith to abolish the minimum could easily be explained by the statement - which is perfectly true - that on trying to work out any scheme equally and equitably applicable to England and Ireland, he has failed.

1

But these entreaties had no result, and a fortnight later, on the eve of his departure on a fund-raising mission to America, O'Connor wrote another long letter to Lloyd George in similar vein:

It seems too tragic that the moment for which we have been looking all our lives, when we could really tackle the house of lords with some hope of victory, our path should be obstructed by obstacles of such infinitesimal importance in proportion to the big stakes we are playing..... Why in heaven's name you and your colleagues stick to these wretched licence duties in Ireland - on the one side adding to the forces against us another force which may turn the balance against us in our effort to support you in the election - on the other side, bringing you in nothing either in finance or reputation - I am unable to understand. What I fear is that we shall be involved next week in a wrangle with the ministry over these duties; that we shall have to vote in force against the third reading of the budget. You know I would not think of bluffing with a friend so close as you.

2

-
1. O'Connor to Lloyd George, 25 Sept.1909 (Lloyd George papers, C/6/10/1).
 2. O'Connor to Lloyd George, n.d. 'Saturday', probably 2 or 9 Oct.1909 (Lloyd George papers, C/10/2).

Fortunately for liberals and nationalists alike (in the light of the subsequent election result) this dread outcome was averted, though in fact the government made no further concessions as a result of O'Connor's letters or other pressures. One reason for this was that the position of the Irish party was not quite as delicate as O'Connor maintained - to some extent he was bluffing, despite his disclaimer. On the very day of Asquith's refusal to grant the full licence concession,² Dundalk brewer, T.C. Macardle,¹ had written to Redmond asking him to work for the relief of the small breweries but added:

I am sure the whole trade of Ireland cannot but be deeply grateful to yourself and your party for your success so far as I see outlined with regard to the publicans' licences and the spirit gacers' arrangements. Belfast will not come out of it so well as the rest of Ireland, but with the exception of a very small number of public houses in Ireland, on the present valuation I think it would work out very equably.....

2

Perhaps another reason why the Irish party leaders were not irreconcilable on the budget was that there was a growing realisation amongst informed nationalist observers that Ireland's case against it, aside from the broad

1. No concession was gained here. Asquith wrote to Redmond on October 29 that he was aware of the hardship to small brewers in both countries, and could see no grounds for differentiating. 'This is one of the imposts which is always and properly subject to review in the light of experience'. Asquith to Redmond, 29 Oct.1909 (Redmond papers).
2. T.C.Macardle to Redmond, 1 Sept.1909 (Redmond papers).

argument that Ireland could not afford to pay, was a slim one. Bishop Kelly of Ross, one of the party's financial experts, observed a few months later that as a result of rising expenditure in Ireland, her contribution to imperial services, which in 1902-3 had been £2,852,000, had by 1908-9 fallen to £583,000. But in March 1909 old age pensions had not really got under way, and Kelly was able to calculate firmly that taking this new expense into account (as well as the increased expenditure sanctioned under the universities act and the land act), in the financial year 1909-10 Ireland would in fact be making no imperial contribution, whilst her domestic expenditure would be 'subsidised' by £1,750,000 of British money. Kelly wrote to T.P.Gill:

Does any sane man believe that any English government, whig, tory, radical, or socialist, will go on spending on us in Ireland and our people and our projects, £1 3/4 million of English, Scotch and Welsh money? The thing is unthinkable, pace Wm O'Brien and Tim Healy. Gladstone fixed Ireland's [imperial] contribution at £2 million and some further charges. We contributed over £2 million down to 1906. Thus, to put ourselves on the same financial footing towards England that we held on 31 March 1905, we should raise by increased taxation £1 3/4 million to pay our own bills and £2,186,000 to pay imperial bills - that is, in round numbers, we should raise £4 million of additional taxation.....How much additional taxation has been raised in Ireland by the budget, I can form no opinion. All anti-party men say £2 million: that is a gross lie - but even if it raised £2 million, we want £4 million.

1

1. Bishop of Ross to T.P.Gill, 20 Feb.190 (Gill papers).

When, a few weeks later, a proposal for a new financial relations commission was put forward, Kelly considered that 'any "reference", not ruin us, should rigidly confine the commission to considering the income and revenue of Great Britain and Ireland from 1817 to 1910 and the relative taxable capacities of the two countries, and exclude all questions of expenditure¹'.

Despite their threats, therefore, the Irish party did not vote against the third reading of the budget when it came up at the beginning of November. This decision was made easier by the development of the general political crisis, as the lords mutilated the land bill and made it plain that they intended to reject the budget outright. Nonetheless, as Redmond admitted in his speech on the third reading, he was 'in a position of some embarrassment'. Although the concessions won were 'of very great importance', the retention of the whisky duty alone was a barrier to full co-operation with the government. 'If there was nothing else in this bill to which we objected except this deadly attack, as I believe it is, upon one of the few remaining Irish industries, it would be impossible for us by our votes to support it'. The party would thus abstain from voting:

But there is a larger issue at stake in the matter. We are told that this bill is going to be rejected by the house of lords. If that fight is entered upon, many issues more than land taxes or licence taxes will be raised. If that question of the house of lords, and the power of the house of lords to permanently block legislation in this country, is to be raised,

1. Ibid., 3 Mar.1910.

if that power is going to be challenged in the crisis which is before us, I am not going to be on the side of the house of lords.

1

Ever since Lloyd George's campaign and the failure of the Budget Protest League, during the summer, the rejection of the budget by the upper house had come more and more to be regarded as a practical possibility. In so far as government speakers like Birrell expressed the opinion that they did not believe the lords would dare reject, they were pursuing a tactic intended to make rejection appear all the more unconstitutional if it took place.² As the government chief whip, Pease, said at the end of September 'we are bound to assume at present that the house of lords will not take the unconstitutional course of interfering with the finance bill, and that, therefore, this parliament has yet two years to run'.³ Nonetheless, some were genuinely surprised when the lords' intentions became clear (though the surprise was doubtless more at their lordships being so 'foolish and suicidal' than at their being 'unconstitutional'). T.W.Russell wrote to T.P.Gill at the end of September:

Up to yesterday I had refused to believe that the lords would reject the budget. It is now more than likely that their hands will be forced. "The Trade" and the "Tariffsters" will....stop their contributions to the party funds unless Lansdowne consents...

-
1. 4 Nov.1909. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.12, cols. 2026-33.
 2. Birrell at Bristol, 8 Oct.1909 (I.W.I., 16 Oct.1909).
 3. W.F.J., 2 Oct.1909.

This means a general election.....and the liberals
safe for five years - with the lords veto gone!!!!
You will be able to see what all this means.

1

Redmond on the other hand seems to have been less decided. Although
at Ashton-under-Lyne on October 12 he 'prayed to god that the lords would
reject the budget' he felt that:

The indications at the present moment all point in the
direction of the lords swallowing the budget in spite of
their threats and protestations, but even if they do, the
question of the veto of the house of lords will still
remain. Every great measure sent up to the lords in this
parliament has been mutilated or rejected.

2

At Barrow the following day he warned that if in such an outcome the
liberals sought to cling to office for another year or two, the Irish party
would do all they could do bring about an immediate dissolution.³ He had
stated earlier, when the land bill left the commons, that the lords would
be unlikely to destroy both great measures, and that the fate of one would
be a guide to the fortunes of the other - now it seems that the land bill
was the one to be mutilated. The Westminster Gazette shared this view:
'If the Irish land bill gets badly stung in early October, we shall treat
the operation as so much evidence that the budget is safe'.⁴ Redmond thus

-
1. T.W.Russell to T.P.Gill, n.d., but evidently a reply to Gill's letter
of 28 Sept.1909 (Gill papers).
 2. Redmond at Ashton-under-Lyne, 12 Oct.1909 (W.F.J., 16 Oct.1909).
 3. Redmond at Barrow, 13 Oct.1909 (W.F.J., 23 Oct.1909).
 4. W.G., 18 Sept.1909.

feared having to go into the 1910 session with no land bill won, an objectionable budget passed (with his tacit consent), the political temperature down (and, with it, the liberals' chance of victory whenever they did decide to go to the polls), and the government's home rule pledges looking less and less convincing.¹ His tactic was to make as much capital as he could out of the lords' treatment of the land bill. In mid-October he telegraphed Michael Ryan, of the U.I.L. in America, appealing for funds, and explaining that a great crisis had arisen in which the lords were destroying the land bill: 'a general election is certain within the next few weeks. In that election the veto of the house of lords will be at stake, and with the veto of the house of lords will disappear the last obstacle to home rule'.²

In the event Redmond's concern was unnecessary, for the Tory leaders had in private already decided that the budget should be rejected. Joseph Chamberlain guided tariff reformers in that direction in a letter read out by Austen in Birmingham on September 24. Lansdowne had made up his mind likewise by October 2, and Balfour had probably taken the same decision earlier.³

-
1. His fears were not unjustified. Asquith's note of his talk with the king on Oct. 6 makes it quite clear that the prime minister would not have favoured an early election if the lords had passed the budget, for he feared that the outcome would be a very small majority either way, with the deciding voice left to the Irish, 'a very undesirable state of things' (Jenkins, Asquith, p.200).
 2. Redmond to M.J. Ryan, telegram published in W.F.J., 16 Oct. 1909.
 3. Lord Newton, Life of Lord Lansdowne (London, 1929) p.378.

Two more moderate unionist peers, Devonshire and Goschen, had recently died, and those who did oppose rejection, James of Hereford, Balfour of Burleigh, and St. Aldwyn, were all too closely associated with the free trade rump of the unionist party to carry any weight with the majority.¹ The result of the Bermondsey election, on October 28, a tory gain from liberal, served² to encourage those unionists who favoured a strong policy. By early November it was clear to everyone that rejection was the most likely policy. The Independent declared on November 13 that 'the refusal of the lords to pass the budget, which is now taken for granted, is regarded as improving the prospects of the land bill'.³ On November 26 the amended land bill was passed,⁴ and on November 30 the lords rejected the budget on second reading. On December 2 Asquith moved in the commons that their lordships' action was 'a breach of the constitution and a usurpation of the rights of the commons', and although considering that 'this new-fangled caesarism which converts the house of lords into a kind of plebiscitary organ is one of the quaintest inventions of our time' had no option but to recommend an immediate dissolution. The passage of the budget, he declared, would be the 'first act' of a re-elected liberal government.⁵

1. Jenkins, Mr Balfour's Poodle, pp.61-2.

2. Dumphreys (U.) 4,278
 Hughes (Lib.) 3,291
 Salter (Soc.) 1,235

Although the intervening socialist split the 'democratic' vote, the unionist received 1262 more votes than his 1906 counterpart (Times, 29 Oct.'09).

3. I.W.I., 13 Nov.1909.

4. Not without a struggle between Lansdowne and his fellow Irish landlords. See ch.5 p. 579.

5. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.13 col.556.

The die was cast and the contestants in Britain arrayed for battle. But the Irish party stood unhappily on the side-lines until the last minute. They had won a land bill which the lords had re-written, they had no home rule promises further than those made during the home rule resolution debate and subsequently at the N.W. Manchester by-election, and the election was certain to be fought to a great extent in Britain on a budget to which they were still unable to give their support. Dillon had said at Kingstown on September 20 that 'if they could get rid of the obstruction of the house of lords they could have a parliament sitting in Dublin in one year'¹. But, as the Independent commented, the government had given no indication at all that this would be the case. That journal recalled that in 1894 Dillon had found Rosebery's 'predominant partner' speech satisfactory: 'we make bold to suggest that such perfunctory consideration of liberal assurances was unwise then, and that it would not be much, if anything, less imprudent now'².

On the budget also the concessions won had not been enough to silence criticism. Although the Independent's prediction (that an early rejection of the budget followed by a dissolution might prevent the land bill reaching the lords at all)³ had proved too pessimistic, Healy could still argue that

-
1. Dillon at Kingstown, 20 Sept. 1909 (I.J.I., 25 Sept. 1909).
 2. I.W.I., 25 Sept. 1909.
 3. I.W.I., 4 Sept. 1909.

with such a budget imposed there could be no hope of a home rule bill that was fiscally satisfactory: it would be too late anyway.¹ To this, the Irish party leaders could only reply that the whisky tax was proving prohibitive and was reducing revenue, and express confidence that it would quickly be withdrawn.² But unconvincing though the budget promises of the party leaders were, by the last weeks of 1909 their attempt to present the future of the house of lords as the main principle at stake, overriding the budget, had been successful. Apart from the habitual dissentients, the rank-and-file of the party were loyal. P.A. Meehan even declared that personally he would have voted for the budget on third reading.³ In the countryside attempts made to mobilise anti-budget opinion against the leadership were generally unsuccessful outside Co. Cork. The Edenderry union passed a motion condemning the Irish party's attitude, and circulated it to most other public bodies in Ireland. Kilkenny corporation approved it - but they had expressed their attitude to the Irish party before the budget crisis broke, when they gave the freedom of their city to Matthew Cummings of the Clan-na-Gael. Local councils and poor law guardians in Wicklow, Wexford, Roscommon, Loughrea, Athlone and Carlow passed motions rejecting the Edenderry resolution.⁴

-
1. Healy, letter to Dundalk U.D.C., 20 Dec. 1909 (W.F.J., 25 Dec. 1909).
 2. Dillon at Dungarvan, 11 Dec. 1909 (W.F.J., 18 Dec. 1909).
 3. W.F.J., 25 Dec. 1909.
 4. See W.F.J., 18 and 25 Dec. 1909. Callan board of guardians passed a motion calling on the marquis of Ormonde to use his vote to save them from the iniquitous budget. This decision was rescinded a week later when the three initiating members were rejoined by their sixteen colleagues!

But a conciliatory attitude to the budget would become much easier for Irishmen when the position of home rule was made clear, for few had been fully convinced by the liberal 'pledges' made in the spring of 1908. At Manchester, on 26 September 1909, Dillon took pains to point out that the Irish vote had not been given: 'nobody can tell until we know the platform on which the two parties stand'.¹ At Ashton-under-Lyne on October 12 Redmond warned the liberal leaders that their policy at the last general election could not be repeated, for the Irish vote would be given to no candidate who did not pledge himself to use all his influence to make home rule a leading issue at once.² This in fact had been the declared policy in all by-elections since April 1908, and as the Independent was quick to point out: 'were any such policy as this pursued, nothing more is likely to be heard of home rule once the election is over...unless definite assurances were obtained from the prime minister himself'.³ Accordingly, when he dealt with the subject at Barrow on the following day, Redmond stressed that 'liberal ministers must explicitly place home rule among the leading issues'.⁴ At Dublin, on

-
1. Dillon at Manchester, 26 Sept.1909 (W.F.J., 2 Oct.1909). Though a few were less circumspect. On the same day in London, Wm O'Malley said that 'unless the liberal party goes back on its promises and pledges, we shall be found, when the day arrives, with our coats off, fighting on the side of that party' (W.R.J., 9 Oct.1909).
 2. Redmond at Ashton-under-Lyne, 12 Oct.1909 (N.F.J., 16 Oct.1909).
 3. H.N.I., 11 Dec.1909.
 4. Redmond at Barrow, 13 Oct.1909 (N.F.J., 23 Oct.1909).

November 17, he stated the new position fully:

We have kept our hands free, but if we are to take the vigorous, and as I believe it will be, the effective part which we desire in this battle against the house of lords, we must have an official declaration from the liberal leaders on the home rule question.

1

We may be certain that the Irish leaders had accepted, privately, that the liberal leaders would not divert attention from the lords and budget issue by making a home rule declaration at an early stage, and they had not pressed for one. But as the dissolution drew near they became anxious. By November 20, Dillon was 'very uneasy about this business'. He felt that Asquith would be 'almost sure to ignore Ireland altogether' in his main pre-Christmas speech at the Albert Hall on December 10. If no statement was forthcoming from him until his manifesto in January, the Irish position in the meantime would become 'most serious'.² Both Dillon and Redmond were lobbying cabinet ministers at this time, and when no indication of the government's intentions was forthcoming, they adopted a tougher line by bringing into play their main weapon - the Irish vote in the industrial constituencies of Scotland and Northern England.³ On November 27 Redmond wrote to Morley:

-
1. Redmond in Dublin, 17 Nov.1909 (W.F.J., 27 Nov.1909).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 20 Nov.1909 (Redmond papers).
 3. Morley, Burns, Loreburn, Lloyd George and Birrell were their main links with the cabinet. Redmond thought it better 'not to communicate in any way with the P.M.'

The political conditions in Ireland are such that unless an official declaration on the question of home rule be made, not only will it be impossible for us to support liberal candidates in England, but we will most unquestionably have to ask our friends to vote against them.... as you know very well, the opposition of Irish voters in Lancashire, Yorkshire and other places, including Scotland,¹ would mean the loss of many seats.

Declarations of individual candidates in favour of home rule are of no use to us. We cannot acquiesce in the present situation being continued.... We must therefore press for an official declaration which will show that the home rule issue is involved in the issue of the house of lords, by declaring that the government are in favour of home rule, and that they are determined that their hands shall be free to deal with it, not on the lines of the councils bill, but on the lines of national self-government, subject to imperial control, in the next parliament.

2

Redmond insisted that the suggested declaration be made by Asquith on December 10, in which case the Irish party would willingly co-operate fully with the liberals in fighting the election.

Redmond's bargaining point was a strong one. The Irish vote, however much its true size was disputed between liberal and nationalist newspapers, was universally admitted to be important, and responsive to the directives of the U.I.L. of Great Britain. It was also generally accepted that Lancashire, where that vote was strongest, was one of the key areas in which the election would be won and lost. Whilst optimistic liberals might still hope for an independent majority in the new parliament, no-one thought it could be obtained without the aid of the Irish vote.

-
1. Four cabinet ministers, including Asquith, and Morley himself, sat for Scottish constituencies at this time. The others were Churchill and Haldane.
 2. Redmond to Morley, 27 Nov.1909 (Redmond papers). There is also a copy in the Asquith Papers, Ms.36 f.1.

But it has been generally maintained by historians that Redmond's bargaining counter was, in the last analysis, of very limited weight, for the reason that his only chance of political success lay with the liberals: if he weakened then he strengthened the tories, which could only end in coercion. This is correct when applied to Redmond's position at Westminster, but it does overlook one factor. The liberal straightjacket could safely contain the Irish party, but not necessarily the Irish vote in Great Britain. If the home rule party continued to show no signs of success, it was quite conceivable that the Irish vote, while being kept tolerably united through the bonds of the Church and the Irish clubs, might escape from the control of the U.I.L.G.B. and become instead a part of the 'catholic vote' -in which case it would no longer be a liberal preserve, but a tory one. This was the real alternative to the liberal alliance, so far as the long-term political future of the Irish in Great Britain was concerned. T.P.O'Connor, a pronounced anti-clerical who would clearly not relish such a prospect, hinted at these trends in a letter to the master of Elibank earlier in the year,¹ and Dillon stated them more fully to Lloyd George on 28 November 1909:

If a satisfactory declaration on the Irish question is not made at the Albert Hall or immediately before or after it, the situation will become dangerous in the extreme. It is strongly rumoured that the English catholic bishops have a manifesto drafted calling upon all catholics to vote tory,

1. See this chapter, p. 680.

and that they will all sign this document and issue it at an early date - and the pastoral enclosed with passages marked looks like a preparation for such action. Cardinal Logue and the archbishop of Dublin are thoroughly hostile and may if they think it safe - join the English bishops. We can carry the Irish vote in Great Britain solid against all these episcopal influences if the P.M. makes it possible for us to take the field heartily - and in time. But if we are left in a state of uncertainty and unable to act - and the bishops are allowed to get a few weeks start with an appeal in favour of Christian Education and against Socialism, the position may become impossible for us.

1

Allowing for Dillon's habitual pessimism, and his interest in pressing his correspondent to immediate action, the catholic challenge was nonetheless real. The loss of North-west Manchester to the tories in 1908 had been a valuable lesson in this respect, whilst the criticisms of Irish party policy made publicly by Bishop O'Dwyer since 1906, and more covertly by Archbishop Walsh and Cardinal Logue, indicated that the hierarchy might conceivably begin to oppose the Irish party consistently, along Healyite lines, without appearing overtly pro-tory.

The cabinet met to discuss its Irish policy on December 1, and remarkably, in view of the disputes of the previous fifteen years, 'no difference of opinion came to light'. All agreed that a home rule
2
declaration was necessary. No doubt those who might have preferred home rule to remain on the shelf were unable to answer the argument that Irish

1. Dillon to Lloyd George, 28 Nov.1909 (Lloyd George papers, C/4/7/1).

2. Birrell to Redmond, 1 Dec.1909 (Redmond papers).

votes withdrawn on Redmond's direction would harm the liberal party's chances far more than would a home rule declaration, in an election where public attention would without doubt be concentrated primarily on the budget and the veto of the house of lords. At the Albert Hall on December 10 it would be 'made plain that home rule is the live policy of the party, without limitation or restriction other than the old tag about the supreme control of the imperial parliament'. Birrell felt 'no anxiety....now that the matter has been thoroughly discussed'.¹ Morley and Burns were 'both pleased at the reception their representations received'.² Morley later reported that:

Everyone is fully conscious of the gravity of the consequences of an inadequate or halting declaration; and almost everybody, if not quite, believes in the importance of taking a definite line on home rule on the merits, and apart from the points of temporary expediency, marked as the latter may be. Personally - and I am not at all easy to please on this subject - I was entirely satisfied with the sincerity of the cabinet.

3

As quith made the declaration as promised on December 10:

Speaking on behalf of my colleagues, and, I believe, of my party.....the solution of the problem can be found only in one way, by a policy which, while explicitly safeguarding the supremacy and indefectible authority of the imperial parliament, will set up in Ireland a system of full self-government in regard to purely Irish affairs.....in the new house of commons

1. Ibid.

2. J.J.Mooney to Redmond, 1 Dec.1909 (Redmond papers).

3. Morley to Redmond, 6 Dec.1909 (Redmond papers).

the hands of a liberal government and of a liberal majority will, in this matter, be entirely free.....[Moving on to the general question of the lords' veto, he continued],.....We shall not assume office and we shall not hold office, unless we can secure the safeguards which experience shows us to be necessary for the legislative utility and honour of the party of progress.

1

This statement evinced the full support of the Irish party.² They met in Dublin on December 15, and viewed Asquith's statement with 'great satisfaction' as claiming 'a mandate from the electorate to deal with the Irish question on....[home rule].....lines as soon as the veto of the lords is cleared out of the road'.³ A week later the executive of the U.I.L. of Great Britain had 'no hesitation' in giving the Irish vote to all liberals who accepted Asquith's new declaration. Even more important, in their opinion, was that the liberals were pledged 'to the means necessary to carry that policy into effect; for they are solemnly pledged never again to accept office until they are furnished with powers to overcome the veto of the house of lords'.⁴

In the event, neither of these statements as to liberal intention were entirely correct. The second of them was a reasonable deduction

-
1. Asquith at Albert Hall, 10 Dec.1909 (Times, 11 Dec.1909).
 2. Though not of Healy and the O'Brienites, who based their objections on two planks: that the budget would ruin Ireland and make home rule impossible; and that the liberal pledge would almost certainly be rendered worthless by a unionist victory at the polls.
 3. W.F.J., 18 Dec.1909.
 4. W.F.J., 25 Dec.1909.

from Asquith's declaration, but when King Edward expressed himself unwilling¹ to grant the safeguards, Asquith felt obliged to explain away the pledge. Furthermore, the prime minister's declaration committed the liberal party to its future course on home rule less fully than is sometimes assumed. Although the pledge was unequivocal in its expression of principle, it did not contain a promise that home rule would actually be brought forward in the next parliament (or at all): it merely claimed a free hand. Home rule was far from being the central issue in the election: it was preceded in importance by the budget, by the lords question, and indeed by the old faithful, 'maintenance of free trade'. Redmond was therefore taking a gamble, though probably an unavoidable gamble, in declaring so fully for the liberals at that stage. Only luck and skill during the following months enabled him to welcome in a home rule bill in 1912.

1. See chapter 7, p.751.

CHAPTER VII. BUDGET, VETO AND REFORM: THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS TO THE
DEATH OF EDWARD VII.

The conflict between the liberal government and the house of lords became a crisis on 25 January 1910, when the result of the general election made it clear that no government would be able to operate without the consent of the Irish party.¹ The first stage of this crisis ended on April 14 when Asquith declared in parliament that he would advise the king to create a huge number of liberal peers should the lords reject the veto resolutions, and thereby, in the words of Balfour, 'bought the Irish vote for his budget'.² This chapter will trace the crisis through those weeks, and carry the story on further to the death of the king on May 6, in order to demonstrate both the vast new influence brought to the Irish leaders by the result of the election, and at the same time how brittle that influence might prove. For three months Redmond held the government in his grip, yet one isolated event, the death of the king, threatened to break that grip altogether: if the government did not in fact go back on the bargain of 14 April 1910, it was not for want of trying. From the time of the constitutional conference onwards, the crisis was a direct confrontation between the liberal and the unionist

1. For a study of this election see N. Blewett, 'The British general elections of 1910' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1967). I have not considered it necessary, from the point of view of liberal-nationalist relations to deal in detail with the course of the election.

2. 14 Apr. 1910. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 16 col. 1551.

parties, a working out of the bitterness and difficulties which had grown up between 1906 and 1909. The first months of 1910, however, find the political and journalistic leaders/^{of unionism} on the sidelines, on the riviera, or on the pavements of Downing Street, whilst the leading liberals, nationalists and labour men threatened and argued in private and in public as they gradually fashioned the anti-tory majority of 120 into a pro-liberal one. Asquith's liberal cabinet met parliament on February 21, but not until the middle of April did he secure the 'coalition' necessary to enable the cabinet¹ to govern.

Yet at the end of December 1909 the United Irish League of Great Britain had had 'no hesitation' in giving the Irish vote to the liberals,² and the Irish party had expressed 'great satisfaction' at Asquith's main pre-election speech of December 10.³ It was Asquith's double declaration at the Albert Hall - both for home rule and for the constitutional change which would permit a home rule to pass the house of lords - which secured this support. It was the government's inability to carry out the letter of the enabling half of this pledge, and their difficulty in convincing their followers and allies that they nonetheless fully intended to secure the substance of it, which brought about their troubles in the first months of

-
1. W.T.Stead hoped that the government chief whip would lunch with his Irish and labour counterparts every day: 'You constitute the real cabinet....of the coalition administration'. Stead to Elibank, 15 Feb.1910 (Elibank papers, Ms. 8802 f.13).
 2. W.F.J., 25 Dec.1909.
 3. W.F.J., 18 Dec.1909.

1910. On all sides the statement 'we shall not assume office and we shall not hold office.....unless we can secure the safeguards....' was taken to mean that the prime minister had asked, or was about to ask, the king to give a promise that he would create peers if the lords refused to accept a bill limiting their powers, and that, if the promise was not forthcoming, the liberals would resign and not hold office again until they had such a promise. We may assert confidently that this was Asquith had meant - the words will bear no other interpretation (though a number were later attempted). No public utterance he ever made, with the possible exception of 'wait and see', can have caused Asquith more regrets than this one. It hung like a millstone about his neck, and was at the centre of that depression and loss of assurance which Winston Churchill, the master of Elibank, and more recently Mr Roy Jenkins, have all detected in his conduct during the first weeks of the new¹ parliament.

Yet it was a millstone of his own making. The pledge had been something of a gamble from the start. For on 28 November 1909, almost a fortnight before the Albert Hall speech, the king's secretary, Lord Knollys, told Asquith that the creation of peers on a scale large enough to secure a liberal majority in the house of lords 'would practically be almost² an impossibility, and if asked for would place the king in an awkward position'.

-
1. Jenkins, Asquith, pp203, 231; A.C.Murray, Master and brother (London, 1945) p.39.
 2. Jenkins, Asquith, p.202.

Perhaps the Albert Hall speech was intended to call the royal bluff, but if so it was almost a total failure, for the compromise it extracted from Edward was not one which in practice permitted a strict redemption by Asquith of his pledge. The king, Knollys informed Asquith's secretary, Vaughan Nash, had decided 'that he would not be justified in creating new peers (say 300) until after a second election'. Asquith was for the present to keep that information to himself.¹ Whether at any time Asquith intended to call the bluff again, and if necessary force a second election immediately after the first, is not certain. At all events, it was accepted that this course of action was ruled out of court by the results of the election. The unionists gained 116 seats, and whilst a repeat of the 1906 triumph had not been anticipated, even in liberal circles, so great a reduction in the government forces was felt to be a poor return for the energy put into the people's budget and the campaign against the lords.² In the circumstances there seemed no reason to suppose that a second appeal would produce a more favourable harvest of seats - the only new issue would be the royal prerogative, and popular feeling for 'King Teddy' would probably lose the liberals more votes than any reaction against 'monarchical interference' might gain. Lord Esher recorded in his diary on January 23 that 'the king is less depressed than he was, because undoubtedly the fix in which the ministers find themselves makes it impossible for them to bully him'.³

1. Ibid., pp.202-3.

2. The full result was as follows: liberals 275, unionists 273, labour 40, Irish party 70, independent Irish nationalists 12.

3. Brett, Esher, ii.439.

Liberals returning from the hustings were no less determined to tackle the problem of the house of lords - no minister who had experienced the veto in action during the previous parliament could accept a continuation of the existing situation - but the new balance of parliamentary forces, and their almost total dependence on 'socialists' and 'separatists', meant that the government felt obliged to seek a solution by discreet negotiation and perhaps even compromise. Such a policy, however, required a degree of trust from the government's supporters and allies which was not forthcoming. Asquith's home rule declaration had won him Irish electoral support, but not a blank cheque: his past record on the home rule issue and his general reputation as a former Roseberite meant that their confidence was something that the Irish leaders would not grant him.

Statements by certain members of the government during the later stages of the election campaign did little to help in building this confidence. On January 17 J.A.Pease, the chief whip, outlined his party's position on home rule with rather more baldness than tact:

There was no pledge given at the Albert Hall that home rule would be given to Ireland. what was said was that the ban that was placdd by the liberal party on itself at the last general election was removed, so that liberals are free, if they so desire, to extend self-government to Ireland.

1

The impact of this statement in Ireland was heightened by its being one of the few references to home rule made by a member of the government during the

1. Pease at Saffron Waldon, 17 Jan.1910 (Times, 19 Jan.1910).

election.¹ The Dublin correspondent of The Times claimed that 'consternation² prevails among Irish nationalists as the result of Mr Pease's statement'. When questioned in his constituency about home rule, on the night following Pease's speech, Asquith did little to ease the situation, simply repeating his pledge that the government would be 'perfectly free to implement home rule', but refusing to make any promises as to future legislation until the lords issue had been settled.³ Redmond admitted that 'Mr Asquith is perhaps not as enthusiastic and extreme a home ruler as I should like', but claimed (correctly) that the East Fife statement was 'not a modification of his pledge. It was a re-iteration of his pledge'.⁴ The episode was not important, and originated simply in a few tactless-words from Pease, but it did nothing to increase the government's standing in the eyes of the nationalist leaders or their followers. Worst of all from Redmond's point of view, it gave a much needed fillip to the Irish 'factionists'. O'Brien declared at Fermoy that:

Both Mr Asquith and the two liberal whips⁵ had repudiated that [home rule] pledge the moment Mr Redmond handed over the Irish

1. Balfour later claimed in parliament that of 149 election speeches made by cabinet ministers, only one had contained a voluntary reference to home rule (21 Feb.1910. Parl. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.14 col.46).
2. Times, 19 Jan.1910.
3. Asquith in East Fife, 18 Jan.1910 (Times, 19 Jan.1910).
4. Redmond at Rathmines, 21 Jan.1910 (Times, 22 Jan.1910).
5. The other was J.M.F.Fuller, who declared that: 'With Mr Redmond's ideas I have not the smallest sympathy, and I will agree to no proposal which is not obviously, on the face of it, a mere extension of local government to Ireland' (Times, 8 Feb.1910).

vote in the north of England to them. Mr Redmond delivered the goods, and was ignominiously kicked into the streets. The cry that they would get home rule in the next parliament was bosh.

1

Such was the complexity of the new situation that although the Irish leaders were in the forefront of events, home rule, for the moment, was not. 'They in Ireland were not such imbeciles and fools as to ask Mr Asquith and the liberal party to introduce a home rule bill in the coming session before rejecting or modifying the veto of the house of lords',² declared Redmond at Rathmines. But he was as yet in no doubt about the government's intentions with regard to the house of lords. The king's view of his obligation to create peers was still not generally known, even inside the cabinet.³ Most people outside the tory party still regarded the crisis in the simple terms of the Albert Hall speech, and the liberal Daily News could still declare on January 24 that:

The nature of the negotiations between the king and the prime minister last autumn are, of course, known only to the persons involved; but it may be assumed that so wise and constitutional a monarch as King Edward made it clear that he would act on the judgment of the country.

4

-
1. O'Brien at Fermoy, 23 Jan.1910 (Times, 24 Jan.1910). Asquith, rather belatedly, seems to have realised Redmond's difficulty. At East Fife on 24 January, the day following O'Brien's speech, he contrived to add a new note of conviction to his pledge: 'I am in favour of granting to Ireland a full measure of self-government in relation to purely Irish affairs' (Times, 25 Jan.1910).
 2. Redmond at Rathmines, 21 Jan.1910 (Times, 22 Jan.1910).
 3. Herbert Samuel told Asquith on 3 Feb.1910 that he had just 'gathered the information' from McKenna (Asquith papers, Ms.12 f.105).
 4. Daily News, 24 Jan.1910.

But as the result of the election became clear, there came from the unionist press a new note of compromise. The Times on January 24 called for 'a provisional government.....under a neutral head'.¹ On the following day it reflected that Lord Rosebery might not after all be prepared to take on such a task, and proposed instead a round table conference between the party leaders to enable Asquith 'to escape from that thralldom [of Irish pressure]', and also from the domination of the more violent of his own colleagues'.² The liberal Westminster Gazette reciprocated, insisting only that financial control be left to the house of commons, and stressing that the country would not have anything which looked like single-chamber government, but was 'ready for a broad and statesmanlike reconstruction which promises a fair and workable second chamber'.³ The Manchester Guardian, a voice from the more radical wing of the liberal party, spoke disparagingly of the 'certain shy little signals and counter-signals of a conciliatory mood fluttering from various unofficial windows on both sides of the street'.⁴

It was probably this apparent split in the liberal camp over basic aims which gave impetus to a second problem, a dispute over tactics, within the

-
1. Times, 24 Jan.1910.
 2. Times, 25 Jan.1910.
 3. Westminster Gazette, 24 Jan.1910.
 4. Manchester Guardian, 26 Jan.1910.

progressive ranks. Whilst Asquith had declared at the Albert Hall on December 10 that he would not hold office without 'safeguards' against the house of lords, he had also said, in the house of commons on December 2,¹ that the enactment of the budget would be 'first act' of the new parliament. In the absence of any government statement resolving this contradiction (most cabinet ministers were on holiday after the election), speculation in the press acted as a divisive influence among the progressive forces. In the last days of January differences over what should be done with the lords were already emerging, but immediate parliamentary procedure had not seemed to be in doubt in liberal circles: 'The requirements of the public service will, we imagine, claim precedence for the budget - the retarded budget for 1909-10; and the budget of 1910-11 will have to follow quickly upon its heels',² was the Daily Chronicle view on January 27. More radical papers at first agreed: the Manchester Guardian thought it a pity that a veto bill could not be put through side by side with the budget at the same pace, but agreed that the first duty was the finance bill;³ even the Daily News, which was later to adopt a very different tone, reported on January 27 that it expected from the government a rapid programme of finance bill followed by veto bill.⁴

1. Parl't. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.13., col.550.

2. Daily Chronicle, 27 Jan. 1910.

3. M.G., 31 Jan. 1910.

4. D.N., 27 Jan. 1910.

Many assumed that this procedure would be equally acceptable to the nationalist party. On January 26 a Press Association correspondent reported that 'the nationalists may make the disclosure of the terms of the lords' veto measure a condition of their active support',¹ but there was as yet no feeling that the Irish leaders would be especially sticky in their demands on the government so far as tactics (i.e. order of procedure) was concerned. A week later Birrell could advise Asquith that:

So far as Ireland is concerned it is all plain sailing, provided we steam ahead on (1) budget and (2) house of lords - But unless the two are placed in immediate sequence - why then Redmond will be knocked off his quaking throne if he does not lead his men into whatever lobby does not contain us.

2

Yet had Birrell been more assiduous in his reading of the Freeman, he might have been less confident. For as early as January 24 the London correspondent of that paper had asked his readers: 'If the budget is out of the way and the services of the crown are provided for, would the prime minister be in as strong a position to see that the voice of the country is respected?'³ When, a few days later, the Liverpool Daily Post came up with the old slogan

1. Published in F.J., 26 Jan.1910.

2. Birrell to Asquith, 1 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.56 f.4).

3. F.J., 24 Jan.1910.

'redress before supply', its tactics were adopted avidly by the Freeman's man in London, who reported that it was 'recognised that it would be a fatal error of tactics to pass the budget or anything else until the government are in a position to deal with the veto of the house of lords'¹. The radical Daily News, in contrast to its previous standpoint, also agreed that the primary duty of the new house of commons 'is not to present the rejected budget for possible rejection a second time'².

The adoption of this attitude by the official organ of the Irish party was in part a result of the outcome of the general election in Ireland. The conduct of T.M.Healy and the O'Brienites since their renewed break with the party in the spring of 1908, especially their extreme hostility towards the budget and the Irish land bill during 1909, meant that it had not been possible for the Irish party leaders to avoid electoral contests with them, as they had managed to do in 1906. But although the rebels had the advantage of being able to denounce the budget unstintingly, they had been weakened by Asquith's apparently unequivocal declarations at the Albert Hall, whilst O'Brien's private funds were but a drop in the ocean set against the financial power of the U.I.L. of America.³ Initially therefore, the O'Brienite

1. F.J., 2 Feb.1910.

2. D.N., 5 Feb.1910.

3. For an analysis of the O'Brienites' electoral campaign see K.R.Schilling, 'William O'Brien and the All for Ireland League' (Dublin Univ.B.Litt. thesis, 1956).

challenge caused less concern than it had threatened to do in 1909. The Manchester Gaardian reported on 3 January 1910 a general feeling that O'Brien would be able to do little more than hold Cork City, and perhaps¹ Mid-Cork. Even the normally pessimistic Dillon thought the 'factionists' could not win more than five or six seats, and he hoped also that Tim Healy might be defeated in North Louth. O'Brien, he anticipated, 'will of course² resign again in about six months - and that will be the end of him'. But in fact Healy, supported by Cardinal Logue, held his seat, and did all the other sitting O'Brienites, and a further two seats were lost by the party in Cork county. In all, twelve independent nationalists were returned, including³ eight O'Brienites. It was a somewhat better result for the party's critics than had been predicted. But O'Brien had had the advantage of a 'sudden dash', and most observers felt that a 'greater triumph' was out of the question for⁴ him.

-
1. M.G., 3 Jan.1910.
 2. Dillon to T.P.O'Connor, 1 Jan.1910 (Dillon papers, cited in F.S.L.Lyons, John Dillon (London, 1968), p.312).
 3. Gwynn, Life of John Redmond, pp.170-1.
 4. See especially an anonymous memorandum dealing with the significance of the new nationalist split from the point of view of the British liberal party, prepared for the master of Elibank, 31 Mar.1910 (Elibank papers, Ms.8802 ff.39-46).

What was alarming for the party was that the contests had revealed¹ that denunciation of the budget was still the prevalent Irish attitude.

Redmond told Wilfred Blunt that if the budget were defeated, 'bonfires will be lit on every hill in Ireland'.² T.P.Gill observed that:

The crucial point for the Irish party is their action....[damage to Ms.].....budget: I think if Asquith is going to fight the lords from the first, the party must be prepared to support the budget boldly; but their freedom of action will be sadly hampered if Wm O'Brien and Tim [Healy] are able to go on, practically uncontradicted, with all their blather and claptrap about the budget's "adding £2 million a year to the overtaxation of Ireland".

3

Dillon told T.P.O'Connor on February 1 that the party's position was still an extremely delicate one: 'In spite of all we could do to stem the torrent of lies about the budget, they have left a considerable effect on public opinion, and there is a considerable undercurrent of hostility to the budget, and dislike and distrust of our toleration of it and of the government'. This hostility, Dillon thought, meant that the Irish party could only afford to swallow the budget if they could at the same time demonstrate to the people that they had secured real guarantees of home rule. In practice, Dillon considered, the party could not allow the budget to pass unless Asquith offered convincing evidence that he would be able, during the session, to pass into law a measure limiting the lords' veto.⁴

1. Ibid.

2. W.S.Blunt, My Diaries, 1888-1914 (London, 1919), ii.301.

3. T.P.Gill to Bishop Kelly of Ross, 5 Feb.1910 (Gill papers).

4. Dillon to T.P.O'Connor, 1 Feb.1910 (Dillon papers, cited in Lyons, John Dillon, p.313).

The Irish party's opposition to the re-introduction of the budget was thus motivated not only by objections to some of its basic provisions, but by the deep-rooted hostility of many of their own supporters, which condition was exacerbated considerably by the wild alarms of the O'Brien faction. But if these fears on the part of the Irish leaders mark the origin of the 'veto before budget' demand, there began to appear at the same time doubts amongst British radicals as to whether Asquith was in fact fully determined to carry through the policy of 'thorough' which he had indicated at the Albert Hall, or whether a combination of royal reluctance, electoral disappointment, and the 'whiggish' influence of Grey, Haldane and the Westminster Gazette had deflected him into the blind alley of lords' reform. By far the safest course, radicals began to think, was to coerce crown, lords, and Roseberyite backsliders by holding up the budget until the veto had been dealt with. This emergence in British radical circles of a tactical argument against proceeding with the budget came very conveniently for the Irish leaders, enabling them to stand firm (and be seen by the Irish people to stand firm) against the passage of the budget, and at the same time consolidate their alliance with the English left, as opposed to antagonising the left by adopting an overtly non possumus attitude on the content of the people's budget. By February 9 the Freeman was emphasising the tactical aspects of opposition to the budget, and on that day the parliamentary party, which normally held its meeting later, on the day before the opening of

parliament, met in Dublin.¹ At that meeting doubt as to the party's course was brought to an end, and a firm line emerged. T.P.O'Connor sent a report to Lloyd George, to Morley, and to Harcourt:

I have grave news for you. I have seen all my friends here: and I find them unanimous in saying that they must oppose the budget unless it be preceded by the announcement of a measure limiting the legislative and financial power of the lords, and backed by the statement that there is the guarantee that the bill will be passed into law within the present year. I need not in this letter go into all the reasons which have produced this resolution. It is sufficient to say that, having heard the expression of opinion from all the Irish representatives of our side, I am certain that no other policy is possible for the Irish party in the present condition of Irish opinion.

2

This degree of firmness was something of a bolt from the blue. Ministers were reported previously as being confident of nationalist support for the budget so long as the promise of a satisfactory veto bill was included in the king's speech.³ Now the Irish demand was for the immediate involvement of the king, and on the day following O'Connor's letter it was made upublic in a speech by Redmond at the Gresham Hotel, in Dublin.⁴ The implication was that if Asquith could not give an assurance that he had guarantees from the king (though nationalists still assumed, or pretended to assume, that he did have⁵), he must demand them, or resign at once. On

-
1. Times, 10 Feb.1910.
 2. T.P.O'Connor to Lloyd George, 9 Feb.1910 (Lloyd George papers, Beaverbrook Library, C/6/10/3).
 3. Times, 10 Feb.1910.
 4. Redmond at Dublin, 10 Feb.1910 (Times, 11 Feb.1910)
 5. T.P.O'Connor wrote in Reynolds's Newspaper, 6 Feb.1910: 'My own impression is that the matter has been fully discussed already, and that there is a fairly clear understanding between the king and the prime minister.'

February 10 and 11 the cabinet discussed the situation in the light of O'Connor's letter and Redmond's speech, and Asquith reported to the king that:

The cabinet of course agreed that no such assurance could or should be given. It is quite possible therefore, that upon the question of the enactment of last year's budget, the government may be defeated in the house of commons by the combined votes of the unionist and nationalist parties.

1

It is clear that Asquith did not intend to coerce the king.² The government at this stage thus appeared to have only two (not very attractive) options open. They could introduce the budget and once, and resign when it was defeated on second reading. This would not have been a resignation against the king with a clear-cut veto scheme to present to the electorate, but in effect a resignation against the dictatorship of the Irish party. Asquith later told the king that a number of ministers favoured this policy,³ and Birrell wrote to a friend on February 18 that Asquith was 'really in a very easy position - if the Irish want him to go, he is quite ready to go'.⁴ The alternative to this (clearly unsatisfactory) policy appeared at this stage to be a deal with the unionists. Already the press, notably The Times and the Westminster Gazette, had hinted at a possible compromise on the basis

-
1. Asquith to the king, 10 Feb.1910 (Cab. 41/32/45).
 2. Edward saw his prime minister on Feb. 10, and found him 'reasonable and amiable'. Edward VII to Lord Knollys, 12 Feb.1910 (S.Lee, King Edward VII (London, 1927), ii.699).
 3. Asquith to the king, 25 Feb.1910 (Cab.41/32/51).
 4. Birrell to Maida Bernard, 18 Feb.1910 (Birrell papers, B.M., Add.Ms.49372, section I).

of a reform of the house of lords, and if some agreement could be arrived at there, it might not be impossible for the unionists to justify abstaining on the budget and so allowing it to pass, whatever the Irish did. Balfour was initially attracted by this possibility, which was brought home to him by Redmond's Dublin speech. He was not clear what the tory attitude should be, but was inclined to think that if Redmond moved an amendment to the budget, he should lead the party out of the house. Esher, who recorded this view, agreed: 'If I were he [Balfour], I would not follow Redmond'.¹ This approach was indicated in the Daily Mail on February 14, but J.L.Garvin, the influential journalist who was at that time very close to the tory leadership through his correspondence with Balfour's secretary J.S.Sanders, sent the editor a strong rebuke:

To capitulate on the budget without conditions - to force all the Irish sections.....into the arms of the government - to save Redmond's situation by leaving him to give a safe vote against the budget - to dish the O'Brienites.....to disgust our strongest supporters - to take the heart out of a new fighting partythis is not only a mad policy. It is impossible.....
Work the Irish split for all it is worth.....Make nothing easier for the other side.

Whether or not Garvin's voice was the one he heard, Balfour quickly changed his mind, and by February 15 the king had told Asquith that the unionists would once more record their votes against the budget.³ They could not, it

-
1. Lore Esher to M.V.Brett, 11 Feb.1910 (Brett, Esher, ii.450).
 2. J.L.Garvin to Kennedy Jones, 14 Feb.1910 (cited in A.M.Gollin, The Observer and J.L.Garvin, 1908-14 (London, 1960), p.186).
 3. Asquith to the king, 15 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms. 1 f.265).

was felt, vote black where before they had voted white.¹ As the opening of parliament approached therefore, the government looked set for defeat.

The liberals appeared to have led the forces of progress into a blind alley. What had become of the bold policies put forward in 1907, and repeated with increasing firmness following the defeat of the 1908 licensing bill and the 1909 budget by the house of lords? The royal damper, it is true, had been applied to Asquith privately in December 1909, and the result of the following general election had been disappointing. In addition, Redmond's declaration had, or at least appeared to have, considerably narrowed the government's freedom of action. But the ability of the king and of the 'dollar dictator' to wield such influence had been increased by the government's own actions. Asquith's Albert Hall 'pledge' had led, perhaps misled, Redmond into adopting his bold position. Yet how had Asquith intended to square this pledge with his commons statement of 2 December 1909 that the budget would be the "first act" of the new parliament? How, indeed, had he intended to square it with the king's attitude, which had already been indicated to him? One can only surmise that the prime minister made a double miscalculation, gambling on the trust of the Irish party, and on a good election victory to weaken the king's resolve.

1. B.E.C. Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour (London, 1932), ii.43.

Furthermore, by a remarkable omission, the government had strengthened the recalcitrance of both Redmond and the king: Asquith's government had never given any detailed indication of what their house of lords proposals would be. Thus Redmond, wary as ever of Asquith and his friends, required assurance that the government were in earnest about a lords' scheme strong enough to enable them to pass a home rule bill into law; whilst the King, eager to postpone a head-on crash between the two houses of parliament, could with justification refuse to give any sort of guarantee with regard to the creation of peers in respect of a scheme which had not even been shown to him in outline, let alone presented as a bill for the judgment of parliament.¹

The government were thus in the midst of a crisis but seemed unable to direct it. They were unable to direct it primarily because they had made no plans to direct it. They had not announced (not even agreed on) a course of procedure for the new parliament,^{now} had they established the principles on which they would act. They had first approached the lords problem in 1907, by appointing a cabinet committee, which had discountenanced any attempt at reforming the composition of the upper house, on the grounds that it would tend to strengthen the authority of that house. But equally it was felt that to restrict the veto of the lords to (say) one session, after which

1. At this time even Lewis Harcourt thought that 'we can hardly ask the king for a promise of the creation of peers: if we did, he might have some ground for refusal at present'. Harcourt to Asquith, 27 Jan.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.12 f.77).

a measure might by-pass them, would in effect be single-chamber government. The 1907 committee had therefore recommended, in cases of deadlock, a joint sitting of the house of commons with 100 peers, so that a liberal government would need a good majority (say 70 or so) to ensure the passage of controversial measures.¹ Campbell-Bannerman had greatly disliked this scheme, and had proposed instead a revival of John Bright's plan for a suspensory veto, limiting the lords' powers to two sessions. After exhaustive discussion, including consideration of the referendum as another alternative, C.B.'s idea was accepted by the cabinet, and was the basis of the resolution introduced into the commons by C.B. in June 1907 and passed by a large majority.² But the degree of enthusiasm for the plan was not great, among either radicals or moderates.³ Though Asquith was later to emerge as a firm supporter of the suspensory veto idea, this was not public knowledge at the beginning of 1910. It was still vaguely believed in most quarters that the C.B. plan was the government's policy, but it held the field by default only, and doubters could point out that the Asquith government had not committed itself to the policy.

The result of the general election of January 1910, decisive enough against the unionists, but scarcely so in favour of the liberals, gave a new

1. See 'Relations between the two houses of parliament'. a cabinet paper by Lord Loreburn, May 1907 (Cab. 37/87/38).
2. Jenkins, Asquith, p.173.
3. The Freeman's Journal at the time had denounced the two-year delay period as 'dilatatory and cumbersome in the extreme' (W.F.J., 29 June 1907). The whole idea of a suspensory veto, Lloyd George later told T.P.O'Connor, did 'not represent the views of many of the government as the best method of settling the relations of the two houses. It is C.B.'s plan, and was carried against a cabinet committee by C.B.' T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 4 June 1910 (Redmond papers).

opportunity to those who disliked the C.B. plan. On January 24, as soon as the equivocal nature of the electorate's decision became clear, the Westminster Gazette broached the subject of lords reform, and drew a heated response from one radical M.P.:

The passage in question seemed to assume that the government's policy in regard to the house of lords was still an open question, and that we were now invited to debate on general principles various schemes for reconstructing that assembly. I earnestly hope that no such illusion will be encouraged by the Westminster Gazette.....It would paralyse the party now, and would probably destroy it in the near future.

‡

The Westminster replied at once that of course 'the limitation of the veto is a fixed and necessary part of liberal policy. Without that we can clearly do nothing to any immediate purpose'.² But the seeds of doubt had been sown, and were fertilised by later comments from the same source to the effect that 'although the general outlines of liberal policy are clearly laid down there is much hard work and careful thought necessary before the details are filled in'.³

One valid point which the Westminster did make was to point out 'certain facts, now generally recognised, which makes it practically impossible

1. Letter to the editor from C.E.Mallet, M.P. (W.G., 26 Jan.1910).
2. W.G., 26 Jan.1910.
3. W.G., 31 Jan.1910.

for the prime minister to appear before parliament with the programme Mr Redmond would prefer'.¹ Despite the optimistic outlook affected by T.P. O'Connor in Reynolds's newspaper and by the Daily News, the stark alternative to proceeding immediately with the budget was not the introduction of a veto bill which would be rapidly rammed through the house of lords with the assistance of the king, but a refusal by the king to act, followed rapidly by another general election, in which the liberals would have to appeal to the people against the king's decision. Thus, although a number of ministers, notably Harcourt and Simon, still urged Asquith to push ahead with a veto policy,² other, more influential, figures urged an opposite view. Grey considered that 'it is the constitution of the house of lords, and not its powers, which is an anomaly'.³ Samuel too, thought that, in view of the king's attitude rendering another election very probable, the C.B. plan should be given up, as 'it might well prove fatal to us in an election'. His argument was that after their public denunciations of 'hereditary legislators', the liberals could only satisfy their electors by reforming⁴ the house of lords. Others who preferred reform were, predictably, Haldane,

-
1. W.G., 11 Feb.1910.
 2. John Simon to Asquith, 5 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.12 f.111); Harcourt to Asquith, 7 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.12 f.114): 'we must stick tight to principles [i.e. abolition of the veto] and not go a'whoreing after false constitutions'.
 3. Grey to Asquith, 7 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms. 23 f.66).
 4. Samuel to Asquith, 3 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.12 f.105). Samuel advocated reducing the size of the house of lords to 200, with joint sittings on the South African model. He was of the opinion, at this stage, that the labour and Irish parties would 'probably support any policy which would be effective and was likely to be carried'.

and, more surprisingly in view of the company, Morley and Churchill. The latter, however, had no fear of 'unicameralism', but felt that the C.B. plan would not 'command intellectual assent nor excite enthusiasm' (he overlooked radical, Irish, and labour opinion in this assessment), and on purely tactical grounds felt that it was necessary to reconstitute the lords in such a way as to prevent the unionists from doing so at a later stage and restoring the veto.¹ These conflicting views demonstrate clearly that the liberal party was not agreed on its policy, let alone its procedure, on the lords question, and that the disagreement, though stimulated by the new parliamentary situation, was more deeply rooted in a failure by the government to air the issue publicly or amongst themselves during the previous parliament. In the circumstances it was not surprising that no attempt could be made to restore radical and Irish confidence by indicating a firm line in the king's speech or by means of a motion on the address. The cabinet were just not in sufficient agreement at this stage to venture into any sort of debate on lords policy.

This fact was one of the government's troubles in the weeks following the election. The others have already been discussed: they had rejected an immediate demand on the king for guarantees; they were unable to persuade

1. Churchill to Asquith, 14 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.23 f.70). For the opinions of Morley and Haldane see Jenkins, Asquith, pp.205-6. These conflicts of opinion were reflected also in the liberal press. On the one side the Daily News claimed that: 'It may be taken for granted that the measure will deal solely with the powers of the house of lords, which means we may dismiss in advance all proposals for a round table conference for the reformation of the peerage' (D.N., 27 Jan.1910). The Westminster Gazette, at the other end of the party spectrum saw 'no necessary incompatibility between the limited veto scheme and the various schemes for reform' (W.G., 4 Feb.1910).

the unionists to let the budget through; and yet they were in the main opposed to a straight refusal to govern. If they were to continue in office, they had to find some way round Redmond's non possumus of February 10. But the government had drifted into a very difficult position with regard to their now necessary Irish ally. They had not got guarantees, and they were not prepared to ask for them until they had carried through a veto bill and shown its path to be blocked by the house of lords. Yet they needed to pass the budget in order to demonstrate that it really did have the backing of the newly-elected house of commons, and to assert their authority as a government, as well as to restore the financial situation to stability. This last factor especially could not await the passage through its stages of a full-blown veto bill. Redmond, on the other hand, had called on the government to resign and appeal to the country at once if the king would not guarantee the passage of a veto bill. The Irish leader would not pass the budget, for tactical reasons, and could not pass it, for fear of William O'Brien. Redmond's Gresham Hotel speech of February 10 had greatly boosted the morale of his followers, who now saw their somewhat jaded leader^s wielding power at the centre of the political stage, and had also 'sensibly impressed' many nationalists who had previously been inclined to take a more independent line.¹ He, no more than the government, could afford to be seen to back down.

1. Times, 12 Feb.1910. Redmond's bold stand had succeeded in stealing the thunder of O'Brien, who two days previously had accused the Irish party leaders of 'contemplating the blackest treason perpetrated against Ireland since the act of union' (speech at Cork, 8 Feb.1910. Times, 9 Feb.1910).

But despite the complexities of the situation, the pressures towards a settlement were extremely strong on both sides. Redmond's first concern had to be the unity of his party and of the home rule movement, but his next priority had to be the maintenance of the liberal alliance, which was the main justification for the continuance of constitutional nationalism - nothing would be gained by putting the unionists in power. The liberals, because they knew this and because they realised that they could not hope to improve their position by a second general election unless they first achieved something, were prepared to hang on in circumstances which otherwise appeared hopeless. Their more sanguine spirits suspected, as did J.S.Sandars, 'that Redmond is in the market, and when an Irishman is in the market something generally results'¹. Thus began a series of informal meetings between Lloyd George and Redmond, who were joined at one time or another by the master of Elibank (the new government chief whip), T.P.O'Connor, and John Dillon. After O'Connor's letter and Redmond's speech, the cabinet could see no way out, but Lloyd George had later gathered a few colleagues together and secured their support for a new proposal, which he put to Redmond and O'Connor on the morning of February 12. He suggested that the whole of the parliamentary time up till Easter (which was early) should be occupied with the address and the necessary supply debates. Immediately after Easter the government would introduce a veto bill, followed rapidly by a budget bill

1. J.S.Sandars (Balfour's secretary) to J.L.Garvin, 15 Feb.1910 (Garvin papers, cited in Gollin, J.L.Garvin, p.178).

which would include 'very substantial concessions to Ireland on whisky duty, etc.'. This would be a budget for 1910-11, the old budget thus disappearing altogether. These two measures, veto and new budget, would run side by side through the house of commons, but the veto bill would go to the lords first. When it was there rejected, the king would be asked to create peers. On his refusal, 'which is taken for granted', parliament would be dissolved. This proposal, Lloyd George claimed, had been agreed to by Grey, Haldane, Churchill, McKenna and Samuel. Asquith 'would not commit himself', but seemed not unfavourable¹. For the government this plan had the advantage of reducing the immediate tension and allowing some time to pass before a crisis was reached, without giving the appearance of backsliding on the veto question or of throwing away the tactical advantage of an uncompleted finance bill. For the Irishmen, it lacked the attractions of an immediate crisis, but it would very much ease the strain of the waiting period, both by making clear that a dissolution on the veto question would still precede the final passing of the budget, and by rendering that budget very much less distasteful to Irish opinion. Redmond seemed to have got it both ways.

In these circumstances, it was not surprising that talks at first went well. On February 15 Asquith reported to the king that although the unionists might have decided to vote against the budget, 'it is by no means

s

1. This conversation was reported by Redmond to Dillon, 12 Feb. 1910 (Dillon papers, cited in Lyons, John Dillon, p.314).

certain that, when it comes to the point, they will find that in this course they will have the support of the Irish party'.¹ But it soon became clear that, whatever Lloyd George may have promised (or appeared to promise) in private, the government as a whole were not prepared to let Redmond have it both ways. The Times' political correspondent reported on February 16 that although there was a possibility of accommodation between the Irish leaders and the government, a concession on the whisky duty was not expected.² On the following day, the political situation 'developed very unfavourably for the government'.³ Redmond wrote sternly to Lloyd George, perhaps feeling that his hopes had been falsely raised:

After our interview today, I take it for granted that you have no further suggestions to make in the direction of easing the situation and therefore we stand, I regret to say, where we did at the commencement of our interchanges of opinion some days ago.

4

It seemed as if the government after all had decided to stand fast against Redmond's demands. But the confidence of the more radical members of their own party had meanwhile been very much shaken by the outcome, or

1. Asquith to the king, 15 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.1 f.265). He added, cautiously, that 'such a culmination is undoubtedly a contingency which must be regarded as within the range of probability'.
2. Times, 16 Feb.1910.
3. Times, 18 Feb.1910.
4. Redmond to Lloyd George, 17 Feb.1910 (Lloyd George papers, C/7/3/2). Redmond's copy of this note, in his own papers, is dated (erroneously, I am sure) 17 Feb.1909, and has been so cited by Professor Gwynn in his Life of Redmond, p.159.

rather lack of outcome, of the much publicised discussions between the government and the Irish leaders. If Asquith intended to keep to his firm line on the veto, radicals reasoned, why was he apparently finding it impossible to secure the support of the Irishmen? Radical opinion thus began to harden behind a 'veto before budget' policy. The Lanchester Guardian on February 12 had urged the immediate passage of the budget in the interests of financial stability; three days later it suggested that the two measures, budget and veto, be run in harness; by February 21 it had so altered its position as to declare that:

If the budget can be passed only in the teeth of the Irish members and by the support of tory votes, or by running the risk of its defeat by a combination of the two, let it wait, and let somebody else pass it.

1

On February 14 a letter from one radical M.P., Hilaire Belloc, appeared in The Times, calling on the government to give up 'the weary and tawdry game of party' and (in effect) to resign against the king at once, or face independent action from the radicals. The tone of Belloc's letter was one of extreme irreconcilability. His intention, probably, was to extract from the government an admission that they had received no guarantees from the king. He was apparently supported by another letter which appeared in the same

2

1. M.G., 12, 15 and 21 Feb.1910.

2. Times, 14 Feb.1910.

columns two days later. Another radical M.P., Sir Henry Dalziel, wrote to 'entirely associate myself with the views of Mr Belloc so far as they relate to the determination of a not inconsiderable number of radical members that the question of the power of the house of lords shall not be allowed to slip back in the government's programme from the dominant position which it has held throughout the recent general election'. But beneath this dressing, Dalziel's proposal was very much a compromise to keep the government's wheels turning (he was later to become a leading member of the Lloyd George group of liberals). In order to 'demonstrate the triumph of the militant against the ca'canny school of thought', he urged the government to introduce as soon as possible into the house of commons resolutions indicating precisely the lines, on which their veto bill would be framed. His recognition that 'the passage of the budget could not be indefinitely postponed', coupled with his confession that he did not see how guarantees could be secured from the king before a veto bill was passed through the commons, implied that the veto resolutions would for the time being have to suffice as an assurance to the Irish, labour, and radical groups of the seriousness of the government's intentions. ¹ Under Dalziel's scheme the budget would pass before parliament

1. Times, 16 Feb.1910.

1

was dissolved on the veto question. It was essentially a proposal to gain time for the government while they built up a credible programme which Redmond, despite his threats, would be loath to knock down.

When on the evening of February 17 the new chairman of the labour M.P.s, George Barnes, added the voice of his party to the 'no veto, no budget' cry of the nationalists and the radicals, the time seemed ripe for the government to give consideration to Dalziel's proposal if they were to avoid a hostile amendment to the address from their own ranks. Churchill wrote to Asquith, strongly urging the adoption of such a course:

We are becoming involved in a perfectly unreal dispute with our own supporters. The Irish, the labour party, and I daresay

-
1. On 17 Feb.1910 the Daily Chronicle suggested five days discussion of the veto question before the essential supply debates, leaving just time to pass the budget before easter. The London correspondent of the Freeman's Journal referred to this proposal (in its issue of the same day!) as a serious possibility. In the Freeman's version however, the budget would not have been reached until after easter, when it would be combined with the 1910 budget (D.C. and F.J. 17 Feb.1910).
 2. Probably as a result of assiduous lobbying by T.P.O'Connor, Barnes issued a statement to the effect that if there was to be a second general election before the veto was tackled, it should be sooner rather than later. This statement came as a surprise to the press, the more so since it appeared with the blessing of Sir Hardie, who had, at Mountain Ash four days earlier, predicted that there would be no election for two years, and that the labour party would support wholeheartedly the government's (unannounced) policy on budget and veto. It soon transpired that Barnes had overestimated his powers as chairman. Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden soon made it clear that Barnes' statement had been a bolt from the blue so far as they were concerned. The truth was that the labour party, more than any other, could not afford another general election. Barnes admitted in a speech at Doncaster on 26 February that he had 'put both feet in it' within a couple of days of becoming party chairman, and now realised that his party 'was not disposed to march so fast or so far as he was disposed to lead them' (see Times, 18,19 and 28 Feb.1910; Daily News, 19 Feb.1910).
 3. Though it was Dalziel who first publicised the veto resolutions, the idea probably originated with Lloyd George. Esher recorded on 18 Feb.1910 that 'Churchill and Lloyd George have a scheme for buying the Irish vote' (Brett, Letters of Esher, ii.454).

half our own men say 'veto before budget', because they think (or pretend to think) that withholding the budget means putting pressure on the lords to pass the veto. Surely a triumph of absurdity: It is the refusal of the necessary votes of supply that alone could embarrass a new government - and about that there is no dispute and no danger. On the other hand we say 'budget before veto', because we feel that our duty as ministers obliges us to safeguard the national finances.

But the situation has changed. When 'veto first' meant '~~veto~~ bill first', there would have been real injury to the finances owing to the delay involved. Now that 'veto first' means nothing more than 'veto resolutions first' and only a week or ten days in question - no injury to public interests can occur. One only has to realise how artificial the point in debate has become to feel assured about the outcome.

Your own statements are compatible with either course.....

1

Surprisingly enough it was the old home ruler John Morley who objected most strongly in cabinet to this mode of government according to the dictates of the Irish party. Lord Esher, to whom he took his troubles, urged him to resign, in the private hope of bringing down the government, but not for the first time in his life, Morley paused on the brink. He wrote rather sourly to Asquith on February 18.

It may be necessary to proceed by resolution for the sake of the Irishmen. My misgivings as to that mode of procedure were fortified by looking into Disraeli's reform resolutions

-
1. Churchill to Asquith, 18 Feb. 1910 (Churchill papers, cited in R.S. Churchill, Winston Spencer Churchill: the young statesman, p.336).
 2. Brett, Esher, ii.454.

of 1867.

1

The government thus seemed to have accepted in principle the plan for tackling the lords question by means of resolutions.² But others were unwilling to accept any such plan until they knew where the resolutions would lead. So far as Redmond was concerned 'veto resolutions before budget' was better than 'budget first', but unless the resolutions dealt with the veto and not with reform (i.e. unless they would render the upper house incapable of stopping a home rule bill), and unless the government were prepared to take the resolutions to the lords and then appeal to the king before attempting to pass the budget, the scheme would not adequately meet the Irish-radical demand for 'veto before budget'. Churchill's letter makes plain that he regarded the resolutions as a placebo. Redmond on the other hand regarded them as a weapon, more abbreviated, but no less sharp, than a veto bill itself. He wrote to Gill on February 20:

-
1. Morley to Asquith, 18 Feb.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.10 f.120). Resolutions had been unsuccessful as a parliamentary stratagem in 1867 (franchise reform) and in 1905 (redistribution). On both occasions the speaker had ruled that each resolution was a separate proposition, and was therefore to be debated separately. Since the intention in both cases had been to save time by avoiding a long committee stage, the prime ministers concerned, Disraeli and Balfour, had both withdrawn their resolutions and introduced bills.
 2. See Asquith to the king, 18 Feb.1910 (Cab. 41/3247).

Thank you for your letter. You of course don't know the situation. No one wants A. [squith] to seek guarantees now, but he won't ask for any until the lords have rejected the bill and then, we are aware, he won't get them. A dissolution would then occur perhaps about October after a long and futile session with the budget passed - the crisis dead, all enthusiasm amongst liberals evaporated and a certain defeat. Our policy is resolutions (in detail) moved in both houses - at once - before budget, thus continuing crisis, carried in commons, rejected in lords - guarantees then asked, and on refusal, A's resignation.¹ All ~~worth~~ their salt in the liberal party are heartily for this. Tear this up.

1

The cornerstone of the disagreement still remained - the Irishmen had come to accept Asquith's continuing to hold office "without safeguards", now that they had been made to realise that the safeguards were for the present not available, but they still stuck hard against any attempt to pass the budget before those safeguards were obtained.²

Thus, when parliamentary business opened on February 21, a question mark still hung over the government's future. 'Perhaps never in modern years has so much depended upon a single speech as depends on Asquith's speech tomorrow', wrote Herbert Samuel to his mother.³ T.W. Russell recorded that

-
1. Redmond to Gill, 20 Feb. 1910 (Gill papers).
 2. See also T.P.O'Connor in Reynolds's Newspaper, 20 Feb. 1910.
 3. Samuel to his mother, 20 Feb. 1910 (Samuel papers, House of Lords Record Office, A 156 f.11).

'Redmond may wreck us and himself tonight'.¹ The king's speech added to the mystery - financial problems were to be dealt with 'at the earliest possible moment', whereas the lords proposals would be produced only 'with all convenient speed', and would provide that the lords should be ^{so} 'constituted and empowered' as to exercise their function impartially.² Asquith now had to resolve the various pledges he had made since the end of the previous session concerning the order of precedence for budget and veto.³ He adopted an attitude of bluffing it out. He had meant, he explained, to make clear that his government would not hold office except to work for safeguards, statutory safeguards against domination by the lords. He stated frankly that he had not asked for royal guarantees, and that such a demand in regard to a measure which had not been presented was one 'no constitutional statesman may properly make'. The government's policy, he said, was to introduce in the house of commons 'at a very early date' resolutions which would make plain their precise intentions with regard to the house of lords problem. The programme was to be a short first session until 'ecclesiastical Easter', dealing solely with estimates and matters of supply. The break then would

-
1. T.W.Russell to Gill, 21 Feb.1910 (Gill papers).
 2. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 5 series, vol.5 col.5.
 3. Various press-organs had in the previous days offered him escape routes which were face-saving, if not very convincing. The Times' explanation of the pledge 'not to hold office without safeguards' was that by 'safeguards' Asquith had meant, not royal guarantees, but legislative safeguards (Times, 9 Feb.1910). The Daily Chronicle admitted that 'safeguards' meant royal guarantees, but explained that Asquith had not been referring to the present, but to some future moment, 'when the time has come for trying conclusions' (D.C., 28 Jan.1910).

Be four or five days only, and the normal 'Easter' recess would be taken later in the spring. Between the two breaks the budget and the lords resolutions would be dealt with, and after the spring recess a veto bill would be taken through its stages. The resolutions would be voted on by the commons before they relinquished control of the budget, but in answer to a question from Keir Hardie, Asquith replied that 'as at present advised, I do not propose to send the [veto] resolutions to the house of lords at all'.¹

The master of Elibank thought this the worst speech he had ever heard Asquith make.² Burns recorded in his diary: 'It looks like disaster'.³ For Redmond, constructive reply was difficult, though he had no trouble in dismissing Asquith's explanation of his Albert Hall words: 'His words [at the Albert Hall] are not consistent with that explanation'. If by 'safeguards' Asquith had meant an act of parliament, how could he 'refuse office until he had such safeguards?'.⁴ Going on to the problem of what was to be done, Redmond stated that the Irish party were quite willing to keep the situation fluid for a few weeks by voting in favour of supply. But apart from that, he committed himself no further than he had done in Dublin: he urged the government to submit their

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.14 cols.52-63.

2. Murray, Aster and brother, p.39.

3. Burns' diary, 21 Feb.1910 (Burns papers, Add. s. 46332).

4. The radical Daily News protested that: 'In believing that the guarantees meant were guarantees from the crown, Mr Redmond was in company with every journalist, every politician and very ordinary citizen. Nobody would think of charging Mr Asquith with prevarication; but it is the highest degree unfortunate that such a master of clear speech should have expressed himself so ambiguously upon so important an occasion. What is even more unfortunate is that Mr Asquith took no earlier opportunity of correcting a general misapprehension' (D.N. 22 Feb.1910).

resolutions to the lords as well as the commons, and to resign at once, with no budget, if they were rejected by the former and if the king refused guarantees. To spend the next few months carrying a veto bill through committee with the knowledge that it would have to be done all over again after a second election would be a waste of time and the ruin of the liberal party:

The alternative policy of the Rt.Hon.Gent. [Asquith] is to introduce the budget and to pass it into law before we are satisfied, before we receive any reasonable assurance whatever that the bill dealing with the veto can pass into law this year or during this parliament. I take the opportunity of saying that in my judgment this is a disastrous policy.

1

The timetable saved Redmond from having to go any further than this for the moment: as The Times pointed out the next day, one result of the government's order of procedure was 'that the possible use of their weapons by the nationalists has seemingly been postponed until after the ecclesiastical Easter'.² But the situation was far from satisfactory for either side: Asquith had called Redmond's bluff, and the Irish leader had stood his ground.

The ball was still in the government's court therefore. A bigger gesture was required from them before they could hope to gauge the budget's chances with any certainty. (But in the moves which followed it/^{is}as well to bear in mind an observation made by Austen Chamberlain in a letter to his

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 14 cols. 63-74.

2. Times, 22 Feb. 1910.

father: 'One thing I think is clear; that Asquith won't give way in substance, and that if Redmond is to be satisfied he will have to be satisfied with a shadow concession - not a reality'.¹). The cabinet met at the house of commons on February 22 and decided to bid for the confidence of the Irish party through a new mouthpiece. Asquith reported to the king:

r Redmond's attitude is cold and critical, if not avowedly hostile; he is not altogether his own master, as the budget is extremely unpopular in Ireland, and the O'Brien party are on his flank. On the other hand Mr Barnes, the new leader of the labour group, spoke in a more friendly tone than had been anticipated. Among the rank and file of the liberal party there is, for the moment a deal of anxiety, if not mistrust, as to the plans and intentions of the government. This situation was recognised by the cabinet as in many of its aspects precarious, though not immediately dangerous, and careful consideration was given to the line which was to be taken by Mr Churchill, who was appointed to speak. Mr Churchill's speech followed exactly the suggestions of his colleagues, and was at once statesmanlike and effective.

2

Churchill's speech fell into two halves. The first part followed the lines of his letter to Asquith of February 18, seeking to demolish the theory that the withholding of the budget was in some way a weapon by which to coerce the lords into accepting a veto bill: 'it would indeed have exactly the opposite effect', for, he argued, their lordships disliked the budget intensely, and were in no hurry to see it before them again. He then went on to restate

1. A. Chamberlain, Politics from the inside (London, 1936), p.203.

2. Asquith to the king, 22 Feb.1910 (Cab. 41/32/50).

the government's intentions in such a way, it was hoped, as would regain the confidence of the Irish party:

Until the prime minister is in a position to state that he is at the head of a large majority in the house of commons who are united in support of these proposals we shall make for dealing with the lords and the veto, it would be idle, it would be foolish, and it would not be in the interest of the cause we are seeking to advance, for us to declare or describe the action which may follow when those facts are established. A new situation will have been created and that situation will immediately bring forward a supreme crisis of the government. We are going to take immediate steps, subject to the necessary financial business, to come to a final test on this question.....when the [veto] proposals are brought before the house we will stake our whole existence upon carrying them into law. That is the declaration of the government.

1

The 'effectiveness' of this speech, to which Asquith referred, was somewhat limited in its scope. It reassured radicals and labour men of the government's resoluteness of purpose to some extent, but it contained no decision on the crucial question of 'veto or reform', nor did it alter the cumbersome procedure laid down by Asquith. As the Daily News observed, 'the house of commons knows where it stands on the veto resolutions - it wants to know where the house of lords stands, and where the exercise of the prerogative stands'.² To the Irish demand for indefinite postponement of the budget, it conceded in substance nothing. T.P.O'Connor, always kinder to English radical liberalism than his colleagues in the Irish party, could only bend thus far:

1. 22 Feb.1910. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol, 14 cols.132-139.

2. D.N., 23 Feb.1910.

Mr Churchill announced that it was the policy of the government to bring to an end the deadlock between the two houses at the earliest possible moment. This is an apparent acceptance of the main points in the programme of Mr Redmond and of the Irish party. It does not accept that programme yet; but it opens the door which Mr Asquith seemed to close. And to that extent it has done much to relieve the tension of the situation.

1

Less charitable, and probably more representative of nationalist opinion, was the view of the Freeman's Journal:

The crisis remains unchanged. The only influence that can improve it is an alteration in the policy of the government, and no such alteration can be recorded. Mr Churchill was expected last evening to give the government policy a less craven and more plausible appearance. But he effected nothing in that way. He handled the subject more cleverly than Mr Asquith....

2

Meanwhile, other pressures were bearing down on the government, pressures which Churchill's statement had only partially pacified. We have seen that the government's inability to appease Redmond in the days immediately following his Dublin speech had aroused deep suspicions among many on the radical side of the liberal party. The impact of these feelings was felt very quickly by the Daily Chronicle, which had previously been earning denunciation from the nationalist press for its advocacy of 'budget first':

1. T.P.O'Connor's column, Reynolds's Newspaper, 27 Feb. 1910.

2. F.J., 23 Feb. 1910.

Evidently many liberals would regard the giving of priority to the budget as a sign of weakness on the part of the government, and as indicative of an unwillingness by Mr Asquith to use the first available opportunity of boldly facing the house of lords. This is a mood of which the party leaders are bound to take account.

1

In addition to this mood among radical P.s, feeling had grown high in the constituencies also, 'where the executives of local liberal associations began resigning right and left as a protest against the tortuous new course of their party [leaders] at Westminster'.² Radical fears were heightened by hints at lords reform made in their by-election speeches by two of the new ministers, Col. J.E. Seely and, once again, the unfortunate Pease.³

When parliament opened, an attempt to amend the address in favour of an extreme stand on the lords veto, put up by Belloc and J.C. Wedgwood, was unsuccessful in the ballot,⁴ but on the second day of the debate the radicals made themselves felt very strongly indeed. Dalziel led the way, following on the heels of Churchill's allegedly 'effective' declaration. The party, he said had made a great mistake, and its leaders had treated their supporters very badly. If the government meant business, why was there such a delay in the production of their plan? 'If the prime minister could have

1. D.C., 14 Feb.1910.

2. Gollin, J.L.Garvin, p.179. No source is given for this information .

3. Seely at Ilkeston, 23 Feb.1910 (Times, 24 Feb.1910).
Pease at Rotherham, 24 Feb.1910 (Times, 25 Feb.1910).

4. Times, 22 Feb.1910.

tabled his [veto] resolutions or his [veto] bill, ¹ he would have gone a long way to relieving the difficulty of the situation'. No less than seven liberal M.P.s added their voices to his during the course of the evening. ² The following day one of them, Joseph Martin, wrote a letter to The Times, urging that: 'we should now act in such a way as to put the liberal party right with its supporters in the country, and for this purpose it would seem necessary to repudiate our present party leaders'. ³ If reform of the lords as well as limitation of the veto found a place in the government's resolutions, there would be 'something like a crisis' at once, with 70 or 80 liberals siding with labour and the Irish, predicted the Manchester Guardian. ⁴ The Freeman's Journal seized eagerly on these signs that at long last the tables were to be turned on 'whiggish' liberalism: it lamented on February 24 that 'a great reform should be blocked by the weakness or cowardice of a single man, or two or three men', and on the 28th, it urged Lloyd George and two or three other ministers to bring down the government by resigning, and then form 'a cabinet with a fighting policy'. ⁵

-
1. Parl. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.14 cols. 146-9.
 2. The seven were H.Belloc, E.G.Hemmerde, J.Martin, E.H.Pickersgill, D.V.Pirie, Sir A.Spicer, and J.C.Wedgwood.
 3. Letter from Joseph Martin M.P. to The Times, 24 Feb. 1910.
 4. M.G., 24 Feb. 1910
 5. F.J., 24 and 28 Feb.1910. Lloyd George apparently did offer to resign about this time, in order to be able to lead the back-bench radicals on a more moderate course, but Asquith refused to permit such a sacrifice (see Murray, Master and brother, p.40). Probably both these acts of apparent magnanimity were well tempered with self-interest.

The Irish party during this time had been acting as the centre of opposition to what Dalziel denounced as the 'ca'canny' school of thought. The Manchester Guardian considered that 'Irish assent to the cabinet's specific proposals is really the nearest that the rank and file of liberalism can come to a scientific test of the value of those proposals';¹ and the master of Elibank later recorded that:

The Irish were....unceasingly stirring up our [liberal] militants to action.....I was constantly receiving deputations, and I paid my felicitations to T.P.O'Connor for the studied correctness with which every member of the deputation represented T.P.'s views to me on the situation. T.P. is no laggard in the lobby.

2

But when a deputation of four 'advanced radicals' (P.Alden, A.G.Harvey, J.S.Higham, and S.Rowntree) called on the prime minister on February 23, their talk was reported in the press as having been 'not altogether of an unsatisfactory nature'.³ Later in the week both the Scottish and the northern groups of liberal P.s also urged a 'veto' policy on Asquith,⁴ and were encouraged by their replies.

1. M.G., 22 Feb.1910.

2. Murray, Master and brother, p.41.

3. This deputation represented the views expressed at a meeting of forty or fifty radicals, which Sir Charles Dilke had chaired earlier in the day at the house of commons (M.G., 24 Feb.1910). Mr Roy Jenkins.

4. M.G., 26 Feb.1910. The northern group sent a five-man deputation (L.A.Atherley-Jones, Sir F.Cawley, J.Tomkinson, Sir T.P.Whittaker, and H.J.Wilson).

Since the radical liberals were by and large the strongest supporters¹ of the people's budget (Lewis Harcourt was an exception), their common bond with the Irish had one weak link. All that the radicals really wanted was to be sure that the government were heading steadily for the destruction of the lords' veto. The Irish party, on the other hand, could not afford to ease up in their hostility towards the budget before they had extracted from the government palpable public indications of their veto policy, and perhaps concessions on the budget as well. Thus the press reports of the liberal deputations, whether or not they were genuine (and they probably were) were somewhat alarming to the nationalists, in so far as the assurances extracted from Asquith seemed to relate wholly to the issue of 'veto' against 'reform' and not at all to the question of royal guarantees before the passage of the budget. The Freeman's Journal on February 26 warned that a government hint in favour of 'veto' rather than 'reform' might satisfy Dalziel and his friends, but it was not enough for the Irish party: 'If on Monday Mr Asquith is unable to make any advance on his declaration of policy of last Monday, then the end cannot be far off'.² Redmond saw Elibank on February 24 and told him that unless the government introduced their veto resolutions into both houses at once and then asked for royal guarantees, and in any event postponed

1. Jenkins, Asquith, p.205.

2. T.J., 26 Feb. 1910.

the budget until after this, the Irish party would withdraw support from Wedgwood Benn, the liberal minister seeking re-election in the London constituency of St. George's in the East; 'further, we would feel bound to vote against the government and oppose them consistently in the house of commons'¹.

If they had reached a decision on nothing else however, the cabinet still seemed resolved to stand firm against the Irish. They met on the morning of February 25, when:

Some members of the cabinet were of the opinion that in view of the exorbitant demands of Mr Redmond and his followers, and the impossibility under existing parliamentary conditions of counting upon a stable government majority, the wisest and most dignified course for ministers was at once to tender their resignations to your majesty.

Others pointed out that the adoption of such a course would be lacking in courage: that the government were pledged to produce and lay on the table their proposals with regard to the house of lords, and it was urged that they could not honourably retire unless they were defeated in the house of commons before, or upon, the disclosure of their plans.

The master of Elibank (who was called in) reported conversations yesterday between himself and Mr Redmond, the upshot of which was that the latter threatened the government with immediate hostility, and an ultimate vote against the budget, unless they were prepared to assure him that the veto bill would this year become law.

The master was instructed by the cabinet to inform Mr Redmond that they were not prepared to give any such assurances and that he must act on his responsibility, as they would act on theirs.

2

-
1. A note in Redmond's hand, 24 Feb. 1910 (Redmond papers). The Irish vote at St George's in the east was estimated at 600 (.G., 28 Feb. 1910).
 2. Asquith to the king, 25 Feb. 1910 (Cab. 41/32/51),

The same day the U.I.L.G.B. standing committee issued a manifesto to the effect that, although Wedgwood Benn was a trusted home ruler, they could not ask Irishmen to support a liberal candidate until the government made clear their intention to seek guarantees from the king before attempting to introduce the budget.¹ 'If the intention of the nationalist party is to be judged by the language of its press, the party is contemplating a complete break with the government', declared The Times' Dublin correspondent.²

Asquith was still in no position to meet Redmond's demands. His cabinet had not yet agreed on the principles of their policy against the lords, let alone their tactics. Thus he was forced to concentrate first on principles though he may even at this stage have appreciated that once they were established - provided they were the 'right' ones - he might well afford to be tough over tactics. Much of the government's trouble in the

1. Times, 26 Feb.1910. This in fact was no more than a gesture, and for the U.I.L.G.B., a risky one. Local U.I.L. men had already filled up one of Benn's nominating papers, and on February 27 Wapping U.I.L. declared their complete confidence in Redmond's policy, but declared that nothing in the U.I.L. manifesto prevented them from urging Irishmen to vote for Benn. Luckily for Redmond, further events at Westminster diverted attention from the by-election, the result of which made the manifesto ridiculous:

St. George's in the east - Jan. 1910		2 Mar.1910	
W.W.Benn (Lib.)	1568	W.W.Benn (Lib.)	1598
P.C.Simmons (U.)	1134	P.C.Simmons (U.)	1089
maj.	434	maj.	509

2. Times, 28 Feb.1910. Redmond's determination must have been strengthened by a letter he received a few days later from M.J.Ryan, president of the U.I.L. of the U.S.A., who wrote on 27 Feb.1910: 'I am strongly of opinion that should a dissolution come, you could safely count on a fairly generous remittance from this side' (Redmond papers).

first days of the session sprang from its failure, indeed its inability, to produce an agreed scheme for the house of lords. But on February 26 the cabinet referred the problem of drafting the resolutions to a committee.¹ This task was to take some weeks, but an initial statement was meanwhile worked out for Asquith to make in the commons on the 28th, when he opened a debate on the government's request to take the whole time of the house until Easter. It was clear from his statement that cabinet agreement had only been secured by ambivalence, if not ambiguity. The lords' resolutions, Asquith declared, would affirm:

The necessity for excluding the house of lords altogether from the domain of finance (cheers). They will ask this house to declare that in the sphere of legislation the power of the veto at present possessed by the house of lords shall be so limited in its exercise as to secure the predominance of the deliberate and considered will of this house within the lifetime of a single parliament (cheers). Further, it will be made plain that these constitutional changes are without prejudice to and contemplate in a subsequent year the substitution in our second chamber of a democratic for an hereditary basis (opposition cheers).

2

The implication, though it was not very clear, was that a more substantial veto power might be returned to the second chamber after its reform. But, nonetheless, in the first instance it was the veto that was to go. Grey, the leading advocate of lords' reform, accepted this statement, but how

1. Asquith to the king, 26 February 1910 (Cab. 41/32/52).

2. 28 Feb. 1910. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 14, cols. 594-6.

precarious the balance was is apparent in his letter to Asquith of February

28:

Of course I agree to the words, which Haldane has shown me, for they say that the resolutions will contemplate the reconstitution of the second house. But it will be difficult to draft the resolutions, for it will also have to express that the veto proposed by it is temporary and provisional. However, this difficulty can wait awhile.

1

The fruitlessness of the first parliamentary week had at least stirred the government to some sort of activity. But when Asquith made the above statement on the second Monday, he was faced once more with the problem of securing a majority, this time for the government's proposal to take the whole time of the house until Easter. Redmond had already indicated the probability of his opposition. But in his speech Asquith made a new offer, and appeared to ignore Grey's difficulties:

If this house should assent to the [veto] resolutions, a bill to give effect to them will without delay be introduced..... The bill will give effect to the operative parts of the resolutions. But without waiting for that bill to pass through all its stages in this house, we have come to the conclusion that - and in this respect only I have to vary what I said about procedure a week ago (opposition laughter) - that in order to avoid waste of time and labour, and to bring the main issue to a trial and conclusion at the earliest possible moment, the resolutions so assented to by this house will be submitted to the house of lords (cheers).

If the lords did not pass the resolutions, the government were to 'stake their
 2
 existence' on them. Thus the early complaints of radicals like Belloc, who

1. Grey to Asquith, 28 Feb. 1910 (Asquith papers, Ms. 10 f. 122).

2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol. 14, cols. 594-6.

had objected to the waste of time and loss of steam involved in carrying a foredoomed veto bill through a long committee stage, were met. But no mention was made of the budget. Later in the evening, in answer to a question, Lloyd George made it plain that the budget would not be touched until the lords' resolutions had been 'disposed of'; but in reply to Redmond's re-iteration that the Irish party would not support the government unless guarantees were obtained before the budget was introduced, he said simply that sacrifices must be made on all sides.¹ A concession had thus been made to the radicals, and as such it was a concession to Redmond also. But it did not me t his demand, and thus threatened to drive a wedge between the nationalists and the radicals, after what the government must have regarded as a very dangerous alliance during the previous weeks. Before the day's speeches the Irish party had resolved to oppose 'taking time', but after Lloyd George's statement they met again in a committee room, and decided to abstain.² Conveniently, perhaps, by the time they arrived at this decision, the vote had already been taken. Opinion varied as to the significance of the days' proceedings. The Irish Independent expressed open dissatisfaction with the Irish party, claiming that it had been swung over by Lloyd George's manner, whereas in fact he had made no advance on Asquith's promises.³

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.14 cols. 632-7,647.

2. F.J., 1 Mar.1910.

3. Ir.Ind., 1 Mar.1910.

The Times' Dublin correspondent reported that 'it would appear from the English newspaper comments that reach Ireland that the government has "climbed down" to Redmond; In Ireland it is generally assumed that Mr Redmond has "climbed down" to the government'¹.

This confusion arose because the government had still avoided making explicit their plans with regard to budget procedure. Their intentions had not been stated firmly enough to force Redmond to carry out his threats. As Tim Healy correctly asserted, the government had been granted a reprieve until after Easter.² Samuel wrote to his mother on March 5 that 'the political situation has been much eased during the past few days....We are likely to run on now for four or five weeks without any serious incident'.³ A hardening of extreme attitudes had been avoided. Unionist tactics failed to force Asquith to disclose his intentions as to

1. Times, 2 Mar.1910. Conveniently for Redmond, the Irish party's vote had not been of crucial importance. The unionists had at that time no wish to defeat the government, and fearing a hostile Irish vote, had decided themselves not to oppose 'taking time'. There was thus no danger of a government defeat. Unionist reasoning was straightforward: no more than anyone else would that have welcomed an immediate election, in which, furthermore, they could hardly have hoped to materially improve their position after so short a time; further, whatever the circumstances of a dissolution, the liberals would have had to fight the next election on a bolder platform with regard to the guarantees. Austen Chamberlain had told his father, on 25 February 1910, that 'we had to count our men to avoid defeating the government today' (Chamberlain, Politics from the inside, p.207). In the commons three days later Austen stated that 'we are not ready to throw the whole affair into confusion by a snap decision upon some minor point which settles nothing' (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.14 col.629).
2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.14 col.626.
3. Samuel to his mother, 5 Mar.1910 (Samuel papers, A 156 f.13).

the budget. On March 3 he was subjected to a veritable barrage of questions and admitted that 'subject to unforeseen contingencies' the commons would be asked to dispose of the budget as soon as they had passed the veto resolutions, but when Lord Helmsley pressed him more closely about his plans he closed the matter with his famous, later to become infamous, reply, 'I think we had better wait and see'.¹ From exchanges such as these the Westminster Gazette drew the conclusion that the government course on the budget was 'beyond doubt' and that it would be proceeded with as soon as the veto resolutions were through the commons;² the Freeman on the other hand interpreted the statement to mean only that the budget might be recommenced in the commons while the veto resolutions were still in the lords:

But the governing factor of the situation is his [Asquith's] re-iterated statement that if the government fail to get their resolutions through the lords, thereby showing that the veto bill would be rejected, they would ask the king for guarantees, and if they failed to get them they would resign. Manifestly if they decide to resign, they can proceed no further with the budget or any other measure.

3

The Daily News and the Morning Leader⁴ agreed that this was the only interpretation of the prime minister's words. If the Westminster held any other view 'It had

1. 3 Mar.1910. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.14 col.972.

2. W.G., 4 Mar.1910.

3. F.J., 4 Mar.1910.

4. D. and Morning Leader, both 4 Mar.1910.

better abandon the idea immediately', wrote the Freeman's London correspondent. ¹

Meanwhile the government had found another way of indicating their intention of keeping the crisis alive. During the second week in March, when the main items of civil service expenditure came up in the supply debates, they asked parliament for only enough money to carry the administration through five or six weeks. In other words, said The Times, if Asquith failed to pass his budget 'he is going to revenge himself on the country by leaving it without any means of carrying on its business'. ² It was in fact a simple (albeit somewhat brazen) device to retain the liberals' grip on the situation should they resign. Samuel wrote:

This has made the opposition pale with fury, because they will see it may have the effect of preventing Balfour from taking office should we be obliged to resign in April. It is a perfectly legitimate step to prevent the possibility of him carrying on the government with a majority against him in the house of commons. ³

In addition the move served as a re-assurance to the activists that the government were resolved to avoid either a give-away to the Tories or a postponement of action.

But the main problem - the budget - still remained as Easter drew near. Redmond felt it was essential that the veto resolutions should be introduced

1. F.J., 5 Mar.1910.

2. Times, 11 Mar.1910.

3. Samuel to his mother, 12 Mar.1910 (Samuel papers, A 156 f.14).

into the lords at the same time as into the commons, otherwise the Irish party would find themselves facing the vital decisions on the budget in the commons before they knew how the veto question was going to proceed. If that happened, he told Dillon, he did not see how the Irish party could avoid voting against the budget, thereby forcing the government to resign on that rather than the veto, a course which would benefit neither the liberals nor the nationalists.¹ On March 8 Redmond had a talk with Lloyd George, who told him that the government were determined to deal with the budget in the interval between the veto resolutions being considered by the commons and being submitted to the lords. The chancellor, Redmond reported, 'held out no hope whatever of a change in this plan, and on my side I hold out no hope whatever of an alteration in our attitude'.² Lloyd George therefore tried to widen the basis for negotiation by re-opening the old question of concessions on the budget. He explained to Redmond that William O'Brien and Tim Healy had been in touch with the master of Elibank, and had offered their support to the government if the budget were amended so as to remove the worst Irish grievances. Lloyd George then offered Redmond similar concessions in return for Irish support on the budget (It is difficult to see why he needed mention O'Brien and Healy at all, unless it was simply

-
1. Redmond to Dillon, 5 Mar. 1910 (Dillon papers, cited in Lyons, John Dillon p.315).
 2. Redmond to Dillon, 8 Mar. 1910 (Dillon papers, cited in Lyons, John Dillon pp.315-6).

an attempt to inject a slight feeling of insecurity into the Irish leader). Though he still stood by 'no veto, no budget', Redmond felt it his duty to consider this offer. But, he told Dillon, 'to be quite candid with you, I do not trust George in this matter. I do not believe he could get the cabinet to agree to these terms.....but.....I am far from saying that, if they could be carried out, they ought not to be accepted'.¹

It was understood that if such concessions were agreed on, they would be implemented by dropping the 1909 budget altogether (on the grounds that the financial year to which it related was over) and including the modified duties in the 1910 budget. The proposal had already been in the air for some days, and on March 3 in the house of commons Asquith had refused to answer a unionist question on the subject.² But the Freeman's Journal at this time considered 'two budgets in one' to be the government's 'probable' course, and even the Westminster Gazette admitted that such a solution was 'possible'. This apparent agreement was almost wholly illusory however, for the Westminster stressed that such a plan would not involve 'any surrender or alteration' of the 1909 budget provisions, whilst the nationalist organ was confident that the 1910 budget would not present the same objections as the old one from the Irish point of view.³ But the Irish

1. Ibid.

2. Parlt. Deb. C. 5 series, vol. 14 col. 971.

3. , 4 Mar. 1910; F.J., 2 Mar. 1910.

were also anxious to make clear that they would not regard concessions on the budget as justification for giving it priority over the veto question.

The reeman spoke out boldly on arch 5:

If the budget were one to relieve Ireland of a million taxation, instead of to impose another half million of taxation, the opposition of leaders and people to it would be just as firm, unless its passage was to be accompanied by the curbing of the veto of the house of lords.

1

T.P.O'Connor's letter to the master of Elibank on March 12, though more conciliatory in tone, still made clear that the nationalists would accept the promise of concessions on the budget yet continue to block its passage until after guarantees had been obtained (which meant until after a dissolution). All that the Irish were prepared to offer in return for concessions was support for the introduction of the budget into the commons.

Speaking for myself, I think this via media could be carried. First, two budgets knocked into one, with concessions to Ireland, including abolition of whisky tax on ground that it produces no revenue.

Second. Some stages of budget to be taken after veto resolutions in commons, always understanding that control of budget does not pass out of commons until lords have pronounced on veto; and then of course, budget held up by resignation of government unless guarantees are obtained.

This would mean abstention of Irish members on the budget, and I don't even exclude cordial support of the budget. You may show this to the P.M. and L.G. Of course it is unofficial and personal to me.

2

1. F.J., 5 Mar.1910.

2. T.P.O'Connor to Elibank, 12 Mar.1910 (Elibank papers, National Library of Scotland, Ms.8802 f.16).

This proposal of course did not meet one of the government's first priorities - that they should demonstrate their ability to pass the budget before making a further appeal to the electorate. 'From the British point of view', asserted the estminster azette on March 17, 'the government will not only be no weaker, but it will actually be much stronger against the house of lords if it passes the budget than if it fails to pass it'¹. Asquith still prevaricated on this question during the weekly grilling he received at prime minister's question time, though on March 14 he did let fall a (still somewhat enigmatic) statement that the government's intention to pass the budget was not contingent on what happened to the veto resolutions in the house of lords.² A speech by Grey in the City on the same day implied more directly that the government intended to let the budget out of the commons before the lords had pronounced on the veto. Liberal-nationalist relations seemed to have taken a new turn for the worse when Redmond, at Newcastle on March 16, denounced Grey's speech as 'a false and rotten policy and.....a policy that they from Ireland could not uphold'.³ Opinion in Ireland itself was also growing more hostile, Dillon told T.P.O'Connor on March 15: 'Asquith is looked upon as a traitor - utterly unreliable'.⁴

1. I.I., 17 Mar.1910.

2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.15 col.22.

3. Grey at the City Liberal Club, 14 Mar.1910 (Times, 15 Mar.1910); Redmond at Newcastle upon Tyne 16 Mar.1910 (Times, 17 Mar.1910).

4. Dillon to T.P.O'Connor, 15 Mar.1910 (Dillon papers, cited in Lyons, John Dillon, p.316).

If no way out could be found, then both the government and the Irish party were on a disaster course. Dillon feared that if it became necessary to turn the liberals out, the tories would win the ensuing election by a majority of 100 or more. When he saw Lloyd George and Elibank on March 18, he came away 'feeling that the situation is almost desperate'.¹ Dillon could see no escape from the dilemma, but the need of both sides for a settlement was so great that it forced the leaders to adopt a more conciliatory tone, even though they could see no basis for a compromise. Asquith decided to pursue as far as possible a policy of emphasising the government's points of agreement with the Irish party and ignoring the thorny question of the budget. In a speech at Oxford on March 18 he declared categorically for the first time that whatever the prospects for a reform of the house of lords, the government would first of all insist on bringing to an end their lordships' power of absolute veto over legislation.² T.P.O'Connor told the master of Elibank that:

The P.M.'s conciliatory speech yesterday made a most favourable impression. I believe the speech of Redmond at Liverpool tomorrow will recognise that fact.....Further hint, and given in the interests of the budget. Don't be too premature or too rigid or too detailed in announcing procedure or dates of budget.

3

-
1. Dillon to C.P.Scott, 19 Mar.1910 (Dillon papers, cited in Lyons, John Dillon, p.316).
 2. Asquith at Oxford, 18 Mar.1910 (Times, 19 Mar.1910).
 3. T.P.O'Connor to Elibank, 19 Mar.1910 (Elibank papers, Ms.8802 f.17).

In giving this advice, O'Connor was perhaps thinking especially of impatient spirits like Churchill, who that very night at Manchester announced, with an assurance and authority more customarily left to heads of governments, that:

I make every allowance for Mr Redmond's difficulties. The budget is misunderstood in Ireland, and it has been misrepresented as well as misunderstood....But the budget is a crucial part of our main struggle with the house of lords....As soon, therefore, as the veto resolutions have passed the house of commons, the government will march forward with their budget, stage by stage, in summary procedure. If we are defeated, no matter from what quarter, the responsibility for paralysing the attack on the veto at the supreme moment of the charge will not be ours.

1

This came nearer to a full revelation of the government's intended procedure than any previous statement, but it stopped fractionally short of pledging them in so many words to what the Irish leaders had said they would not permit - the passage of the budget into law before either guarantees or a dissolution had been obtained. Thus Redmond, speaking the next day in nearby Liverpool, was still able to 'reciprocate the tone' of Asquith's Oxford address:

Our attitude to the budget is not based on its merits or demerits. This budget is one which quite easily could be made at least tolerable to Ireland. The difficulty is one that does not concern the merits of the budget.....With us, this question of the veto is the supreme issue....we strongly take the view that the budget, or at any rate the concluding portions of it, should be hung up until we know what the lords are going to do upon the veto of the house of lords.

2

-
1. Churchill at Manchester, 19 Mar.1910 (Times, 21 Mar.1910).
 2. Redmond at Liverpool, 20 Mar.1910 (F.J., 21 Mar.1910).

Redmond, had, in effect, given the go-ahead to the government to re-introduce their budget. T.P.O'Connor commented to the master of Elibank:

I thought the speech at Liverpool a good advance towards making accommodation easier. You will note that R. threw out a hint with regard to holding up only a stage of the budget. He has to pick his steps very warily, owing to the feverish excitement in Ireland - not on the budget, but on what they consider the bold tactic R. has advised. Don't make the mistake of thinking that R.'s attitude is due to the budget. I believe by this time the people of Ireland are quite well-informed about the budget, and speech after speech shows that they have thoroughly realised the falsehood of O'Brien's campaign against it. But they cling to the idea that 'no veto, no budget' is the true, the courageous, the only, policy. As you know, I don't agree with them in actual conditions, and especially in view of English opinion and the attitude of the cabinet, I dwell on this point because I am afraid that our attitude is not wholly understood even by our best friends and that even yet there is the idea that we are acting under duress from the liquor trade. That is a profoundly false idea. Please show this letter to the right people so that this disastrous mistake may be removed. The right line to take is to discuss in a perfectly amicable spirit the incorrectness of the idea that 'no veto, no budget' are the true tactics in the present situation. But above all things, we ought to remember that we have still three to four weeks before the crisis will arise. Things may have entirely altered by then. And we shall all be trying to find the way out. Meantime, LET O DOORS BE CLOSED.

I still think the holding up of the third reading of the budget, with some clear understanding as to firm tactics after the rejection of the veto resolutions by the lords may get you the third reading. I think, as you know, that it ought to get you the third reading, but one must be given time to develop these things and not be embarrassed and even beaten by announcements that are too cast-iron, and still more by announcements that are provocative [probably allusions to the speeches of Churchill and Grey respectively].
P.S. I have just had a wire from Dillon saying situation much improved. It is a great relief to me.....

1. T.P.O'Connor to Elibank, 22 Mar.1910 (Elibank papers, Ms.8802 f.18).

O'Connor had once again placed himself a step nearer than his colleagues to the government's position. When Redmond had demanded the simultaneous introduction of the veto resolution into both houses and no consideration of the budget meanwhile, O'Connor had talked to Elibank of permitting the introduction of the budget. Now that Redmond publicly hinted at this, O'Connor communicated to the chief whip his own desire to support a third reading of the budget (i.e. to allow the budget out of the commons before a dissolution). Redmond may well have wished to do likewise, but he was to a considerable extent hamstrung by his Dublin declaration on February 10, which the government's apparent lack of resolution and the challenge of O'Brien had forced him to make.¹ Nonetheless, his Liverpool speech had demonstrated a new tolerance towards the budget, and he had concluded with an offer to discuss the problem 'fully and frankly' with ministers. Accordingly, on the following evening, he and Dillon had a two-hour meeting with Lloyd George, Birrell and Elibank.² No details of this meeting are available, but although Redmond afterwards told the press that 'there is

1. Austen Chamberlain wrote to his father on March 24 that there was conflicting evidence as to whether or not the Irish had been 'squared', but he expressed the opinion that 'the Irish are eager to be squared, and will take any excuse which they think is sufficient to protect their position in Ireland against O'Brien' (Chamberlain, Politics from the inside, p.236).

2. Times, 22 Mar.1910; W.G., 22 Mar.1910.

1

absolutely no change in the situation', the postscript of O'Connor's letter to Elibank indicates at least an improvement in understanding between the two sides. A more hopeful feeling among the liberal rank and file was reported when it became known that a meeting had taken place. ² In the light of our knowledge of the events of the following weeks, the observations made by the writer of The Times' 'political notes' column sound well-informed, if a little mischievous. A more friendly feeling had been established, he reported, but:

No agreement has yet been arrived at between the nationalist party and the government with regard to the budget, and its passage in the house of commons is still in doubt.....There is reason for saying that the intentions of the ministry have changed more than once during the last few weeks with regard to the course to be pursued on the budget, but now that the crisis is nearer it is understood that the government are resolved to risk an adverse vote on the budget in the house of commons. At what moment the critical division should be taken may be a matter for further consideration, and many suggestions are being made by liberals of the rank and file as to the way in which the veto resolutions in the house of lords and the budget in the house of commons may be alternately³ proceeded with.

The basis for this 'more friendly feeling' was that on the one side the Irish ⁴ had agreed to support the introduction of the budget, and on the other the

1. Times, 22 Mar.1910.
2. Ibid. Herbert Samuel wrote to his mother on 26 Mar.1910 that 'there is a better prospect of an accommodation with the Irish on the budget' (Samuel papers, A 156 f.16).
3. Times, 23 Mar.1910.
4. The Irish party 'were not anxious to kill the budget as soon as it appeared', declared T.P.O'Connor in Reynolds's Newspaper on 27 Mar.1910: 'On the contrary they are anxious and, I believe, ready, to support the budget through several changes, so long as the house of commons does not lose entire control of it before the lords have pronounced on the veto resolutions'.

liberals had sounded a more confident note on the future of the veto proposals. The government had not agreed to postpone the budget until after a dissolution, nor had they agreed to Lloyd George's suggestion for concessions to the Irish on the 1910 budget.¹ What the government had come to realise was that the further they could advance in the construction of their scaffold for the destruction of the veto, the less the Irish leader would feel inclined to (or obliged to) destroy that structure, whatever the position of the budget. As the Westminster Gazette observed on March 24: 'A fortnight or three weeks during which Irish and liberals will be working ^{and} voting together on a definite proposal [i.e. the veto resolutions] in the house of commons may make a considerable change in the political situation'.²

Just as in early February, when interminable cabinet meetings and various press reports gave the impression that the cabinet were reluctant to face up squarely to the problem of abolishing the veto, Redmond had felt obliged to play strong, so now, with the government's firmness apparently restored, he could risk being somewhat more amenable. This situation was the outcome of another struggle which had been going on inside the cabinet

1. Haldane, in a speech at orth Berwick On March 5 said that 'the real and courageous course is to stake our lives on the passing of the whole and entire budget' (Times, 26 ar.1910).

2. V.I., 24 Mar.1910.

side by side with the discussions over budget procedure. As we have seen, the first step towards reconciling the cabinet to a 'veto before reform' policy on the lords had been taken at the end of February, when Asquith announced the intention of the government to bring forward veto resolutions, without prejudice to the future reformation of the second chamber. But on that occasion Grey, the main proponent of lords reform, had given only an interim assent, observing privately to Asquith that it would be difficult to draft the resolutions, for they would have to express that the veto arrangement was 'temporary and provisional'.¹ Here lay the seeds of further disruption. Little information is available concerning the discussions that took place in the cabinet committee which prepared the resolutions, but on March 13 T.P.O'Connor, a well-informed if not an impartial observer, reported in his newspaper column that the resolutions would be practically confined to the veto, and that if reform was mentioned at all it would be no more than a 'pious' expression of opinion.² Certainly something was afoot, for on the following day at the City Liberal Club, Grey came out with a forceful defence of the reformers' case. He admitted that limitation of powers was the 'question of the moment', but laid far more stress on the need to follow it up immediately with a full scale revision of the second chamber: 'The root of this mischief is

1. See supra, p.764.

2. Reynolds's newspaper, 13 Mar.1910.

the hereditary principle'.⁴ Not only did he regard reform as a better solution in itself, but he considered that an appeal to the country on the basis of 'veto' alone would prove a disastrous election platform.

By the middle of that week London abounded with rumours that resignations were in the wind. ¹ John Bull mentioned the names of Grey, Haldane, Curzon and 'possibly others'.² Haldane told his mother that he and Grey had 'decided to be Daniel',² though in a speech to the Eighty Club on March 19 he denied the press rumours, asserting that 'there never was a time when he had less desire to resign a place in the fighting line'. But his speech made clear that he was fighting not only the lords, but also some of his own colleagues:

Veto was an essential first step, but they could not pause to break up their policy into two parts....it was....essential that the veto stage of their policy should be followed by a still further development of the policy of placing the constitution on a broader basis than it had ever been before....He advised them not to listen to those who said that the easiest course was to proceed by detached steps.

3

Grey was always less of a fighter and, it is customary to say, less of an office lover (though he held the post of foreign secretary for over ten years).

1. See N.G., 17 Mar. 1910.
2. Haldane to his mother, 29 Mar. 1910 (Haldane papers, L.S., no. 5982 i.76).
3. Haldane at the Eighty Club, 19 Mar. 1910 (Times, 21 Mar. 1910).
4. Grey at the City Liberal Club, 14 Mar. 1910 (Times, 15 Mar. 1910).

He wrote to Asquith a day or^{so} after Haldane's speech, saying that he felt he should resign.¹ He did not do so however. As in December 1905, when he attempted to remain outside Campbell-Bannerman's government, it was probably his friend Haldane who caused him to change his mind.²

On March 21 the resolutions were laid on the table of the house, and were found to deal with the veto only: it was to be abolished with regard to money bills and limited to two sessions in respect of other legislation; the maximum life of a parliament was to be reduced to five years. A preamble to the resolutions promised future legislation to reform the constitution of the house of lords, and was presumably included as a face-saver for Grey and Haldane. But it was no more than O'Connor's 'pious expression of opinion', and has remained a dead letter from that day to this. The master of Elibank considered that the victory of the vetoists 'is due as much to opinion in the party on the subject as to the efforts of individual ministers'.³ Nonetheless, all the leading advocates of reform in the cabinet, with the exception of Grey (and to a lesser extent Haldane), welcomed the resolutions formula. Churchill, who had written to Asquith denouncing the C.B. plan in early February, now declared

1. Asquith told Crewe that: 'I have had a tiresome letter from E. Grey' (Asquith papers, cited in Jenkins, Asquith, p.206).
2. Austen Chamberlain wrote to his father on 24 Mar. 1910: 'I hear that Grey tried to resign last week, and the only question was whether Haldane would resign with him' (Chamberlain, Politics from the inside, p.236).
3. Murray, Master and brother, p.41.

that 'all schemes of reform, without a limitation of the veto, are useless and dangerous'.¹ Even the Westminster Gazette felt that the restriction of the veto would be enough for the time being, 'and until it is achieved we shall not be able to cut a path through the present chamber for any scheme of reform'.² Thus, by the last week in March, one half of the government's problem - the formulation of their principles of action against the lords - had at last been settled. The Times commented that 'those who have persisted in trusting the more moderate members of the cabinet can scarcely fail any longer to perceive that they have leant upon a broken reed'.³

Asquith introduced his veto resolutions in the commons on March 29. Fortified by the increased measure of agreement within his cabinet he was able,

1. Churchill at Manchester, 19 Mar.1910 (Times, 21 Mar.1910).
2. W. . ., 19 Mar.1910.
3. Times, 21 Mar.1910. Grey may have caused an anxious moment or two in liberal circles on March 22 by addressing the Free Trade Union at the Westminster Palace Hotel. The content of his speech was harmless enough, but earlier in the day the Unionist Free Trade Club had also met at the same hotel and formally dissolved itself. Its membership had divided between those who followed Lord Cromer and formed a 'Constitutional Free Trade Association' (which in effect put the maintenance of 'the constitution' before the maintenance of free trade), and those who followed Lord James of Hereford into the Free Trade Union, previously an overwhelmingly liberal body. James, a unionist, was in the chair as Grey spoke. This may have been a hint at a possible basis for a centre party, but if so, it was a bluff on Grey's part which his colleagues lost no time in calling (Times, 23 Mar.1910).

for the first time during the session, to o some way towards pulling the anti-lords forces together, Haldane recorded that he spoke 'admirably',¹ whilst T.P.O'Connor admitted that he had 'managed to please all sides'. The prime minister spoke of the desirability of a small, democratically elected second chamber with powers to revise and delay legislation, but made it clear² that the step immediately contemplated was the curtailment of the veto. But about the sequence of events which was to follow the resolutions leaving the commons, Asquith was extremely vague: agreement with the Irishmen had evidently not proceeded so far as agreement within the cabinet. Redmond offered 'a general and hearty support' for the resolutions. He urged Asquith to press on with the resolutions in the lords as soon as they were through the commons: 'let him not delay. Let him not interpose any measure to delay³ the consummation of this great crisis'.

But the passing of the budget was becoming more and more of a priority in liberal circles, as the growing delay made it painfully obvious to the public that the 'people's budget' was unable to command a parliamentary majority.⁴ The cabinet on arch 30 laid great stress on this point, and on the following day in the commons Churchill agreed with a unionist critic, F.E.Smith, that the government should demonstrate their sincerity by passing it. He declared

1. Haldane to his mother, 30 Mar.1910 (Haldane papers, Ms.5982 f.80); Reynolds's Newspaper, 3 Apr.1910.
2. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.15 cols. 1162-82.
3. Ibid., col.3 1198-1208.
4. Asquith to the king, 30 Mar.1910 (Cab. 41/32/54): 'great stress was laid on the importance of getting the long-delayed budget of 1909-10 through the house of commons at the earliest possible moment'.

that:

....immediately the veto resolutions are disposed of, we shall march forward with the budget regardless of consequences. Unless the house of commons carries the budget it is idle to look to the king or to look to the country to carry the veto....The Irish members are in favour of the budget except for certain points wholly irrelevant to the quarrel that has arisen between this and the other house.

1

Although other members of the cabinet may well have wished Churchill to have been less forthright, his statement reflected the government view. Now that they had decided on a lords' scheme acceptable to the radicals and Irish, it would be easier for the cabinet to take a firmer line on tactics. Asquith felt that 'it is still uncertain whether Mr Redmond and his supporters will, when it comes to the point, venture to oppose the budget'.²

The gap between the government and the nationalist leaders had, in private at least, very much narrowed as a result of the above developments.

But crucial issues remained outstanding. The Irishmen had not agreed to allow any sort of budget to pass a third reading, and had not agreed to give any support at all to an unamended budget. Further talks between the two sides on March 30 and 31 were reported by The Times to have stopped short of an understanding.³ At the same time, the Irish vote in the Mid-Glamorgan

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.15, cols. 1571-2.

2. Asquith to the king, 30 a.r. 1910 (Cab. 41/32/54).

3. Times, 31 Mar. and 1 Apr. 1910.

by-election was given for the labour candidate against the liberal, in
 a two sided contest.¹ But the Irish were now plainly convinced that support
 for the government should be their line, and Redmond and Dillon crossed over
 to Ireland, where, it was stated at U.I.L. headquarters, they would make
 important announcements in their speeches on April 3. This statement was
 mysteriously withdrawn at the last minute,² but nonetheless Redmond's speech
 at Tipperary denoted an increased willingness to settle, and may be regarded
 as his most important statement of policy since the Dublin speech of February
 10. Although still asserting that the budget was 'a great weapon' in the
 hands of the government, he declared that 'whether the budget passed or did
 not, whether they obtained great concessions for Ireland on this budget or not,
 was as nothing compared to success or failure in this attack on the lords'.
 He then went on to discuss the situation, and made it fairly plain what his
 'terms' were:

1. But without avail:	F.W.Gibbins (Lib.)	8920
	V.Hartshorn (Lab.)	6210

Earlier Elibank, as liberal chief whip, had tried to prevent the liberal
 candidature, since the seat was part of a bargain with the labour party.
 But the local liberals telegraphed him that: 'The master of Elibank is
 not the master of Mid-Glamorgan' (Times, 2 Apr.1910).

2. Times, 4 Apr.1910. Austen Chamberlain reported to his father a rumour
 that Redmond and Dillon 'had come to an agreement with Lloyd George [on budget
 concessions] in the early part of the week-end and intended to announce it
 on Sunday, but that was when it was submitted to the cabinet, the cabinet
 refused its consent' (Chamberlain, Politics from the inside, p.241).

The view of the Irish party was that the government ought not to allow the budget to pass from the control of the commons until it was known what the lords proposed to do with the veto.....Up to this there had been no explicit declaration of what the prime minister would be as to asking for guarantees that the royal prerogative would be at his disposal to overbear the anticipated decision of the lords. There was no explicit guarantee that if, when the resolutions were rejected, guarantees were refused, the government would act on the Albert Hall declaration and refuse to remain in office. If such a statement were made, if the Irish party were assured that the government in the circumstances would refuse to continue in office, the situation would be eased in a very marked degree.....

.....If the last stages of the budget, even the third reading, were held back to see what was going to happen - if that took place then the Irish party could quite easily, with the utmost safety to their cause, and quite consistently with their policy and pledges, settle down to discuss such concessions on the budget as would make it as acceptable, at any rate, as any British budget for Ireland could be under the act of union.

1

The Times erred in dismissing this as 'the utterance of a baffled tactician who finds the ground crumbling beneath his feet'.² It was a clear and (in view of the fact that it was made in Munster) bold statement of Redmond's new terms. It retreated from the now untenable 'veto before budget' position (untenable partly because it had to some extent been side-stepped by the introduction of veto resolutions before the budget, and because

1. Redmond at Tipperary, 3 Apr.1910 (Times, 4 Apr.1910).

2. Times, Apr.1910.

to hold to it still would in practice have meant another general election without the 1909 budget having been passed) to a demand for holding up the third reading of the budget until the lords had pronounced on the veto. But Redmond's new policy was still open to objections from the government's point of view - that it handed over control of timing to the lords; and, by its demand for budget concessions and pledges as to the government's future policy on the veto, it aroused hostility among those members of the government who were most keen to avoid giving the impression that Redmond dictated their policy. No one in the liberal party could be enthusiastic about so humiliating a step as conceding to the Irish on the budget, even though it might be argued that the increased whisky duty had failed to bring in more revenue. Further, some members of the cabinet were still holding out strongly against making any pledge in advance on guarantees. Morley objected, it seemed on principle, to being dragooned into the creation of five hundred peers, whilst Grey and Haldane still held to the view that the government should press on without veto assurances and, in effect, call Redmond's bluff. ¹ The Times observer wrote on April 5 that 'it is thought unlikely at present that this desire of the nationalist leader will be gratified' and he added further that 'it is probable that the third reading of the budget will be reached before the government's veto proposals have been finally dealt with in the house of lords'. ²

-
1. Morley to Asquith, 15 Apr.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.23 f.94); W.S. Blunt, My Diaries, ii.308.
 2. Times, 5 Apr.1910.

y the second week in April it began to look as if the Irish advance had been halted and that they were not to be offered a compromise after all. Haldane told his mother on April 5 that he had made peace in the cabinet, his proposals 'have been accepted by both wings'¹. This presumably referred to the speech he was to make the next day introducing the debate on the veto resolutions. But the speech dwelt far less on veto restrictions than on the future reform of the lords, and if it had satisfied the cabinet it certainly did not please the radicals and their allies.² Suspicions of the leadership were again aroused, and radical liberals were once more reported to be favouring the Irish policy, that the government should be compelled to make an explicit statement about guarantees.³ A leading radical, Josiah Wedgwood, wrote to Elibank on April 8 to urge this course. The alternative policy of keeping the king's name out of things, he said, would be the surest way of installing a tariff reform government:

I hope that if the decision is made on Monday [cabinet, April 11] he [Asquith] will bear in mind that these two courses are known to his supporters, and that overwhelmingly the majority would have him save the country not the crown.

4

T.P.O'Connor commented that 'it is not the first time by a long way that somehow or other the personality of Mr Haldane seems to cast a bleak shadow over the fair prospects of liberalism'.⁵

-
1. Haldane to his mother, 5 Apr.1910 (Haldane papers, Ms.5982 f.86).
 2. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 cols. 449-63.
 3. Times, 8 Apr.1910.
 4. J.C.Wedgwood to Elibank, 8 Apr. 1910 (Elibank paper, Ms.8802 f.47).
 5. Reynolds's Newspaper, 10 Apr.1910.

O'Connor was of course reluctant to see the delicate structure which it was taking so long to build destroyed by a few words from one who was known to stand at one extreme of the party spectrum. But if Wedgwood's polarisation, 'country or crown', came to dominate the stage, then chances of a re-ement were clearly reduced. When the lords came to reject the veto resolutions, whether the government could resign unconditionally, leaving Balfour to call an election which would once again have to be fought without mention of guarantees; or Asquith could demand guarantees and be refused, which would mean that the unionists might be able to represent the liberals as fighting the election against the king.¹ But a third course had been left open. Rather than face either of these stark alternatives, reported T.P.O'Connor, several members of the cabinet felt that 'the views of the king should be ascertained; that ministers should not be put in the position of asking, and the king in the position of refusing, guarantees', but if it were ascertained

1. Argot Asquith wrote to Mrs Eleanor Birrell a fortnight later, 21 Apr.1910: 'I wish Mr Birrell and all our men would say nothing for the moment to foreshadow what sort of advice H. [Asquith] will give the king. I hope every M.P. will be told to say nothing except that H. of commons must be boss and not H. of lords. I know the king can be very nasty and is badly surrounded and always abroad when one wants him at home. I know Arthur Balfour and all his lot intend to run gen.election entirely on our dragging the king's name in, and we ought all to go in for a conspiracy of silence and never mention his name. Of course Mr Birrell has not, but just now no 500 peers, no nothing the nature of advice should be mentioned I'm sure!' (Birrell collection, Liverpool Univ., Ms.10.2 f.22).

that the king would not give guarantees, then the government would dissolve on condition that he would agree to 'contingent guarantees' (i.e. contingent on the government winning the¹ election), along the lines which had been agreed between King William IV and Earl Grey in 1832. The prime minister himself was coming round to this view. He wrote to Lord Crewe on April 8:

The question there [in the cabinet called for April 11] will be (and, of course, it affects the king) what course are we prepared to take as regards the so-called "guarantees". I remain of the opinion which I have held throughout - that is in this parliament we cannot advise, and therefore cannot ask for anything. By a mere and naked non-possumus, we could ensure defeat on the budget closure on Monday 18th. The real question will be on Monday [11th] whether we can make up our minds and convey to the Irish, that in the event of your house rejecting the resolutions, we shall only advise a dissolution on the terms of what are called, "contingent guarantees".

2

On the same day, April 8, other members of the cabinet also were thinking on this problem. Churchill called on Morley, the latter told Haldane:

.....on behalf of the chancellor of the exchequer also, beseeching me to agree about squaring Redmond by creation of peers, contingent on victory at the next election. I am having a sabbath's day wrestle, but find myself obdurate. It is really time all this ignominy should end.

3

The scene was thus set for a stormy series of cabinet meetings, with what looked like a new alignment emerging - Lloyd George and Churchill

1. T.P.O'Connor's column, Reynolds's newspaper, 10 Apr.1910.
2. Asquith to Crewe, 8 Apr.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.46 f.18+).
3. Morley to Haldane, 10 Apr.1910 (Haldane papers, Ms.5909 f.18).

advocating acceptance of the Irish demand for assurances, supported, it appears, by Asquith and Crewe; while the strongest opponents of this policy were Grey and Haldane, Asquith's oldest colleagues, together with Morley, the great Gladstonian and friend of home rule. But the problem of assurances was not the only one outstanding, for at Tipperary, Redmond had said that the promise of assurances would provide a situation in which modifications to the budget could be discussed. Ever since February the press had abounded with rumours that the cabinet were willing to make this or that deal on the budget to pull the Irish party in. One of the rumours were strictly true, though a number of them had had some basis in Lloyd George's mercurial attempts to break the deadlock. When on April 4 a unionist asked Asquith whether the government had promised any concessions to the nationalists on the land or the spirit duties, the prime minister replied, firmly but warily, that 'no promises of any kind have to my knowledge been made'.¹ Grey told Berwick Liberal Association on April 11 that he hoped the budget 'will be passed without any alteration of its taxes and charges'.²

In the field of budget concessions, the Irish party were not only opposed by an influential section within the cabinet, but they lacked also any basis for an alliance with radicals and labour, such as had served so well over

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C., 5 series, vol.16 col.26.

2. Grey at Berwick, 11 Apr.1910 (Times, 14 Apr.1910).

the 'veto versus reform' issue. Ramsay MacDonald, secretary of the labour party, told Elibank that in his opinion any substantial alteration to the budget would be extremely bad. It would, he said, be a sign of weakness; it would annoy and dishearten the government's supporters in Britain; it would lay them open to tory attack; and thus provide the house of lords with the pretext for a justification of their activities:

....If however the Irish really say "alteration or nothing", that raises a question of alternatives....If I were driven into that corner I would concede, although I would not conceal from myself the fact that one alternative is nearly as bad as the other. Before conceding, I would make sure (1) That the Irish would defeat the budget. I do not believe they will if some clear statement can be made about the house of lords policy - and do you not now think we are near enough to the final stage to make an announcement? (2) I hardly think they will fight on whisky, and consequently have not the government the whip hand over them?

1

This put the finger on the Irish party's weak spot. Elibank already shared MacDonald's view, but Lloyd George, and probably Churchill with him, were at that stage in favour of dropping the spirit duties. The cabinet, Elibank later recalled, were 'at sixes and sevens' on the matter. In Elibank's recollection he convinced Lloyd George that the concessions would probably not be necessary. He probably overestimated his powers of persuasion, for

2

-
1. J.R. MacDonald to Elibank, 13 Apr. 1910 (Elibank papers, Ms. 8802 f. 51),
 2. Murray, Master and brother, p. 46.

Burns recorded in his diary, following the cabinet meeting of April 13:

Concessions of a spiritous nature politely but firmly declined by P.M. and supported by all but two, even there strategically not pressed. Otherwise unanimous and free from the entanglements of past three months. What a relief to the P.M. and to all of us.

1

It seems reasonable to assume that the two dissidents were Lloyd George and Churchill.

Although the decision to stand firm on the budget was taken in defiance of the views of the Irish leaders, it was a very calculated defiance. Asquith was very much overemphasising the 'bold independence' of his cabinet's stand when he wrote to one of the royal secretaries:

It is possible and not improbable that in consequence of this [cabinet] decision the Irish party will vote against the government in the critical division on the closure to the budget on Monday night. If they do the government will be defeated and a crisis of extreme urgency will at once arise.

2

Lord Knollys thought it highly unlikely that the nationalists would decide to vote against the government, but admitted that 'one can never tell what the Irish will or will not do, and Redmond is undoubtedly in a very awkward and difficult position'.

3

-
1. Burns' diary, 13 Apr.1910 (Burns papers, Add. s. 46332).
 2. Asquith to F.E.Ponsonby (copy of cipher sent), 13 Apr.1910 (Asquith papers, s.1 f.279).
 3. Knollys to Vaughan Nash, 14 Apr.1910 (Asquith papers, s.1 f.280).

When Asquith made his statement in the commons on the following day, April 14, it was revealed that the government had in fact made a further advance on the main question of veto procedure. For despite what he had written to Crewe on April 8 about the government being able to ask for nothing in that parliament, except 'contingent guarantees', Asquith now declared that in the event of the lords rejecting or declining to consider the veto resolutions, the government would immediately tender certain advice to the king, and resign if they found they were not in a position to deal with the veto in that parliament. They would not recommend a dissolution unless they received 'contingent guarantees'.¹ 'He has bought the Irish vote for his budget' declared Balfour, and T.P.O'Connor obligingly rejoiced that 'at last the right word has been said, the right thing done'.²

On the previous day, a certain amount of nervousness had been expressed in liberal circles as to the nationalists' attitude,³ and Redmond did not in fact commit himself to supporting the budget.⁴ But it was generally assumed that Balfour's guess was correct. Redmond could not be too enthusiastic, for nothing had been said about budget procedure. On the

-
1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 col.1547-8.
 2. Balfour's speech, 14 Apr.1910 Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 col.1551; T.P.O'Connor in Reynolds's Newspaper, 17 Apr.1910.
 3. Times, 14 Apr.1910.
 4. Times, 15 Apr.1910.

main question, however, Asquith had gone further than the Irish leaders expected.¹ Possibly the government had moved on from the 'contingent guarantees only' compromise simply as a matter of tactics, feeling perhaps that the bold approach better justified their demand - though Asquith had seemed as late as April 8 to rule a direct appeal to the king out of court for the time being. He had clearly given way personally, and it seems probable that it was a concession to the Irish (and to Lloyd George and Churchill, who had been advocating their case). Elibank tells us, though his knowledge must have been second-hand, that in return for backing down over concessions on the spirit duties, Lloyd George had at the final cabinet been most firm that the question of the prerogative be not shirked, threatening that if it was he would resign and join the Irish (!).² The king, in a letter to the prince of Wales two days previously, had already predicted the cabinet's decision, and incidently made very clear his own view of the matter. The government's ways, he wrote:

....get worse and worse, and our great empire is now being ruled by essrs Redmond and O'Brien (in their different ways) aided and abetted by Messrs Asquith, L.George, and W.Churchill. The other ministers who really know better (Crewe, Grey and Haldane) quickly agree to anything.

3

-
1. The Times considered that their declared intention of advising the creation of peers, instead of asking only for contingent guarantees, showed that the government were in that respect in advance of their radical supporters (Times, 15 Apr.1910).
 2. Murray, Master and brother, p.46.
 3. Edward VII to the prince of Wales, 12 Apr.1910 (cited in P.Magnus, King Edward VII (London, 1964), p.450).

Ironically enough, it was the veteran Gladstonian, Morley, who clung most resolutely to a conservative policy. He wrote dejectedly to Asquith on the day that the government's intention was announced: 'You all really mean the creation of 500 peers, and have only wrapped it up out of friendly consideration for me. You had far better let me go'.¹ But once again he took no action.

Four days later, on April 18, the 1909 budget was at last reintroduced. It contained a number of revisions, in the form of declaratory amendments, most of which related to Ireland: three points in connection with the relation of the land taxes to agricultural land were cleared of what the Irish party had regarded as ambiguities, and the stamp duty provisions were altered to the advantage of ecclesiastical institutions. But on the main bones of contention, the increased liquor and licence duties, nothing new was conceded.² The tenor of Redmond's reply had been fairly widely predicted in the press, but it nonetheless came as a relief to the government. The Irish party, Redmond declared, would support the budget, for although it did not meet all their demands, a number of concessions had been won, and in the light of the prime minister's previous statement on veto policy, he was not prepared to prejudice the government's position.

1. Morley to Asquith, 14 Apr.1910 (Asquith papers, Ms.23 f.94).

2. Speech by Asquith, 18 Apr.1910 (Parlt.Deb H.C. 5 series, vol.16 cols.1725-39).

Otherwise, he contented himself with what was clearly intended to be a strong warning: The government's 1910 budget had yet to be produced, he said, and he hoped that in it Asquith 'would take into account fully the proposals that would be made for the mitigation of taxation in Ireland'.¹ He and Asquith both denied the unionist allegations that there had been 'bargain' between the government and the Irish party.² The budget was hurried through the commons, passed disdainfully by the lords with a bare quorum, and given the royal assent on April 29.

The absence of any major concessions on the budget, after the Irish party's parliamentary success of the previous week, caused some depression in Ireland, and Healy's critical speech made a good public impression. Despite the chancellor of the exchequer's constant re-assertion that the increase in Irish taxation was likely to be under half a million pounds, and a growing feeling in many quarters that the Irish people had come to see through the verbiage of the independents' anti-budget campaign, the situation might still prove a difficult one for Redmond. For as people in Ireland came to realise that perhaps the budget was no more than a minor and temporary inconvenience, so William O'rien managed rather subtly to shift the emphasis round to a position more favourable to himself: somewhat away from a bald assertion of

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 cols.1762-5.

2. T. J. Healy, on the other hand, complained because 'there was no bargain between the member for waterford and the prime minister' (ibid., col.1778).

how bad the budget was, to a claim that the Irish party leaders could have made it a lot better and had refrained from doing so simply in order to keep O'Connell and the O'Rienites out of the party. That O'Rien was able to maintain this claim for a time was the result of a complex series of manoeuvres which came close to sucking two leading liberals deep into the morass of Irish nationalist rivalries.

It had been clear since the previous year that Redmond's extreme fierceness over the budget was prompted less by his own objections to it than by O'Rien's challenge in Ireland. Clearly, if O'Rien could be bought off, Redmond would be easier to deal with from the Government's point of view. This was a way out of the apparent impasse which could not be overlooked by such natural intriguers as Lloyd George and the master of Elibank.¹ On February 27 Elibank met O'Connell at the Berkshire home of Hudson Kearley (a wealthy liberal I.P. who happened to be a friend of Healy's), and had with him 'a conversation he was careful to remind me has not taken place and which if necessary he will repudiate'.² Healy's terms were that

-
1. The master of Elibank became government chief whip in February 1910, despite the view of his predecessor that he was 'a bit too scheming, and needs a steady hand over him'. (J.A. Pease to Asquith, 4 Feb. 1910 (Asquith papers, cited in Jenkins, Asquith, p. 207 ft.).
 2. Elibank to Asquith, 28 Feb. 1910 (Asquith papers, Ms. 36 f. 5).

the new whisky tax be dropped from the 1910 budget, and that uncollected dues under the 1909 budget be written off, and in addition certain concessions on the stamp duties (which were in effect made by Asquith in his speech of April 18) be made. If this were done the independents would be prepared to co-operate with the Irish party, and therefore the government, once more, provided that Elibank and his friends would negotiate the nationalist rapprochement. Elibank reported Healy's views to Asquith:

It was difficult for him [Healy] to approach Redmond, as his motive would be mistaken, but if we were of opinion that the Irish members could be useful to us he suggested that I should re-open negotiations on the grounds that it had come to my knowledge that the independents were agreeable to an understanding being arrived at. He advised that I should point out to Redmond that it is impossible for the government to treat with a divided Irish party. A conference might be called. If that is arranged, modifications might be agreed to on the budgets to meet the joint views.....The only motive that I can trace is the weakening of John Dillon's position. You observe that he wishes Redmond to remain leader.

1

Asquith's view of this manoeuvre is not available, but it is at least clear that Elibank took up Healy's suggestion (how hopeful he was is perhaps another matter). A few days later Healy, together with O'Brien, met Lloyd George at the house of 'a prominent member of the liberal party' (probably Kearley again). The chancellor was eager for an accommodation, but told the

1. Ibid.

Irishmen that he had no authority from the cabinet to offer budget concessions, and stressed that nationalist unity would have to come before any concessions. This much O'Brien admitted in the commons on April 18.¹ Yet on March 15, in a letter to the nationalist candidate for the West Wicklow parliamentary vacancy, he wrote:

The government are willing to drop the Irish part of the budget and in addition to restore land purchase on the same terms as under the act of 1903 if Mr Redmond's friends are willing to join me in asking for it.....Mr Dillon, who detests land purchase, will do all he can to thwart such an arrangement.

2

A day or two after this O'Brien had another talk with Lloyd George at the house of commons, and attempted to persuade him to publish details of the 'offer' he had made to the two nationalist parties. O'Brien later admitted that he found the chancellor more cautious and guarded than on the previous occasion, but claimed that Lloyd George assented to the publication of a letter which O'Brien had read out to him.³ This was to be the source of the later public row between them.

-
1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 cols. 1739-51.
 2. Wm O'Brien to E.P. O'Kelly, 15 Mar. 1910 (Redmond papers, filed under O'Brien). O'Kelly replied disparagingly to O'Brien's advances, and forwarded the correspondence to Redmond. It was probably the appearance of this threat - that O'Brien would go shouting round the country that the Redmondites had refused budget concessions - which caused the party leaders to start stressing at this time that the 'merits' of the budget were insignificant, and that the vital question was that of the tactics which were to be employed against the house of lords. See the speeches of: Devlin at Dumbarton, 14 Mar. 1910; Dillon at Birmingham, 17 Mar. 1910; Redmond at Liverpool, 20 Mar. 1910; T.P. O'Connor at Glasgow, 22 Mar. 1910 (all published in F.J. on the date following the speech in question).
 3. O'Brien's speech, 18 Apr. 1910 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16, col.1744).

Probably by the time of their second meeting Lloyd George had given up hope of an opening in that direction (It is of course possible that, far from being invited, O'Brien forced the second meeting). It is difficult to see what the independents had to offer from the government's point of view. No doubt in view of the situation at the end of February, there was justification for exploring every possibility. But once embroiled with the independents, it was difficult to get free. There was a prophetic note in T.P.O'Connor's advice to Elibank on March 19: 'I most solemnly warn you to be more than careful in negotiations with O'Brien and Healy. They are likely to aggravate instead of easing the situation'.¹ Indeed, the independents had nothing to offer: if the government were prepared to make concessions on the budget large enough to satisfy the twelve independent nationalists, they might as well make them directly to the more reliable and more powerful 'master of seventy votes' as Healy was derisively calling Redmond at this time. All the independents wanted was a lever against Redmond, and that they managed to thrust their way briefly into the forefront of affairs is attributable not to what they had to offer, but to the contacts, the influence, and the personal ability which O'Brien and Healy had at their command at Westminster. Their hope was not really that the crisis would be got round as much as that they might gain some advantage through its

1. T.P.O'Connor to Elibank, 19 Mar.1910 (Elibank papers, Ms.8802 f.17).

continuan¹ce. It is probable that O'Brien, at least, had throughout these proceedings one eye on the use he could put them to in the inauguration of the newgrass-roots organisation, the All-for-Ireland League, which he was planning to underpin his parliamentary group. His letters to and from Healy at this time (when the independents were in public calling for unity) are in fact full of discussion of the prospects for opposing the 'Mollies' in the north, of the extent to which Cardinal Logue might publicly take their side, of whether Archbishop Walsh might be willing to serve their interest, and of the prospects for an alliance with northern protestantism, via Lord Shaftesbury.²

Accordingly, as April was reached and the Irish seemed to be progressing³ towards agreement with the government, O'Brien reverted to open hostility. The All-for-Ireland League was inaugurated in Cork on March 31, and on April 9 O'Brien played what he hoped was a trump card (though later events revealed that it was more like a trumped-up card). He read out the letter, which,

-
1. Healy wrote to O'Brien on 18 Mar.1910: 'If Redmond accepts the proposal for the conjoint meeting, I think we shall carry the bulk of the party with us, or at any rate have such a substantial number of them as to open the eyes of the country'. O'Brien replied the next day: 'If (as seems likely) the M[aster] and his friends stand true to their offer to you and me, whatever is the upshot we are bound to come out on top' (both letters in Wm O'Brien papers, N.L.I., Ms.8556).
 2. Ibid., see also Healy to O'Brien, 26 Mar.1910 (O'Brien papers, Ms.8556).
 3. When it was announced in the press that Dillon and Redmond would make important policy statements in their speeches on April 3, O'Brien retorted that 'the only announcement of the least importance that Mr Dillon could make would be that he had cleared out of Irish life altogether' (Times, 4 Apr.1910).

he alleged, Lloyd George had assented to during their private talk at the house of commons:

I hope I am not mistaken in assuming it to be accurate, as the result of our conversations - (1) That....you see no insurmountable difficulty about relieving Ireland from the increased spirit duties, brewery licences, stamp and succession duties and land taxes (so far as they affect the property of Irish tenant purchasers) which were proposed in the budget of 1909.....(2)you are disposed to make such new provisions as will enable land purchase to proceed with the same rapidity and success as under the purchase act of 1903.

1

Lloyd George told pressmen that 'I never received the letter, nor was it read to me. The statements made in it are grossly untrue, and the whole affair is a disgraceful breach of confidence'.² O'Brien therefore announced that he would make an explanation to the house of commons, and Lloyd George could scarcely avoid doing so - to ignore the charges would pass as an admission of guilt. In parliament on April 18 the chancellor admitted that O'Brien had read (or rather commenced to read) something to him which he had believed to be a memorandum ('not a letter'). But he denied that O'Brien had ever got as far as even asking for most of the concessions he now talked of: 'so that when the Hon.Gent. went down to Cork and said I promised that not a shilling of taxation would be imposed upon Ireland, he himself had never made a suggestion as to four-fifths of it even being removed'.³ In the absence of any independent evidence, Austen Chamberlain's observation is probably as

1. O'Brien at Cork, 9 Apr.1910 (Times, 11 Apr.1910).

2. Times, 11 Apr. 1910.

3. Parl't. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 cols. 1751-9.

good a comment on the affair as any: 'One cannot trust either man, but O'Brien's latest declaration seems to confirm the rumour which I repeated some days ago that Lloyd George was ready to bargain but that the cabinet¹ rejected the terms offered'.

With the parliamentary row between the two men, the affair ended. Though Lloyd George was not completely absolved, consensus in both liberal and unionist parties appeared to be that O'Brien had gone too far. Balfour stressed that the whole structure of government rested upon the freedom of ministers to hold confidential conversations with persons whenever they² thought it necessary. O'Brien, as a parliamentarian of almost thirty years standing, of course fully realised this. His motive was probably to some extent one of desperation as he began to realise that he had missed the bus over the budget and that Redmond was achieving his aim over guarantees. But there may well have been a measure of calculation in his indiscretion also. For it resulted at least in bringing into prominence the question of whether the Irish party might have achieved more concessions on the budget, on the very day that Redmond had to commit the votes of his party to that budget. Furthermore, the nine days of the affair, from April 9 when O'Brien

1. A.Chamberlain to his father, 12 Apr.1910 (Chamberlain, Politics from the inside, p.248).

2. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 col.1765.

spoke in Cork, until April 18 when it was aired, spanned entirely the period in which Redmond achieved his apparent triumph in the matter of the veto. O'Brien's failure however was always on the cards - he had nothing to offer, by way of support or of concessions. As Elibank later recorded:

Dire necessity compelled me to keep my eye on the big battalions, although I confess I was sadly tempted at one time to finance 20 or 30 candidates in Ireland to assist Healy and O'Brien, and I would certainly have done so if the Redmondites had failed us on the budget and the veto.

1

Thus the first stage of the constitutional crisis came to an end. The government had announced their policy towards the house of lords, and in return had secured the support of the Irish party for the budget. Redmond seemed to hold the whip hand. One advantage of his compromise with the government was that the time factor was no longer so pressing. With the budget passed, it was possible to proceed at a slower speed, and so allow a few face-saving and money-gathering weeks or months to pass before the second appeal to the electorate. Within reason, this arrangement was as acceptable to the Irish as to the government. Thus when Lord Crewe explained

1. Murray, Master and brother, p.48.

to the house of lords that the government would have no objection to their wish to postpone their consideration of the veto resolutions until after the spring recess (i.e. until the end of May), it was not correct of The Times to hint that this constituted the beginnings of an attempt by the government to bolt.¹

Nonetheless, the government's committance to action against the lords had been one of words only, whereas Irish votes were already being cast in support of the budget. Privately, Dillon was not at all confident that Asquith would go ahead and resign when the king refused to create peers. He placed his hopes not on any bargain made, but on the residual power of the Irish party to defeat the government at a later date - for instance on the 1910 budget.² But their support for^{the} 1909 budget meant that the Irish party were still faced with some danger on the home front. Clancy explained that Irish support was 'entirely unconnected with the merits or demerits of the measure', and Lloyd George emphasised that with the decrease in consumption of spirits, the additional cost of the budget to Ireland would now be only £435,000.³ But this fact, of course, was no consolation to the Trade, and about this time Redmond refused an offer from the Licensed

-
1. Times, 20 Apr.1910.
 2. Blunt, My diaries, ii.312.
 3. Speech by J.J.Clancy, 25 Apr.1910 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.17 col.61); speech by Lloyd George, 19 Apr.1910 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.16 col. 1914).

Vintners Association of £15,000 for the party fund if he would vote against the budget.¹ As soon as the budget was through, the Irish party and the U.I.L. organised a campaign throughout Ireland to explain their action on the budget, with speeches by Redmond, Dillon and Devlin.² But even some of the party M.P.s were not very happy about the situation. J.C.R. Lardner (an outsider, from his inception) was one of them. He told Tim Healy that 'there are about a dozen men in the party who sympathise with him against the budget tactics, and he is trying to get them to show a bolder front'.³ These specific plans for inciting disaffection came to nothing. But the situation nonetheless remained challenging for the Irish party, and negotiations with the government for budgetary concessions continued more or less as before, though the pressure of time was now somewhat less. (Asquith had told the house on April 27 that no decision had yet been taken about when the 1910 budget statement would be made).⁴ T.P.O'Connor wrote to Elibank on May 10:

Redmond seemed really nervous about the 1910 Budget - especially the whisky tax and the tax on small breweries. It is expected that two breweries - one in Dundalk, Healy's county - and the other in Kilkenny, are the danger spots, and will have to close, and you require to know the desperate

-
1. Healy to O'Brien, 5 May 1910 (O'Brien papers, Ms.8556).
 2. Finès, 5 May 1910.
 3. Healy to O'Brien, 5 May 1910 (O'Brien papers, Ms.8556).
 4. Parl't. Deb. H.C. 5 series, vol.17 col.458.

poverty of small Irish towns to realise all this means, of suffering through unemployment. I do believe that the wise thing to do would be to drop the whisky and to modify the brewery tax. I think L.G. as chancellor is quite entitled to say that the whisky tax doesn't bring him in more money than the old tax, and of course the real reason, from the point of view of the chancellor, for a new tax is that it brings in more money.....I don't think there is anything in the temperance argument. Even if I did, I think temperance is not good enough to put back all progress - and our movement against the lords means progress - and disrupt the progressive forces at this serious moment. I don't believe your insanest temperance advocates would vote against you; and we might be compelled to do so.¹

Threats to the security of the party in Ireland made it necessary for Redmond and his colleagues to continue their pressure on the budget front. But it would be even more dangerous to them if the government made any retreat from the position they had adopted on the veto issue. In the event of a compromise being reached on that issue by the two main British parties, Irish votes against the new budget would be of no avail. Talk of compromise was in the air as early as the fourth week in April, though The Times, which had strongly advocated it in February, was now equally strongly against - there must be an election, it insisted, doubtless in the belief that the liberals would lose votes as the party who had 'dragged the king's name into politics'.² But the idea of compromise was being closely considered at a very high level. On April 27 Lord Knollys called together Lord Esher, the archbishop of

1. T.P.O'Connor to Elibank, 10 May 1910 (Elibank papers, Ms.8802 f.56).

2. Times, 21 Apr. 1910.

Canterbury, and Arthur Balfour, at Lambeth Palace to discuss in the light of government policy the options which might be open to the king. They agreed that Edward could, without fear of repercussions, refuse to create peers during the existing parliament, and Balfour felt that he might also refuse to give 'contingent guarantees', if the refusal were carefully framed. This would lead to Balfour's becoming head of a minority government, and would give the king a chance to call for a compromise settlement. It was decided to approach Sir Edward Grey again, and urge him to press on Asquith the idea of a referendum.¹ But nothing came of this idea, possibly because, as The Times pointed out, the unionists meant by referendum a device for deciding all future deadlocks between lords and commons, while liberals meant by it a substitute for a general election, a once-only affair which would decide forever on the question of the lords' veto, and so remove from the king any responsibility for the use of his prerogative.²

Thus there was no immediately apparent basis for compromise, though the desire for one was present in many quarters. Haldane commented on May 2:

I see a growing desire for the avoidance of another general election. Whether to avoid will prove possible remains to be seen. It is a great achievement for the government to have passed the budget, and this gives the public a sense of belief in its capacity.

3

¹. Magnus, King Edward VII, pp.453-4. Lord Hardinge had earlier approached Grey for the same purpose, but found him but 'a broken reed to lean on'.

2. Times, 29 Apr.1910.

3. Haldane to his mother, 2 May 1910 (Haldane papers, Ms.5982 f.121).

Even on the left there was little eagerness for an election. Keir Hardie said at Tonypany on May 2 that although a general election seemed inevitable there was no reason why that should be so. He proposed a sort of compromise whereby the lords would assent to the principles contained in the veto resolutions and the government would drop the veto bill, thereby preserving¹ an unwritten constitution and avoiding a dissolution.

The development which lifted the compromise idea off the ground was the sudden death of the king, on 6 May 1910. It provided a justification for the parties' coming together which had not previously existed. J.L.Garvin led the way in the Observer, with series of articles commencing on May 8, and by the beginning of June had aroused the interest of a number of prominent liberals, including Haldane, Loreburn, Lloyd George and Elibank, in the suggestion.² Even determined radicals like Harcourt wrote to Asquith urging that the conflict be postponed till autumn in order that the election should not be reached until 1911.³ John Burns thought it certain 'that the king's death will put off the crisis between the two houses, and may modify final settlement of the dispute'.⁴ On May 10 the cabinet had a long discussion of the matter and reached a similar conclusion. Samuel wrote to

1. Hardie at Tonypany, 2 May 1910 (Times, 3 May 1910).
2. Gollin, J.L.Garvin, pp.185-7.
3. Harcourt to Asquith, 9 May 1910 (cited in Jenkins, Asquith, p.213).
4. John Burns' diary, 17 May 1910 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46332).

his wife: 'It seems possible that there may be no election this year (very¹ confidential) - so we can pay for the house comfortably!'. This decision of the cabinet was conveyed to the new king by Asquith on May 18. George V's note of his meeting with the prime minister demonstrates the dangers for the Irish party which were inherent in the new situation:

We had a long talk. He said he would endeavour to come to some understanding with the opposition to prevent a general election, and he would not pay any attention to what Redmond said.

2

The Irish party appeared to be back where it had been in February, or worse. If the government and the unionists managed to work out a compromise settlement of the lords' question, it was almost certain not to be one which would permit a liberal government to implement home rule. Asquith's Albert Hall pledge of December 1909 would in such circumstances be worthless, and the home rule cause would be faced once more with the liberals' self-denying ordinance, as in the dark days of 1905-9. But this was the picture at its blackest. As we know, the liberal-conservative constitutional conference did not achieve the dreaded compromise, and the failure to agree³ on the home rule issue is usually cited as the main cause of the breakdown.

-
1. Samuel to his wife, 10 May 1910 (Samuel papers, Ms A. 157).
 2. George V's diary, 18 May 1910 (cited in H. Nicolson, King George V, his life and reign (London, 1952), p.131).
 3. See e.g. Roy Jenkins, Mr Balfour's poodle (London, 1954), pp.105-7; A. Chamberlain, Politics from the inside, p.190.

That the liberal leaders (in effect) forced the break on the home rule issue was not, we may be sure, an indication that such sceptics as Asquith, such will o' the wisps as Lloyd George, had decided to stand firm on the principle, but was rather based on their realisation that Redmond in fact could still call the tune. If the Irish party picked a quarrel on the 1910 budget (or on any other issue), the government would fall. In these circumstances the unionists would have been foolish to have given the government any sustained support. They did not enter the constitutional conference to keep the liberals in office, but to see if there was any chance of preserving the house of lords in something like its existing form. If they could not persuade the government to sell out in this matter, then they might as well hasten the time of its resignation. When this situation became clear to the liberal leadership, they opted to play once more for Irish support, thinking (in 1910) that Redmond's price was lower than Balfour's. Had they been able to foresee the events of the following years, they might have decided otherwise.

CONCLUSION

If the period from the end of 1905 to the beginning of 1910 has a political unity it is that during those years the government was in the hands of the largest radical majority since Barendse's parliament. It should therefore be possible to judge the Irish policy of the liberal party by its performance during this period, when it was untrammelled by the pressures which had oppressed the minority governments of Mr Gladstone and which were likewise to confine Asquith's freedom of action after February 1910. But although the governments of Asquith and Campbell-Bannerman secured some legislative and administrative reforms in Ireland, no one would maintain that their record in this field was an overall success - as more public money was spent in Ireland, so discontent and disillusion with liberalism spread in all ranks of nationalist society, accompanied in some parts of the countryside by a considerable increase in disorder. When we look at later developments, the liberal record in these years is made to appear even worse: whatever the liberals had done in 1906-9, it did not seem to make life one bit easier for them when they came to depend on Irish parliamentary support in the years after 1910; only six years later, with the same chief secretary still in control of Dublin Castle, there was an armed uprising against British rule. These later developments were to a great extent the result of factors not present at the beginning of 1910. But they nonetheless underline heavily the failure of liberalism to strike effectively at the roots of discontent

during its four years of dominance.

Soured by their experience of 1886-93, liberals in 1905 were in the main less enthusiastic about home rule and about the Irish party than they had been half a generation earlier. The fact that the liberal party came near to wrecking itself on home rule between 1910 and 1914 tends to blind us to the extent to which that policy had been pushed out of its programme between 1894 and 1909. Formally, home rule remained a plank in the party platform, but many liberals may secretly have thought that the demand was dying a slow death from 'kindness', believing, as did Bryce, that 'once they [the Irish] have got the land much of the steam will have gone out of the engine'¹. If Horace Plunkett is to be believed, liberal hostility to nationalism had gone even further. He told Lady Betty Balfour on 15 December 1905 that 'Bryce, Aberdeen and Antony MacDonnell are all determined to save the department [of agriculture] from these wretches [Dillon, Sexton and Davitt]² if they possibly can'.

The religious factor also was a barrier between liberals and nationalists. Many liberals clearly felt the existence of a conflict between their radical-democratic sympathy with the home rule demand and their nonconformist-democratic dislike of authoritarian catholicism and the liquor trade. This

1. Bryce to Goldwin Smith, 26 Jan.1905 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.17).

2. Plunkett to Lady Betty Balfour, 15 Dec.1905 (Plunkett papers).

feeling manifested itself in the suspicion with which they viewed Irish party criticisms of the council bill and of the 1909 budget. Bryce especially held this attitude. He commented to Edward Grey after the rejection of the council bill: 'The priests have been clever enough to keep in the background....but they could work quite as effectively behind the scenes as openly'¹. On the university question also Bryce was prepared to risk failure in order to keep 'sectarianism' out of university education. It was Birrell, whose liberalism (though nonconformist in origin) was more akin to the literary humanism and anti-'business' attitude of the American mugwumps, who finally managed to negotiate a settlement of the university question. Another barrier was erected between liberalism and nationalism when Asquith and the liberal imperialists succeeded in saddling the entire party with a largely unspoken, but no less real, self-denying ordinance in respect of home rule at the 1906 election. But the importance of this lies in the fact that it lost for Asquith and (probably) the majority of the liberal party the confidence of Irish nationalists, and so made relationships less easy to establish when they were vitally necessary, in the years 1910-14. Only in this (indirect) way did the attitude of the Asquithians delay the introduction of a home rule bill, for we may be quite certain that any such bill would have received short shrift from the house of lords between 1906 and 1909.

1. Bryce to Grey, 6 July 1907 (Grey papers, F.O. 800 vol.99).

It is indeed to the house of lords and not to the Asquithian liberals that we must look primarily, in order to explain why the liberal party failed to make more progress in Ireland during this period. The shadow of the upper house loomed over the whole sad affair of the Irish council bill, influencing Sir Antony MacDonnell (into trying to frame a scheme which he thought the lords would accept) as well as the liberals and the nationalists (who argued, not over the measure they wanted, but over the sort of measure which it would be best, from the point of view of tactics, to have rejected by the lords). Had it been possible in these years to pass a council bill into law, it seems probable that the steam really would have been taken out of the nationalist movement. On the land question also, the lords' intervention was damaging. Their attitude made it impossible to remove the irritating issue of the evicted tenants completely from the political scene, and caused the liberals to postpone revising the land act of 1903, so that when they did act they seemed simply to be responding to agitation. By 1909 a great popular demand for the division of the grasslands amongst landless men had spread throughout the west of Ireland (partly as a result of the agitation which had been allowed to develop during the years of government inactivity, 1906-8), yet the lords removed from the 1909 land bill those clauses (concerned with a partly-elective C.D.B.) which might have proved the best way of silencing the hopeless demands of landless men. Their pretext, that the political importance of the landless man would have swayed a representative body into conceding such demands instead of looking first to the interests of

the congest was not entirely without foundation,¹ but it seems more probable that on balance such a scheme would have made for peace, by giving the more influential of the agitators, like John Fitzgibbon, the responsibility of administering the system. As long as the house of lords reflected faithfully the views of the more uncompromising representatives of the unionist party² and served as a public platform for Irish landlords, a liberal government was unable to carry out anything better than a compromise policy in Ireland.

Since their legislative work did have to be framed under the shadow of the house of lords, it is hard to assess the policy which the liberals did pursue. It is certainly true that much of the trouble between 1906 and 1908 arose because the government's chief advisor in Ireland, MacDonnell, did not regard the Irish question in at all the same light as a liberal party whose approach had been fashioned by the political bargaining of the Parnell-Gladstone era. Though regarding himself as a liberal and as (in the best sense) a nationalist, MacDonnell found himself increasingly at cross-purposes with

-
1. See, e.g., the speeches of John Fitzgibbon and Laurence Ginnell.
 2. On issues such as labourers' and town tenants' grievances, opposition had in the main to be left to Irish unionists in the lords, for the Ulster unionist M.P.s were very much afraid of tarnishing their (tawdry) images as orange democrats.

Campbell-Bannerman's government, and in private made little secret of his wish to destroy the predominance of the Irish parliamentary party. Where the liberal party was driven to seek a solution to the Irish question by its wish (or need) to placate the Irish party, MacDonnell had his own answers to Ireland's problems, and came increasingly round to the view that the greatest barrier to his plans was the polarisation introduced into Irish politics by the nationalist party.¹ Thus by 1906-7, he was drafting his Irish council scheme with a view to ending the predominance of that party - i.e. he was declaring war on those whom his government wished to conciliate. He wished to rid Ireland of the tyranny of 'politics'. Although this disregard for party politics (ironical in one who was, in an important sense, the most political under secretary in the later history of the union) was a key factor in his one great success, the land act of 1903, it is more significant as being the root of his failures. His official relationship with Birrell was a never-ending struggle between what he thought was right and what Birrell thought was possible, while the harmony that had prevailed earlier during Bryce's tenure was primarily due to the great extent to which Bryce was prepared to bolster his own administrative deficiencies by abdicating a large

1. He explained to Bryce on 20 May 1906: 'It is very difficult to find in Ireland at present a liberal layman in a prominent position who possesses business habits and a knowledge of affairs. Unionism and nationalism have appropriated such' (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

slice of his authority to MacDonnell. Even at Dublin Castle MacDonnell's tendency to despise 'politics' was noticed. Sir Henry Robinson of the L.G.B. later recollected that:

It took him [MacDonnell] some time to realise that unlike in the case of India there were 80 members of parliament watching every act of the heads of departments, who were quite willing to worry the life out of the chief secretary over administrative acts of the very smallest importance.

1

MacDonnell was, indeed, anti-political, in the sense that he would not recognise the validity of 'demands' made by the political parties in Ireland (and was therefore the archetypal bureaucrat). This meant that so far as measures intended essentially for political pacification, such as the Irish council bill, were concerned, his influence was ruinous, for he would not accept the basis on which the government were trying to act. On the university question also, he argued to the end in favour of the solution which he regarded as educationally preferable, paying little heed to the political difficulties which its implementation might entail. Even on the land question he was well out of harmony with the government by the time of his resignation in mid-1908. It was only when the council bill episode convinced Birrell of the necessity of throwing over MacDonnell's ideas that the liberals began to make achievements in Ireland (though it is only fair to point out that the date of MacDonnell's effectual departure from the scene, the late summer of 1907, co-incided with the beginnings of serious outbreaks of disorder in the Irish countryside).

1. H.A. Robinson, Memories wise and otherwise (London, 1923), ch.16.

For the Irish party the period 1905 to the beginning of 1910 was equally unhappy. Challenged at the end of 1905 for signing themselves once more over to the liberals, by William O'Brien (on the grounds that such a policy would not bring home rule) and by the bishop of Limerick (on the grounds that it would destroy catholic education in England and perhaps place it in jeopardy in Ireland also), the Irish party were on the defensive throughout the period. During Bryce's administration, and to a lesser extent up to the beginning of 1908, MacDonnell formed an effective barrier between them and the government. The delay in the presentation of the land bill, following on the failure of the council bill, brought about a surge of agitation and discontent in Ireland which severely taxed the party's central authority. With the prospect of a general election around the corner, and action at last on the land question, the year 1909 looked somewhat brighter for them. But the unfortunate co-incidence of the crucial lords issue with a budget which Ireland regarded as punitive subjected the party and the liberal alliance to its greatest challenge since the split. Only Asquith's home rule declaration in December 1909 averted a break. This, coupled with the commanding position Redmond seemed to have put his party in by his speech of 10 February 1910, was sufficient to ward off the attacks of sinn feiners as well as O'Brienites.

Although the party appeared to have come through unscathed, some indirect damage had been done. A number of ameliorative measures had been fought for strongly during the preceding four years, and, despite the house of lords, much had been won. The interests of town tenants had been secured against their landlords, council housing had been provided for labourers, the sting had been removed from the evicted tenants problem, and the price of Irish land had been stabilised. On another plane, a teaching university acceptable to catholics has at last been established in Dublin. But radical though these reforms were, they were the product of an old-style nineteenth century radicalism, which concentrated on altering the balance of the law between 'haves' and 'have-nots', and distributing some public money more or less directly to those most in need of it. The party showed little idea of tackling Ireland's basic economic weakness: promises of land (rash and dangerous promises in the case of some of their more irresponsible speakers) or of cottages with potato patches was about the sum total of their contribution to the problem of unemployment. The party leaders' dislike of the politics of Horace Plunkett caused them to give practically no support to the work of D.A.T.I., whilst their interest in the C.D.B. was firmly focused on the land-distributing aspects of its work. In the cities the parliamentary party was even less imaginative. William Field's Town Tenants Association concentrated very much on the problems of the small trader and shopkeeper, and nowhere in accounts of the political movement does one find mention of the carters and dockers who figure so prominently in the works of Dr Larkin and

1
 Mr Greaves. John Redmond's Dublin, even in public life, was a very different one from Jim Larkin's. It was the followers of Larkin, and the followers of men like Laurence Ginnell, who finally brought down both the Irish parliamentary party and the British government. Had Sir Antony MacDonnell but realised, the Irish party were the moderates in Ireland.

We can see, therefore, how the Irish party lost control of the sans-culotte element in Irish society, which was to become the hard core of the revolution. We can see that the house of lords frustrated all liberal attempts to pursue a coherent policy in Ireland (it is arguable that in such circumstances a coercionist tory government during these years, 1906-22, might have produced a more acceptable balance sheet of achievement and suffering). We can see that the tireless efforts of MacDonnell were in the main hopelessly at odds with the received liberal technique for dealing with the Irish party. We can see, perhaps above all, that given the state of public feeling in Ireland and given the attitude of the house of lords, the liberals were refusing to face facts. Their determination to keep the 'ordinary law' caused them to abandon the arms act in 1906, and their failure to replace it with some other check permitted a build up of small arms in the Irish countryside in the most irresponsible hands. The importance of the sheer presence of these weapons in determining the character of the later revolution is incalculable.

1. E. Larkin, James Larkin (London, 1965); C.D. Greaves, Life and times of James Connolly (London, 1961).

But political prediction, even with the benefit of hindsight, is a hazardous business. The implications of a government's action or inaction over a period are very difficult to calculate, especially when the issue is complicated by the upheaval of a world war. Though agreeing with Professor McCready that the liberals' final drive for home rule between 1910 and 1914 was greatly harmed by the 'spirit of political surrender' in which it was brought in, one cannot accept his other assertions about this period: that if the liberals had thrown their great majority behind home rule in 1906 the house of lords would easily have been overwhelmed; that the history of home rule would then have been 'radically different'; and that the development of sinn fein would have been 'frustrated, or at least diverted'.¹ Firstly, it seems reasonable to suppose that a home rule bill in 1906 would have met a similar fate to that met by the education and plural voting bills in that year, and that if the liberals had gone to the country on it, their rapid decline in popularity after the 1906 election would in no way have been halted. Further, it is by no means certain that the orange camp would not have armed itself as strongly in 1907-8 as it did in 1911-12. The Irish record of Britain's last liberal government is a poor, and in some respects a disastrous one. But it is less easy to assert with any confidence that had they acted differently the Irish question would have taken a different course.

1. H.W.McCready, 'Home rule and the liberal party, 1899-1906', in I.H.S., vol. xiii no.52 (Sept.1963).

A brief note on historiography.

Prima facie, it seems unlikely that the reasons which caused Patrick Pearse and Eamonn de Valera, and even John Redmond, to become Irish nationalists, were the same as those which motivated their more humble followers. This, it may be said, is obvious, yet the opposite has been assumed in much of the writing about the Irish revolution. Writers such as Miss Macardle, who see the revolutionary leaders as driven by a simple desire to 'free Ireland', tend to assume that their mass following was similarly motivated, that it was composed, in effect, of a bunch of Tom Barrys, Dan Breen's and Sean Traceys.¹ Such writers accept as historical explanation these men's own ideas of 'why' they were acting, and go on to explain 'how' they did it. The result is inevitably a 'nationalist' interpretation of history. It is unsatisfactory, judged by academic standards, both because it is 'old-fashioned' political history, and because its writers are (or allow themselves to be drawn) too close to the subject to analyse the issues dispassionately.

Very little attention, however, has been paid to the later stages of the land question in Irish politics. It has been assumed that the failure of land purchase to 'kill home rule by kindness' was but another indication that the Irish discontent was rooted in 'pure' nationalism. Thus very little is heard of the Irish land question after 1903.²

-
1. D. Macardle, The Irish Republic (Dublin, 1937). See also D. Ryan, The Phoenix Flame (Dublin, 1937).
 2. Professor Gwynn, for instance, after devoting some pages to the land conference and the Wyndham act, passes over the 1909 land bill and the preceding agitation without a word, in order the more quickly to reach the dramatic political conflicts of the years 1910-14 (D. Gwynn, Life of John Redmond).

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the chain of causation goes unquestioned: the frustration stirred by the third home rule bill crisis caused the 1916 Rising, which in turn re-aroused the patriotic fervour of the Irish people, who did not rest until the British government was driven from Ireland. A slightly more sophisticated version of this theory sees the above developments as having been 'forced' in the hot-house conditions of a world war. Indeed, much of this argument is irrefutable. But it does not explain why a nation of peasant farmers acted out the dream of Patrick Pearse, why it proved impossible to 'kill home rule by kindness'. No detailed attempt has been made to assess the impact of the implementation of land purchase on the socio-political structure of Ireland. Only Mr Strauss¹ has asked why it was that Galway and Mayo were the centres of Irish agitation during the three decades following the foundation of the Land League, yet during the final struggle they surrendered the revolutionary palm almost completely to Cork and Tipperary. A study of the background to the 1909 land bill, though it may go only a short way towards answering such questions, does at least indicate that the implementation of nation-wide peasant proprietorship was arousing great, and in the main, new social tensions in the Irish countryside during the first two decades of the twentieth century which have been almost entirely ignored by the political historians of those decades. The Irish revolution awaits its Georges Lefebvre.

1. E. Strauss, Irish nationalism and British democracy (London, 1951). This most interesting work is a ^{un-}ashamedly Marxian analysis of the Irish question. One's confidence in some of his assertions is very much shaken by the knowledge that, by and large, the detailed studies on which such a general book must be based simply do not at present exist.

APPENDIX I - THE ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians was a relatively modern foundation. It claimed links with the catholic Defenders of the seventeenth century¹, but it could not trace its own origins back further than mid-nineteenth century America. It was a sort of Irish catholic freemasonry relying on a strong nostalgic appeal, which made it to a large extent a society for exiles. Its origin was Irish-American, and the main areas into which it spread were Scotland (and to a lesser extent England), Australia, and, especially, Ulster. But in those parts of Ireland where catholicism and nationalism were ubiquitous it had less raison d'etre, and established few roots². In a sense it was a more purely nationalist organisation than the United Irish League, for it based its appeal not on material grievances like land ownership, but on the desire of catholic Irishmen to meet together socially and to act mutually for one another's benefit. But it was a nationalism manifested

-
1. The history of the A.O.H. is still to a great extent shrouded in secrecy. The following, though all very prejudiced, contain some useful information; J.J.Bergin, History of the A.O.H. (Dublin, 1910), the 'official' history; J.D.Nugent, The Hibernian handbook (Dublin, n.d., c.1937), is also a Board of Erin publication; H.B.C.Pollard, The secret societies of Ireland (London, 1922) is extremely anti-nationalist.
 2. Though it did get a footing in areas bordering on Ulster; Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, and also Dublin, which of course had a large protestant minority, especially among the middle classes. Nugent, op.cit., gives the figures for 1936 as: Irish Free State, 141 divisions; Northern Ireland 211; Scotland 326; England and Wales 40; North America 520; Australia and New Zealand 550 (The Hibernian hand book, p.23).

in the form of a rather cloying sentimentality for the 'ould country' and the Faith (as a glance at the 'Irish in Great Britain' column of any issue of the Weekly Freeman will demonstrate). It lacked the intellectual content of the 'Irish-Ireland' movement, and outside Ulster it lacked the latter's toughness and passion as well. But in Ulster it satisfied another demand also: 'it appeals more strongly than the U.I.L. to the younger men, as it is more manifestly antagonistic to the orange society'¹.

In 1884 there occurred a split in the movement in America over the question of whether Irish birth, or Irish parentage only, should be required for membership. This split was carried over into the more rudimentary organisation in Ireland itself, and in fact persisted there after the original breach in the U.S.A. was ended, in 1898. A limited reconciliation was, however, arrived at in 1902, and the A.O.H. divisions in Ireland agreed to co-operate under the 'Board of Erin'. But at a convention held in Belfast in 1904 to finalise the reunion, strong differences re-appeared, and a new split developed over a proposal to register the order as a friendly society. A minority of the divisions, mainly those from Scotland, seceded and registered themselves as 'The Ancient Order of Hibernians', and from then on the majority, who had opposed registration, had by law to refer to themselves as 'The Board

1. Monthly R.I.C. reports, report of the inspector-general, Feb.1909 (P.R.O., C.O.904.77).

of Erin'. The historian of the latter group claimed that those who legally owned the title 'A.O.H.' in Britain and Ireland, known popularly as the 'Scottish registered section', numbered 20 divisions and 1,500 members,¹ while the Board of Erin numbered 500 divisions and 60,000 members.

At this Belfast convention, the first in Ireland 'within living memory', John D.Nugent, on the motion of Joseph Devlin M.P., was appointed to draft a new constitution for the Board of Erin, and in 1905 Devlin became the first national president of the revised society.² From this time dates the emergence of the Hibernians as a political engine harnessed to the parliamentary nationalist movement. Devlin, in the double role of president of the Hibernians and secretary of the U.I.L., was in a good position to hold the organisations together.³ William O'Brien later alleged in his book, An Olive Branch in Ireland, that the hibernians had captured the U.I.L., but it would be just as reasonable to maintain that the U.I.L. had collared the hibernian organisation. The revised organisation made its first appearance during the 1906 election. Dillon, in writing to Redmond about speakers a

1. The information in this paragraph is from Bergin, op.cit.
2. Nugent, op.cit., p.15. Nugent claims that he had already played a great part in revitalising the society at grass-roots level, at the instigation of John Dillon, M.P. There is no evidence that Dillon was ever more than a benevolent outsider so far as the A.O.H. was concerned, though his son, James Dillon, is now the national president (1967).
3. On the A.O.H. side Devlin was aided very much by J.D.Nugent, who was prominent in local Dublin politics, and who became a member of the Irish party during the last years of its existence. Nugent played a large part in combating the sinn feiners in Dublin, and was by general consent a very smart political operator - a 'machine' man in the Irish-American style. John Muldoon wrote to Redmond on 2 Mar.1909: 'I have had a long conference with Nugent, and needless to say, I learned more from him than I could elsewhere find out' (Redmond papers).

few weeks later, mentioned that 'as the Hibernians behaved exceedingly well¹ in the Tyrone divisions, it would be very bad policy to disappoint them'. By November 1905 the Glasgow correspondent of the Freeman could write, in his inimitable style:

Of late much progress - numerically and financially - has been made in Scotland by the excellent Irish society the "A.O.H." There are now divisions of the order in every populous centre of the "Land o' Cakes", while arrangements are practically completed for the opening of still more new branches.....the great factor in the success of the society, is however, the position occupied by the most popular and brilliant member of the Irish party, Mr Joseph Devlin. His personality has a great weight.....

2

The leaders of the Board of Erin in Scotland, James Stafford and E.McAspurn,³ were also 'earnest and practical members of the United Irish League'.

In October 1905 it was estimated by the Inspector-general of the R.I.C. that the Board of Erin numbered about 10,000 in Ireland and 5,000⁴ in Scotland. This figure for Ireland is but a fraction ;of that claimed in the official history, but the author of the latter was probably applying the figures at time of writing (1910) to 1905.⁵ Certainly the A.O.H. (Board of Erin) underwent a vast expansion between these two dates. T.M.Kettle

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 8 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. W.F.J., 18 Nov.1905.
 3. W.F.J., 31 Mar.1906.
 4. Monthly R.I.C. reports, (379/S), report of the inspector-general, Oct.1905 (Dublin, S.P.O.).
 5. Bergin, op.cit., p.81.

said at Toomebridge in 1907 that 'it was hardly an exaggeration to say that, in Ulster, when they said "nationalist" they meant "Hibernian"¹. James Stafford could declare without contradiction at a meeting of the U.I.L. Home Government Branch, in Glasgow, in 1909 that 'were it not for the A.O.H. Society Mr T.P.O'Connor and Mr Crilly [president and secretary of the U.I.L.G.B.]² might close their books in the west of Scotland'. Full figures for this expansion have proved unobtainable, but enough are available to indicate the pattern clearly. In July 1907 the Inspector-General of the R.I.C. conceded the Board of Erin 540 divisions in Britain and Ireland.³ In 1908 both Devlin and Stafford independently claimed 50,000 members, and Stafford mentioned the figure of 603 divisions.⁴ In 1909 the organisation claimed 646 divisions and 60,000 members.⁵ Most of this membership was in Ulster: between October 1905 and December 1908 the number of divisions in Tyrone rose from 52 to 80; in Donegal from 15 to 45; in Armagh from 33 to 38; in Leitrim from 27 to 36; in Antrim from 16 to 25; in Monaghan from 9 to 21; in Cavan from 15 to 19; in Roscommon from 9 to 12; in Sligo from 6 to 10 (or)

-
1. T.M.Kettle at Toomebridge, 22 Sept.1907 (I.W.I., 28 Sept.1907).
 2. J. Stafford at Glasgow U.I.L. meeting, 24 Jan.1909 (W.F.J., 30 Jan.1909).
 3. Monthly R.I.C. reports, (1668/S), report of the inspector-general, July 1907 (S.P.O.).
 4. Devlin in Boston, U.S.A. (W.F.J., 10 Oct.1908).
Stafford at Glasgow, A.O.H. rally, 18 Jan.1908 (W.F.J., 25 Jan.1908).
 5. Monthly R.I.C. reports, report of the inspector-general, July 1909 (P.R.O., C.O.904.78).

possibly higher); and in Longford from 2 to 10. The organisation was also active to some extent in Louth and Dublin city. Single divisions were also reported in Cork city, Limerick city, Galway, Wexford and King's county, but they were doubtless created mainly to justify the claim that the organisation was 'expanding in Munster and Leinster'. Their continued isolation indicates that this was precisely what the organisation was not doing. But in Ulster and parts of Connaught the movement was growing rapidly throughout our period, and the figures, if anything, underestimate the scope of the expansion, for they give no information of the increase in membership within each division. In addition, statistics are not available for all counties: in Fermanagh the organisation was reported to be 'extending in the county' in May 1907; in Down it was 'gaining in strength' in May 1906; and at the same time in Derry it was 'very strong in the south¹ on the county'.

Generally speaking, the U.I.L. and the Board of Erin worked well together. One factor in this was of course Devlin's double role. Another was the fact that there was normally only a demand for the A.O.H. in areas where the U.I.L. had atrophied, as a result of the settlement of the land question.

1. The above figures are taken from the Monthly R.I.C. reports, reports submitted by various county inspectors, Oct.1905 - Dec.1908 (S.P.O.).

or in towns, where the U.I.L. lacked the appeal to oppose sinn fein. Thus the U.I.L. held the field on the great grass ranches of Galway and Roscommon, but in towns such as Boyle and Strokestown the A.O.H. sought to establish a foothold, operating from its more firmly established bases in Sligo, Leitrim, and Donegal.¹ The inspector-general reported of the A.O.H. in January 1909 that:

in many localities where land purchase has been extensive, it has to a great extent supplanted the U.I.L. These associations profess to be guided by the same principles, and they are on the whole working amicably together, but in some localities jealousy, and even friction, is to be found.

2

In many areas, the attitude of the local clergy was important: the rapid increase in the size of the order in Donegal was attributed to the withdrawal of clerical opposition.³ We have already seen that in the prime case of local rivalry, the North Monaghan by-election of 1907, the priests unanimously supported the local U.I.L. man, while the central Irish party organisation operated through the A.O.H.⁴ Cardinal Logue openly criticised the society on a number of occasions, but its leaders could nonetheless claim that every division had a bona fide chaplain.⁵ In Scotland the hierarchy

-
1. See Monthly R.I.C. reports, reports of the county inspector for Roscommon 1906-8 (S.P.O.).
 2. Monthly R.I.C. reports, report of the inspector-general, Jan.1909 (P.R.O., C.O.904.77).
 3. Monthly R.I.C. reports (538/S), report of the county inspector for Donegal Dec.1905 (S.P.O.).
 4. See supra, ch.6, p.542.
 5. J.D.Nugent to M.Cummings, 17 Apr.1909 (cited in Bergin, op.cit., p.87).

maintained a ban on the A.O.H. in all its forms from 1882 to 1910, though with patently little success.¹ The original reason had been that the society was considered to be 'fenian' in its politics, but even when the full facts were put before the hierarchy, in 1907, it took the bishops three years to make up their minds. In fact, although the upper echelons of the Church tended to be against the A.O.H., on intellectual grounds, most priests treated it as the political organisation which it was, and were for or against it to the extent that they were for or against the official Irish party.

Disputes between the U.I.L. and the A.O.H. were normally personal affairs. In Cavan, Leitrim, Antrim, and Fermanagh friction was reported between them at one time or another during our period, almost always in connection with rivalry for seats on the local council.² At Clones in North Monaghan this was also a problem, but here it was exacerbated by the by-election struggle of the previous year. Clones U.I.L. passed a motion in the heat of this row to the effect that the A.O.H. should be banned from U.I.L. conventions, and in support of a move to rescind this, a letter from John Dillon was read out: the A.O.H., he said, had supported Parnell in the U.S.A. in 1880, and it would be 'ungrateful and in the highest degree impolitic'³ to refuse them admittance to conventions.

-
1. J.E.Handley, The Irish in modern Scotland, (Cork 1947) pp.292-3.
 2. Monthly R.I.C. reports, reports of the C.I.s for the counties concerned, esp. Oct. and Nov.1907 (July 1908 (S.P.O.).
 3. Dillon to Clones U.I.L. (W.F.J., 9 May 1908).

Whilst the Board of Erin was thus expanding, those who had seceded in 1905, the so-called 'Scottish registered section', had taken a very different direction. By the end of 1905 it had become clear to the Board of Erin and to the R.I.C. special branch, though probably not to all the rank and file members of the body concerned, that the Scottish registered section had fallen into the hands of extremists, physical force men, variously described in police reports as 'sinn feiners'¹ or 'I.R.B. suspects'. A newspaper appeared briefly in Glasgow - the Hibernian Banner - which advocated the sinn fein policy and criticised U.I.L.G.B. for its standpoint on the 1906 general election.¹ P.T.Daly and J.Hanlon had applied to join the Dublin A.O.H. branch (Board of Erin) in November 1905, but on being refused admission they attempted to form a branch of their own under the Scottish section, with a hard core of I.R.B. 'suspects'.² At the quarterly meeting of the Board of Erin leaders in March 1906, both the Dublin and Belfast secretaries reported the frustration of attempts by the local sinn feiners to infiltrate the organisation.³

What the extremists were trying to do was to call a halt to the parliamentary take over of the Hibernian movement, partly because they realised that the movement was a source of power in areas where the U.I.L.

-
1. Precis of D.M:P. reports on secret societies, Dec.1905 (P.R.O., C.O.904.11).
 2. Ibid., Nov.1905.
 3. Precis of R.I.C. special branch reports, Mar.1906 (P.R.O., C.O.904.117).

was on the wane, partly because they hoped to stop the parliamentarians from getting a direct hold on the influence and wealth of the far more important A.O.H. of America. Having very quickly realised their failure to prevent the parliamentarians capturing the Board of Erin, the extremists concentrated their efforts on the Scottish section. This was of course a relatively insignificant body in terms of numbers, but it had the benefit of registration, and might be able to maintain its strength enough to confuse the public, embarrass the Board of Erin, and so prevent the union of the latter body with what was really the parent-order in America. It had the support, also, of John Devoy's Gaelic American. J.D.Nugent, the Board of Erin secretary, later alleged that the secession of the Scottish section in 1905 had been arranged to prevent (and did prevent) the amalgamation of the Board of Erin with the American order at that time.

The Scottish section soon revealed itself as a flash in the pan, though it remained something of a thorn in the side. In October 1905 the police reported that its membership stood at '4,000 in Scotland, and probably not 1,000 in Ireland'. Even these figures appear to have been somewhat

-
1. One way in which the public was confused was with names. The Scottish section at this time had among its national officers: John Dillon (of Tyrone) J.Nugent (no relation of the Board of Erin secretary); and John Ferguson of ~~Patrick~~ (no relation of the other Glasgow Irishman, Bailie John Ferguson, the founder and veteran of the Home Government branch of the U.I.L.). Much confusion was caused in the West Belfast election, 1906, by a green handbill denouncing Devlin, signed by "John Ferguson of Glasgow, secretary of the A.O.H." (W.F.J., 27 Jan.1906).
 2. In a letter to the Irish World, May 1908. Reported in the précis of R.I.C. special branch reports, May 1908 (P.R.O.,C.O.904.117).
 3. Monthly R.I.C. reports (379/S), report of the inspector-general Oct.1905 (S.P.O.),

deceptive as a pointer to extremist support. For many of the divisions affiliated to the registered section had taken that action for non-political reasons - it is even possible that, pace Nugent, the registered section was not originally associated with sinn fein at all. But it took time for the new situation to become clear, and more time for individual divisions to take a decision on the matter. Meanwhile the sinn feinners appeared to be having some small success. But when, at the Dublin convention of the Scottish section in July 1907 a declaration was made in favour of the sinn fein policy, only three out of the fourteen Belfast delegates voted in favour, and the other eleven expressed objections to 'making the society a recruiting ground for sinn fein'. These eleven delegates subsequently took their divisions over to the Board of Erin.¹ Only in Derry city does the Scottish section appear to have formed any real roots in Ireland: in February 1906 the police reported that it was 'more popular in Derry than the Board of Erin', and had a membership of 130.² At one time it was hoped to re-establish there a successor to the Hibernian Banner, which had collapsed in Glasgow in June 1906.³ Even at the end of 1907 the Derry branch was reported to have 180 members and be 'financially strong'.⁴ But the movement in general was less flourishing.

1. Precis of R.I.C. special branch reports, Aug.1907 (P.R.O.,. C.O.904.117).

2. Ibid., Feb.1906 (C.O.904.117).

3. Ibid., June 1906 (C.O. 904.117).

4. Ibid., Jan.1908 (C.O.904.118).

Police reported of its Dundalk Convention on 14 December 1907 that 'little is known about the business transacted, as this is practically a secret society on the same level as the I.R.B., and having similar objects. It is however decreasing in strength'¹. By February 1908 the Scottish section had fallen to such a low level that its registration, along with the title "Ancient Order of Hibernians", was allowed to lapse, and was adopted legally by the Board of Erin.

At its Saratoga convention of July 1906, the A.O.H. of America had also fallen under extremist control at the centre, despite the efforts of the parliamentarians. John O'Callaghan, secretary of the U.I.L. of the U.S.A., published an attack on Devoy in the Irish World and:

.....had 800 copies sent up to the Hibernian convention in Saratoga, whose officer for the next two years will be elected tomorrow [i.e. 21 July 1906]. It will give them something to chew on. I fear they will not allow the Board of Erin in Ireland to affiliate. The cowardly crew are afraid to see their own shadows, and they are only good for petty personal politics.

2

Not only was the Board of Erin not offered affiliation at Saratoga, but the outgoing president, J.E.Dolan, who had made a conciliatory speech calling for co-operation between the followers of Tone and the followers of Parnell, was

-
1. Precis of R.I.C. special branch reports, Dec.1907 (P.R.O., C.O.904.117).
 2. J.O'Callaghan to Redmond, 20 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

narrowly defeated in¹ his bid for re-election by Matthew Cummings, a member of the Clan-na-Gael. The Freeman appears to have been slow to realise this fact about Cummings, for it described him as a man with 'an enviable record'.² But O'Callaghan was in no doubt as to the situation, and soon informed Redmond privately of developments. In mid-September, he reported, the matter was brought into the open by certain New England newspapers casting a spotlight on the Clan's ejection of Archbishop Farley of New York from the A.O.H. chaplaincy:

The explosion has at length come in the A.O.H., owing to Clan domination. Mgr McCready of New York has blown the whole thing sky-high.....I understand Archbishop Farley is in a towering rage because of his being ousted, as he is satisfied, through Clan manipulation, from the national chaplaincy of the A.O.H. He has forbidden the A.O.H. in New York, which is the Clan in disguise, to use his halls.....This is of course what we have been anxious to bring about for four or five years past, so that the scales may fall from the eyes of the rank-and-file of the A.O.H.....It is what I expected would happen from the election of Cummings of Boston, the Clan tool, as head of the A.O.H., but it has come quicker than I looked for it.....

3

But O'Callaghan's optimism was premature. The Clan revealed did not necessarily mean the Clan displaced. In February 1907 Robert Johnston, a veteran Ulster fenian who was on the committee of the A.O.H. Scottish section, wrote to Devoy, head of the Clan in the U.S.A.:

-
1. Irish World report of the Saratoga convention of the A.O.H. (reprinted in the w.F.J., 25 Aug.1906).
 2. Ibid.
 3. O'Callaghan to Redmond, 18 Sept.1906 (Redmond papers).

One matter....of pressing importance to which I would like to direct your attention is the recognition, if at all possible, by the Order in America, of the A.O.H. here. Of course I do not refer to the Board of Erin people, as they are solely in the hands of the parliamentarians, but to the registered divisions. A considerable number of our friends throughout the country have lately joined these divisions with the object of leading them in the right direction, and the support and approval of the Order in America would be an encouragement to them in their efforts. In the meantime I shall say no more until I hear from you.

1

No action was taken on this occasion. Probably Cummings and the Clan did not feel confident enough of their grip on the American Hibernians to risk breaking it for the sake of the tiny Scottish section. But in July 1908, the executive of that section, meeting in Derry, were told that 'some prominent members' of the order in America might soon take action in the matter. The information was obtained by the R.I.C. special branch, which commented 'this Scottish section, which is extreme, is dying out here, having only a few branches, but an affiliation on these lines would strengthen its position'.² Since Johnston's letter to Devoy of the previous year, the extremists had secured control over the American A.O.H. for a further two years (at the Indianapolis convention, June 1908), and the leaders had been given authority to investigate the affairs of the A.O.H. in Ireland.³ In February 1909 Patrick McCartan, a young Irish extremist who had been in the U.S.A., wrote to Devoy asking

-
1. R.Johnston to J.Devoy, 5 Feb.1907 (W.O'Brien and D.Ryan (ed.), Devoy's postbag (Dublin 1948, 1953), ii. 357-8).
 2. Precis of R.I.C. special branch reports, July 1908 (P.R.O.,C.O.,904.118).
 3. See speech of Matthew Cummings in Dublin, 11 May 1909 (W.F.J., 15 May 1909).

that the A.O.H. in the U.S.A. be persuaded to 'issue an official statement regarding their connection with the rowdies here [i.e. the Board of Erin]'. McCartan forwarded to Devoy a letter on the situation from a "friend in Maynooth", who wrote:

I would like to have a chat with you about the A.O.H. [Bd. of Erin]. You may not be aware that they are under consideration (sub judice) by the bishops with a view to their condemnation. [This of course is in Ireland only. The A.O.H. had been condemned in Scotland since 1882]. It would be a great thing for religion in Ireland if they were condemned and I have no doubt that they will be, if only the truth is brought home to their lordships about them. The strong plank they have to fall back on, I hear, is their allegation that they are affiliated with the American body. It would be well if that body could be got to give an official denial to this. I fancy you could pull a few strings in this direction.....

1

At last, on 11 April 1909, the president of the American A.O.H., Matthew Cummings, arrived in Ireland at the head of a small delegation 'to settle if possible the differences that exist between the two sections of the A.O.H. in Ireland, and then have all under the control of the American board'.² His real purpose was somewhat different:³ he crossed the Atlantic

-
1. McCartan to Devoy, and enclosure, 20 Feb.1909 (Devoy's postbag, op.cit., ii.3767).
 2. Statement by Cummings at a private conference of leaders of both sections of the A.O.H. in Ireland, at the Gresham Hotel, Dublin, 21 Apr.1909. The Dublin Metropolitan Police received (and seem to have accepted as genuine) a verbatim account of this private meeting, at which only sixteen men were present. See Precis of D.M.P. special branch reports, April 1909 (P.R.O., C.O.904. 12).
 3. The R.I.C. also suspected that he had a separate mission altogether, on behalf of the I.R.B. (Precis of R.I.C. special branch reports, April 1909).

in the company of Seumas MacManus of Donegal, national president of the Scottish section,¹ and was greeted at Queenstown, and at Dublin, almost exclusively by extremists - sinn feiners, 'Scottish' Hibernians, and Gaelic Leaguers.² During the following days Cummings had private talks with such diverse people as Cardinal Logue (twice), Tom Clarke and Bulmer Hobson.³ On April 21 he and his colleagues met in conference with the leaders of both the Board of Erin and the Scottish section, at the Gresham hotel. The Board of Erin produced their books and called on the Scottish section to do likewise. But Cummings swept this information aside, and showed an interest in political policy only. He said that parliamentary agitation was of no use, and urged all hibernians to cut themselves adrift from the U.I.L. and be prepared to make 'a revolutionary party', which would be worthy of the support of the A.O.H. in America. The only Hibernians worthy of the name in Ireland were, in his opinion those under the leadership of Seumas MacManus and Henry Dobbyn (i.e. the Scottish section), and he would therefore recommend that they be affiliated with his own order. Devlin then denounced Cummings as a paid agent of the Clan-na-Gael, and the Board of Erin representatives withdrew.⁴

-
1. MacManus had been employed for some months in the U.S.A. as a lecturer. Before that, in 1906-7, his chief source of income, ironically, seems to have been as a short story writer for the Weekly Freeman's Journal.
 2. Though Douglas Hyde was prevented from attending by 'ill-health' (W.F.J., 17 Apr.1909).
 3. Precis of D.M.P. special branch reports, April and May 1909 (P.R.O.,C.O.904.12)
 4. This information is taken from the allegedly verbatim account by a police informer, mentioned above, footnote 45.

Cummings subsequently issued a statement to the effect that the Scottish section were recognised by the American order, and that its members would receive the privilege of transfer cards to America, in case of emigration.¹ Members of the Board of Erin, he said, would not receive transfer cards until their organisation ceased to be 'political', and reformed those abuses which had been publicly denounced by Cardinal Logue.² During the following days Devlin and J.D.Nugent delivered speeches denouncing Cummings' visit as having the intention of destroying the constitutional movement. Cummings meanwhile embarked on a brief tour of the country, or more precisely, those parts of the country where opposition to the leadership of Redmond, Dillon and Devlin was strong: in Kilkenny he was greeted by the mayor, and thanked by E.T.Keane; and in Cork he was given the freedom of the city, in the presence of E.Crean, Maurice Healy, D.D.Sheehan and T.O'Donnell, M.P.s.³

It seemed like a triumph for the extremists and dissidents in Ireland and America. The police thought that the Board of Erin:

-
1. This was the extremists' chief weapon. Devlin told an A.O.H. rally at Mountcharles, Donegal (the home of his rival president, MacManus) on 16 Aug.1909 that 'the Board of Erin offers the people land, learning and liberty. The other society of Hibernians offers you transfer tickets to America' (W.F.J., 21 Aug.1909).
 2. Statement by Cummings, printed in W.F.J., 15 May 1909. Cardinal Logue, in his Lenten pastoral for 1909, had denounced heavy drinking and 'mingling of the sexes' at Board of Erin functions, and compared 'the social activities of that organisation unfavourably with those of the Gaelic League (W.F.J., 27 Feb.1909).
 3. W.F.J., 22 and 29 May 1909.

will probably lose ground in Ulster, owing to the opposition of Cardinal Logue and to some extent also owing to the recent affiliation of the Scottish section with the American order. This latter is an inducement to the class who join the A.O.H. in Ulster, as recognition by the American A.O.H. is, in case of emigration, a matter of some importance to them.

1

But in June it was reported that the board of the American A.O.H. had not been unanimous in supporting Cummings' mission, and that a number of divisions in the U.S.A. were expected to secede and affiliate with the Board of Erin.² In July, Devlin said that Cummings and his associates had gathered every factionist in the country under their banner, and that 'the A.O.H. in America is up in arms against them'.³ In September, John O'Callaghan of the American U.I.L., who was on a tour of Ireland, claimed that 95% of the grass roots American A.O.H. supported the U.I.L. and not the Clan-na-Gael.⁴ The Board of Erin advanced another step when in January 1910 the ban of the Scottish hierarchy was lifted.⁵ Cardinal Logue still opposed them in Ireland, but he did not feel strong enough to attempt a ban. Cardinal Moran of Sydney wrote to inform Devlin that the A.O.H. in Australia was fighting fiercely against the challenge of the Clan-na-Gael.⁶

-
1. Precis of R.I.C. special branch reports, May 1909 (P.R.O., C.O.904.119).
 2. Precis of D.M.P. special branch reports, June 1909 (P.R.O., CO.904.12).
 3. Devlin at Dundalk, 18 July 1909 (W.F.J., 24 July 1909).
 4. O'Callaghan at Waterford, 15 Sept.1909 (W.F.J., 18 Sept.,1909).
 5. Precis of R.I.C. special branch reports, Jan.1910 (P.R.O., CO.904.119).
 6. Moran to Devlin, 26 July 1909 (published in I.W.I., 4 Sept.1909).

This flexing of parliamentary muscles in all sections of the A.O.H. caused Cummings and his colleagues to make a close scrutiny of their position. They had come out into the open and found the enemy's fire rather strong. With an eye on their 1910 convention, they were now inclined to be more conciliatory. Sensing this situation, Michael Ryan, president of the American U.I.L., prevented his organisation from making an outright denunciation of the A.O.H. leadership at its convention in August 1909.¹ From October 1909, unbeknown to his U.I.L. colleagues, he was in contact with Cummings, who was at first intractable, demanding such things as public apologies from Devlin.² But in February 1910 the national board of the A.O.H., meeting in Chicago, accepted Ryan's offer of conciliation. Ryan's aims, he told Redmond, were:

to stop the antagonism of the A.O.H. to our organisation, by the forming of something like a federation of Irish societies, my own view being that if we got the rank-and-file together, the hostile leaders, whether in Clan or otherwise, would be speedily eliminated. I regard this effort to harmonise our people as very essential, because if William O'Brien should send representatives of his movement to this country, it would be to those antagonistic elements that they would come and from them, out of the mere spirit of opposition, they would receive support.

3

-
1. See O'Callaghan to Redmond, 21 Feb.1910 (Redmond papers).
 2. M.Cummings to M.Ryan, 12 Oct.1909 (Redmond papers, Presumably forwarded to Redmond by Ryan at some stage).
 3. McJ.Ryan to Redmond, 27 Feb.1910 (Redmond papers).

It seems that Cummings, though not a parliamentarian, was a moderate in outlook, at least to the extent of putting the A.O.H. and his position in it before the interests of Devoy and the Clan-na-Gael. Though he had gone to Ireland in 1909 with the intention of recognising the Scottish section, he had done so under the impression that that body was able to stand on its own feet more convincingly than it in fact could. Patrick McCartan wrote to Devoy in March 1910:

How about the A.O.H. and the union? Evidently we were not far out in our estimate of the cardinal's friend when he was over here [I take this to be a reference to Cummings]. He evidently has found out that [Robert] Johnston and [Henry] Dobbin fooled him, but man, he knew everything and more of conditions here than any of us.

1

But when news of Ryan's activities reached O'Callaghan and T.B. Fitzpatrick (secretary and treasurer respectively of the U.I.L. in U.S.A.) they were totally sceptical. O'Callaghan thought Ryan's motives honourable, but felt that he was being exploited simply to secure the re-election of Cummings to the A.O.H. presidency. He strongly opposed any sort of deal with extremists: 'Devoy will be Devoy until the end of the chapter, and the man would not play fair with anybody'.² In face of this hostility, Ryan³ backed down and abandoned his efforts with considerable rapidity.

-
1. Mc Cartan To Devoy, 31 Mar.1910 (Devoy's Postbag, op.cit., ii.290).
 2. O'Callaghan to Redmond, 21 Feb.1910 (Redmond papers).
 3. 'I wish you would dismiss it from your mind as though I had never written', Ryan wrote to Redmond on 4 Apr.1910 (Redmond papers).

Despite O'Callaghan's fears, it seems that Devoy and the Clan-na-Gael¹ also opposed the union. They probably felt that the slight opportunity it offered for an expansion of Clan influence was outweighed by the more immediate and more certain advantages to the parliamentarians of securing peace and unity. With Ryan's defection, Cummings was thus left stranded. He was defeated at the A.O.H. convention in the summer of 1910, and attributed this (in public) to Devoy's influence.² Whether or not this was so, the Clan did not benefit, for the new A.O.H. president, J.J.Regan, appeared in Chicago in October 1910 on the same platform as Joseph Devlin, who was³ collecting funds for the U.I.L.

-
1. Precis of D.M.P. special branch reports, Apr.1910 (P.R.O., C.O.904.12).
 2. Memorandum on the Irish-American A.O.H., included in Precis of D.M.P. special branch reports, October 1910 (P.R.O., C.O.904.12).
 3. Ibid.

APPENDIX II. THE IMPERIAL HOME RULE ASSOCIATION.

Looking back at the final decade or so of Irish parliamentary nationalism, we can see that the prospect of any success for a via media between home rule and the union was brought to an end in the conservative party by the 'new unionism' and the downfall of Wyndham, and in the liberal party by the rejection of the Irish council bill. As a policy, devolution failed to retain the support of a major political party, because no large body of public opinion wanted it. But a number of men, whom contemporary journalists and later historians have tended to call 'influential' (though patently in the political sense they were anything but) pursued the idea for years afterwards. The best known of these were Sir Antony (after 1908, Baron) MacDonnell, Lord Dunraven and his Irish Reform Association of moderate landlords, and more isolated figures like Lord Dudley and Lord Castletown. It was no coincidence that all the main spokesmen were in the house of lords, for no 'representative' politician in Ireland could risk coming out for such a policy.¹ William O'Brien never dared do more than advocate 'co-operation' with these men, whilst the majority of the Irish party, after an initial flirtation, would have nothing to do with them at all.

1. I have not taken account of men like T.H.Sloan and T.W.Russell's group here, for they were all Ulstermen, holding widely different views on the home rule question, but who agreed in regarding it as a chimera veiling the real social and economic issues. They were not anti-orange so much as anti-tory.

But for a few months in 1908 it seemed as if another small group might succeed where the original devolutionists had failed. As unremitting orange unionism had caused a number of moderate unionists to seek a new course, so the increased dependence of parliamentary nationalism on the 'socialism' of the anti-ranching branches of the U.I.L. in the west of Ireland disillusioned many nationalist idealists who held moderate views on social questions. Alfred Webb's letters to Redmond in 1906 and 1907 demonstrate how even an old-established home ruler close to the centre of the movement could feel this.¹ Many such people were attracted more by the Gaelic League and the political groups which (despite the disavowals of Douglas Hyde) were associated with it, than by an organisation dominated by the countryside and its priests, shopkeepers, and small farmers. Men so eminently conservative as John Sweetman and Edward Martyn were found in the ranks of sinn fein, and it was to combat this tendency that Redmond asked T.C.Harrington to form a new central² branch of the U.I.L., to act as a 'fortnightly platform' in Dublin.

Thus, when a small group of Dublin professional and business men formed an Imperial Home Rule Association in 1908, the parliamentary party leaders spared it the lacerations they had earlier handed out to Lord Dunraven and his friends. As Harrington observed to Redmond about the new movement:

1. See supra, ch.6, pp.581, 591.

2. See supra, ch.6, p. 607.

If it would lead to any strengthening of the party it would be a great thing. At the present moment men whose political creed was opposition to home rule are seriously reconsidering their position and it seems to me it would be well if we could keep in touch and not let them play for sinn fein support.

1

Redmond had, in April 1908, been notified of the intention to start such a group, under the leadership of George Bryers, owner of a large Dublin printing firm, whom Harrington later described as 'an old home ruler'.² Bryers' avowed object was to allay the fears of those who opposed home rule in England and Ireland. To do this he proposed a new association, with a careful mixture of protestants and catholics on the committee, an emphasis in its programme on the industrial benefits of home rule, and a clear statement that home rule was the maximum demand as well as the minimum. Emphasis was also placed on the 'imperial links' which were implicit in the home rule idea, to combat emotional antagonisms to 'separation'. The question of parliamentary representation was left open: 'it may be desirable that the association should seek direct parliamentary representation', wrote Bryers, 'or alternatively that it should confine itself to the support of candidates whose views approximate most closely to its creed'. L.Wickham, who forwarded this plan to Redmond, was 'very afraid that there is likely to be a great

1. T.C.Harrington to Redmond, 13 Nov.1908 (Redmond papers).

2. Ibid.

deal ofPlunkettite kindness underlying this movement'.¹

The attitude of the Irish party leaders was one of polite toleration rather than enthusiastic welcome to the cause. Dillon commented to Redmond on the draft proposal:

In its present shape it is an attack on the party and would be very mischievous. But I have no doubt that Bryers did not realise this.

If Bryers and his friends were prepared to entirely recast their statement, I should see no objection to their starting an association, tho' I do not think it would ever amount to much - and if they ever thought of seeking parliamentary representation or of approaching candidates and putting questions to them the results might be bad.

2

Redmond accordingly told Bryers that the intention of bringing in a number of men 'who, although they are home rulers, will not openly identify themselves either with the party or with the U.I.L.' was 'an excellent object', but that the draft as it stood was 'a direct attack on the Irish party'.³ A few days later Bryers and his colleague Aston had an interview with Dillon, and agreed to publish a draft acceptable to the Irish leaders.⁴

In June the formation of the association was made public, and in August its programme was announced. The Independent, unlike Dillon, considered

1. 'A few casual notes upon the necessity for a new political movement, by Mr Bryers', a document enclosed with L.Wickham to Redmond, 29 Apr.1908 (Redmond papers).
2. Dillon to Redmond, 29 Apr.1908 (Redmond papers).
3. Redmond to G.Bryers, 4 May 1908 (Redmond papers).
4. Bryers to Redmond, 8 May 1908 (Redmond papers).

that the 'organisation is likely to have a far-reaching effect on the home rule movement'¹. The statement of aims was similar to that sent to Redmond earlier, except that the offending suggestion concerning parliamentary candidates were admitted. The Freeman welcomed the new support for home rule, and stressed that the policies were in no way new.² But the degree of positive support for the new group was not impressive - the statement was signed only by Bryers, E.A.Aston, A.S.Findlater and G.Ryoe, who declared that other names would be withheld for the time being, 'in order that the merits of its proposals rather than the personnel of its membership should receive consideration'³.

In view of the (apparently) unequivocal nature of the declaration, the reason for withholding names seems unconvincing - it is more likely either that those who favoured the movement were unwilling to be publicly pledged by it; or, that the number of 'influential men' attracted was not impressive. Indeed, it rapidly became apparent that the movement was neither very new nor very powerful. In September it was alleged in the press that a meeting had taken place in a Dublin hotel on the 21st between representatives of the Imperial Home Rule Association and Dunraven's Irish Reform Association

1. I.W.I., 27 June 1908.

2. W.F.J., 15 Aug.1908.

3. Ibid.

with MacDonnell in the chair, at which the possibility of drafting a bill to be introduced into the Lords by MacDonnell was discussed. MacDonnell, it was said, clung tenaciously to his Irish council scheme (which he had always claimed would not have been destroyed by the house of lords).¹ Bryers and others admitted that talks had taken place, but no-one would admit MacDonnell's involvement. The Independent's information was that MacDonnell explained his council scheme, but that the two associations did not merge, as there were 'bigger questions between them than that scheme'.² But the Independent was always eager to keep the door open for rivals to the 'official' Irish party. The Freeman on the same day quietly revealed a change of attitude since its remarks in August - the edition of October 3 featured a cartoon entitled 'Resurrection'. It portrayed a cemetery with tombstones to 'Tory home rule 1879', 'Carnarvon's home rule 1885', 'Chamberlain's scheme', and, in the foreground, the grave of 'Devolution 1907' being opened up by three gravediggers:³ Bryers, Col. Nugent Everard, and MacDonnell.

For the Irish party the association of MacDonnell's name with the movement lost it any respectability it may have possessed. In their own terms they were right in adopting this attitude. A letter from MacDonnell to his

-
1. Times, 25 Sept. 1908.
 2. I.W.I., 3 Oct. 1908.
 3. W.F.J., 3 Oct. 1908.

wife dated October 1 would have substantiated most of their fears:

You may tell her [Lady Arnell] she was right in saying that the Imperial Home Rule Association asked me to be their chairman and I declined. I did so for three reasons (1) Because their published programme did not clearly distinguish their Association from the home rule party (2) because they had not attracted any very influential names and (3) because I considered that a movement purporting to emanate from businessmen would best be led by a man of eminence in commercial life.

He had, he continued, had several talks with the promoters of the movement, and was satisfied that they were closer to being devolutionists than ordinary home rulers (!). Accordingly, he had pressed Dunraven to amalgamate with them, and had agreed to serve as vice-chairman under such a man as Sir John Arnell. He was prepared, he said, to meet such men as Arnell, Clonbrock, and Barrymore, and to lay schemes before them and to discuss:

...So long as the main end is kept in view - the gradual transfer to Ireland of the management of her domestic affairs, subject to the supreme authority of the imperial parliament, with due regard for the representation of minorities....I have good reason to believe that William O'Brien would view with favour such a new development, and that many members of the Irish parliamentary party are similarly directed.

You might say to Lady Arnell, or Sir John if he is present, that the present time seems to me to be the right psychological moment for such a movement as I suggest. The licensing bill will raise a tremendous storm of passion, and it cannot be carried without the closure. The closure in such a passion will bring into prominence the disadvantages of the existing parliamentary procedure and a feeling will be excited in favour of such a re-arrangement as will permit of the full parliamentary discussion of great questions without the curtailment of debate. That may precipitate home rule - unless there be 'in being' some alternative. It is because of my honest conviction that pure home rule, without any apprenticeship, would produce chaos in Ireland, that I earnestly advocate an improved scheme of devolution.

1. MacDonnell to his wife, 1 Oct.1908 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.217 f.77).

Clearly, the imperial home rulers were prepared to cut their cloth to suit their market, to a considerable extent. In fact, however, it seems likely that MacDonnell had by this time been somewhat left behind by the general trend of thought in the small but interesting devolutionist camp. When, in October 1908, James O'Connor M.P. was attempting to arrange a broad-based meeting in Dublin on the basis of Redmond's home rule resolution in the house of commons, he found that Lord Dunraven would speak if asked: 'I know (this is of course not to be publicly mentioned) that the devolutionists would support such a resolution'.¹ While MacDonnell, the administrator convinced of the correctness of his own view, was still hammering away at his constitution-drafting, his more realistic associates were looking for opportunities wherever they thought such might exist. For men like O'Brien and Dunraven, devolution was a convenient mechanism for easing agreement, as much as a solution for Ireland's governmental weaknesses. Dunraven's correspondence with O'Brien suggests that by this time his concern was not to stop the nationalist machine short of full home rule, but to preserve his standing as a 'moderate man' in his own party by avoiding public avowal of home rule.²

Precisely because it was a mechanism for enabling unionists and nationalists to 'agree', and had no positive attractions of its own for anyone besides MacDonnell, devolution (if such it was) in its new guise of 'imperial

-
1. James O'Connor to Harrington, 27 Oct.1908, forwarded to Redmond by Harrington (Redmond papers, filed under 'Harrington').
 2. See Wm.O'Brien to Lord Dunraven, 28 Dec.1907; Dunraven to O'Brien, n.d., c.31 Dec.1907 (Wm.O'Brien papers, N.L.I., Ms.8557).

home rule', made little progress. The nearest it came to a success was when the Independent announced that the man supported by Dillon for the nationalist candidature in South Dublin, Alderman Cotton, was treasurer of the Imperial Home Rule Association, and that the liaison 'marks a new orientation in nationalist politics'.¹ MacDonnell was reported to have chaired a second joint meeting of the Irish Reform Association and the Imperial Home Rule Association at the end of September 1909, but without success; the Independent reported that the only terms on which the imperial home rulers would agree to fusion with the Irish Reform Association was the complete absorption of the latter.² This would appear to suggest that the imperial home rulers were uneasy about the relationship they had drifted into with the devolutionists, and were unwilling to continue it further for fear of prejudicing any standing they might still have with the Irish party. That the distinction between the policies of the two bodies had been re-asserted, that MacDonnell had not in fact chaired a second meeting, and that the Imperial Home Rule Association was not an important force in Irish political life, are all indicated by a letter written by MacDonnell to his wife in October 1909:

I have had no communications with these associations for many months.....The Imperial Home Rule Association was (and is, I fear) a nondescript and worthless body.

3

-
1. I.W.I., 9 Oct.1909.
 2. Ibid.
 3. MacDonnell to his wife, Oct.1909, date of month illegible (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.217 f.97).

BIBLIOGRAPHY.A. Sources.

1. Private papers.
2. Public records.
3. Newspapers.
4. Parliamentary debates and papers.
5. Memoirs, diaries and contemporary articles.
6. Works of reference.
7. Miscellaneous.

B. Secondary works.

8. Biographies.
9. Special studies, theses and articles.

A. Sources.1. Private papers.

(i) The Asquith papers (Bodleian Library, Oxford). This large collection contains surprisingly little material on the Irish question before 1912.

(ii) The Bryce papers. Most of Bryce's Irish papers are in the National Library of Ireland (Ms. 11011-11016), though three volumes of his 'English' papers (Ms. 18-20), in the Bodleian Library, also relate to Irish affairs.

(iii) The Burns papers (British Museum). The diaries (Add. Ms. 46324-6) contain brief comments by Burns on cabinet meetings, and are a useful complement to the prime minister's cabinet letters.

(iv) The Campbell-Bannerman papers (British Museum). A major source for the formation of the 1905 government, though the papers reflect the general lack of cabinet interest in Irish affairs in 1906-7, once the election was over.

(v) The Elibank papers (National Library of Scotland). A small collection which however, contains a number of interesting letters from P. P. O'Connor, 1909-12.

(vi) The Gill papers (National Library of Ireland). This collection has been allocated a group of numbers, Ms. 13478-13526, but individual boxes were (in 1966) unidentifiable. As a civil servant in the department of agriculture Gill was not directly involved in liberal-nationalist politics during this period, but his comments as an informed observer are often extremely illuminating.

(vii) The Herbert Gladstone papers (British Museum). This is an important source for the formation of the liberal government, Oct.-Dec. 1905.

(viii) The MacDonnell papers Bodleian Library). Very few letters to MacDonnell from his chief secretaries have survived. However, his letters to his wife at times when he was away in London are often informative, and the volumes of his own papers, draft memoranda, etc., are invaluable.

(ix) The Redmond papers (National Library of Ireland). A very large collection, which was (in 1966) beginning to be catalogued. Professor Gwynn, in his Life of John Redmond, quoted extensively from the ^{important} more political letters, but paid little attention to the land question after 1903.

(x) The Ripon papers (British Museum). These contain a number of letters from Sir Antony MacDonnell, and also some correspondence between Ripon Crewe, and Campbell-Bannerman concerning the progress of various Irish measures in the house of lords.

More limited use has been made of the following:

The Birrell collection (Liverpool University Library: letters to and from Birrell collected, in the main, by his stepson, Sir Charles Tennyson).

The Blake papers (Ontario Provincial Archives. On microfilm in N. L. I.).

The Grey papers (Public Record Office).

The Haldane papers (National Library of Scotland).

The Harrington papers (N. L. I.).

The Lloyd George papers (Beaverbrook Library, London).

The Wm. O'Brien papers (N. L. I.).

The Samuel papers (House of Lords Record Office).

I found little or nothing of relevance in the following:

The Balfour papers (British Museum).

The Birrell papers (British Museum: personal letters, 1876-1927).

The E. W. Hamilton papers (British Museum).

The Lewis Harcourt papers (private possession: Viscount Harcourt, Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire).

The Plunkett papers (Plunkett Foundation, London).

The Rosebery papers (N. L. S.).

The Spender papers (British Museum).

The Crewe papers (Cambridge University Library) are closed until 1973. The Morley Papers are also unavailable at present, though Mr. A.F. Thompson of Wadham College, Oxford, in whose charge the papers are, has told me that they contain no significant body of material relevant to this study. The Dillon papers are also closed, though some of the most important material has been published in: F.S.L. Lyons, The Irish parliamentary party; in the same author's John Dillon (London, 1968); and, to a lesser extent, in M.A. Banks, Edward Blake. I understand from Professor Lyons that, like the Redmond papers, the Dillon material is very thin for the years 1908-9. The Churchill papers are in private hands, and the companion volume of documents to volume 2 of R.S. Churchill's Winston Spencer Churchill (the young statesman: 1901-14) has not appeared at the time of writing.

2. Public records.

1. Cabinet papers (P.R.O., Cab.37). A very large, though not quite complete collection of cabinet papers for the period, photocopied from originals in various collections of private papers.
2. Cabinet letters (P.R.O., Cab.41). Prime ministers' letters to the monarch, reporting (often briefly) on the decisions taken at cabinet meetings. Photocopied from the Royal Archives at Windsor.
3. Irish office records in colonial office files (.P.R.O., C.O.903-4). A relatively small collection, consisting in the main of the most recent departmental records, probably those removed from Dublin Castle by the British government in 1922. I have made use of the following volumes:
 - C.O. 903: Vols. 13-16: Judicial division: intelligence notes, 1906-11 ('confidential print').
 - C.O. 904: Vols. 11-12. Precs of D.M.P. reports on secret societies, 1905-10.
 - 33. Law opinions, 1902-11.
 - 35. Circulars: judicial division.
 - 77-80. Monthly R.I.C. reports, 1909-10.
 - 117-9. Precs of R.I.C. Crime branch special information, 1906-10.
 - 121. Agrarian outrages, 1903-8.
4. Monthly R.I.C. reports, 1905-8 (Dublin Castle, S.P.O.). These volumes are from the same departmental files as those at the P.R.O. listed above, C.O.904. 77-80. They have no archive number, and I have therefore cited the appropriate Dublin Castle file number in each case.
5. Records of the chief secretary's office (Dublin Castle, S.P.O.). A brief inspection did not suggest that this vast collection contained material bearing on the higher levels of policy-making.

3. Newspapers.

My basic press sources have been:

Irish Weekly Independent
The Times
Weekly Freeman's Journal
Westminster Gazette

More limited use has been made of the following:

Cork Examiner
Daily Chronicle
Daily News
Dundee Catholic Herald
Freeman's Journal
Glasgow Record
Irish Catholic
Irish Independent
Irish people
Irish Times
Labour Leader
Liverpool Catholic Herald
Manchester Guardian
Morning Leader
Morning Post
Reynolds's Newspaper
Sinn Fein
The Standard
Tribune
Yorkshire Post

4. Parliamentary debates and papers.

Annual Register, 1905-10.

Parliamentary debates, 4 series, vols. 152-98; 5 series, H.L. vols 1-4; H.C. vols. 1-17.

Report of the royal commission on Trinity College and the University of Dublin, 1906-17 [Cd. 3174, 3176, 3311-2].

Report of the royal commission on congestion in Ireland, final report 1908 [Cd. 4097].

Report of the estates commissioners, 1906 [Cd. 3148].

Report of the estates commissioners, 1919-20 [Cmd. 577].

5. Memoirs, letters, diaries and contemporary articles.

Aberdeen, Marquess and Marchioness, 'We Twa'. reminiscences (London, 1925).

Asquith, Margoy, Autobiography, vol. ii (London Penguin edition, 1936).

Bergin, J.J. History of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Dublin, 1910).

Birrell, A. Things past redress (London, 1937).

Blunt, W.S. My diaries, 1888-1914 (London, 1932).

- Brett, M.V. (ed.), Journals and letters of Viscount Esher, vol. ii (London, 1934).
- Bodkin, M.McD., 'The position of the Irish parliamentary party', in Fortnightly Review, lxxix, Feb. 1906.
- Brooks, S., 'The last chance of the Irish gentry', in Fortnightly Review, lxxxiii, Mar. 1908.
- Brooks, S., 'The New Ireland', in North American Review, clxxxvii, Jan. 1908 et seq.
- A. Chamberlain, Politics from the inside (London, 1936).
- Dunraven, Earl of, The outlook in Ireland (Dublin, 1907).
- Dunraven, Earl of, Past times and pastimes, (London, 1922).
- Dunraven, Earl of, 'The Irish council bill', in The Nineteenth century and after, lxi, June 1907.
- Ginnell, L., Land and Liberty (Dublin, 1908).
- Haldane, R.B., Autobiography (London, 1929).
- Healy, T.M., Letters and leaders of my day (London, 1928).
- Morgan, J.J., Parnell to Pearse (Dublin, 1948).
- Kettle, A.J., Material for victory, ed. L.J. Kettle (Dublin, 1958).
- Kettle, T.M., 'A note on sinn fein in Ireland', in North American Review, clxxxvii, Jan. 1908.
- Long, W.H., Memories (London, 1925).
- MacDonnell, M.F.J., Ireland and the home rule movement (Dublin, 1908).
- MacMamus, S., 'Sinn Fein: its genesis and purpose', in North American Review, clxxxv, Aug. 1907.
- Micks, W.L., The congested districts board, 1891-1923 (Dublin, 1925).
- Midleton, Earl of, Ireland - dupe or heroine (London, 1932).
- Morley, John, Viscount, Recollections. (London, 1917).
- Nugent, J.D., The Hibernian handbook (Dublin n.d., c. 1937).
- O'Brien, R.B., Dublin castle and the Irish people, (Dublin, 1909).
- O'Brien, William, M.P., An olive branch in Ireland and its history (London, 1910).
- O'Brien, William, M.P., 'The breakdown in Ireland', in The Nineteenth Century and After, lxi, July-Aug. 1907.
- O'Brien, William, and Ryan, Desmond (ed.), Devoy's post-bag, vol. ii (Dublin, 1953).
- O'Connor, T.P., Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (London, 1908).
- O'Malley, W., Glancing back (London, 1933).
- Oxford and Asquith, Earl of, Fifty years of parliament (London, 1926).
- Oxford and Asquith, Earl of, Memories and reflections (London, 1928).
- Paul-Dubois, L., Contemporary Ireland (Dublin, 1908).
- Plunkett, Sir Horace, Ireland in the new century (London, 1904).
- Plunkett, Sir Horace, 'The Irish council bill', in The Nineteenth Century and After lxi, June 1907.
- Redmond, John, interviewed by W.T. Stead, December, 1906, in Review of Reviews, Feb. 1907.
- Robinson, Sir H.A., Memories: wise and otherwise (London, 1923).
- Sheehan, D.D., Ireland since Parnell (London, 1921).
- Spender, J.A. Life, journalism and politics (London 1929).

6. Works of reference.

- Carty, James, Bibliography of Irish history, 1870-1911 (Dublin, 1940).
Dictionary of national biography.
 E. A. Eager, Bibliography of Irish bibliography (Dublin, 1965).
Dod's parliamentary companion, 1832 - work still in progress.
Whitaker's almanack, 1910 (London, annually).
Who was who, 1897-1916 (1920). Who was who, 1916-1928 (1929).

7. Miscellaneous.

- (1) Ginnell, L: Statement by Mrs. A. Ginnell to the Irish Bureau of military history concerning the career of L. Ginnell, and based in part on his own shorthand notes and diaries. (I am grateful to Professor F.S.L. Lyons for showing me a copy of this document. I believe there is also a copy in the National Library of Ireland, amongst the 'special classes').
- (2) I am grateful to Dr Thomas Dillon of Donnybrook and Mr. W.G. Fallon of Glasnevin for their personal reminiscences of this period. Both served terms as presidents of the Young Ireland branch of the U.I.L. during the first decade of this century. Mr. Fallon was a Y.I.B. delegate to the national convention of May 1907, and contested Mid-Cork for the Irish party against D.D. Sheehan M.P. in January 1910. Dr Dillon became a member of the revised sinn fein executive, in 1917.

B. Secondary works.8. Biographies.

- Banks, M.A., Edward Blake: a Canadian statesman in Irish politics (Toronto, 1957).
 Barton, D.P., Timothy Nealy, memories and aneddates (Dublin, 1933).
 Cherry, M., R.R. Cherry, a short memoir (Dublin, 1924).
 Churchill, R.S., Winston Spencer Churchill: the young statesman, 1901-14 (London, 1967).
 Crewe, Earl of, Life of Lord Rosebery (London, 1931).
 Digby, M., Horace Plunkett (Oxford, 1949).
 Dugdale, B.E.G., Arthur James Balfour (London, 1936).
 Fisher, H.A.L., Life of Viscount Bryce (London, 1927).
 Fyfe, H., T.P.O'Connor (London, 1934).
 Gardiner, A.G., Life of Sir William Harcourt (London, 1923).
 Greaves, C.D., The Life and times of James Connolly (London, 1961).
 Gwynn, D.R., Life of John Redmond (London, 1932).
 Gwynn, S.L., and Tuckwell, G., Life of Sir Charles Dilke (London, 1917).
 Hyde, M., Sir Edward Carson (London, 1953).
 James, R.R., Rosebery (London, 1963).
 Jefferson, H., Viscount Pirrie of Belfast (London, 1947).

- Jenkins, R., Asquith (London, 1964).
 Jenkins, R., Sir Charles Dilke: a Victorian tragedy (London, 1958).
 Kent, W., John Burns: Labour's lost leader (London, 1948).
 Larkin, E., James Larkin (London, 1965).
 Lucas, R., Colonel Saunderson: a memoir (London, 1908).
 Lyons, F.S.L., John Dillon (London, 1968). Professor Lyons kindly allowed me to see this study in proof.
 MacDonagh, M., Life of William O'Brien (London, 1928).
 Mackail, J.W., and Wyndham, Guy, Life and letters of George Wyndham (London, 1925).
 Magnus, Sir P., Gladstone (London, 1954).
 Magnus, Sir P., King Edward VII (London, 1964).
 Mallet, C., Herbert Gladstone: a memoir (London, 1932).
 Marjoriebanks, E., Life of Lord Carson (London, 1932).
 Murray, A.C., Master and brother (London, 1945).
 Newton, Lord, Lord Lansdowne, a biography (London, 1929).
 Nicholson, Sir H., King George V. his life and reign (London, 1952).
 Owen, F., Tempestuous journey: Lloyd George, his life and times (London, 1954).
 Petrie, Sir C., Walter Long and his times (London, 1936).
 Pope-Hennessy, J., Lord Crewe: the likeness of a liberal (London, 1955).
 Sommer, D., Maldane of Cloan (London, 1960).
 Spender, J.A., Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (London, 1923).
 Spender, J.A., and Asquith C., Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith (London, 1932).
 Walsh, P.J., William J. Walsh, archbishop of Dublin (Dublin, 1928).
 Wolf, L., Life of Lord Ripon (London, 1920).
 Young, K., Arthur James Balfour (London, 1963).

9. Special studies, theses and articles.

- Beckett, J.C., and Moody, T.W., Queen's Belfast: the history of a university (London, 1959).
 Blewett, N., 'The British general elections of 1910' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1967).
 Bromage, M.C., Churchill and Ireland (New York, 1964).
 Buckland, P.J., 'The southern Irish unionists, 1906-14', in Irish Historical Studies vol. xv, no. 59 (March 1967).
 Clarkson, J.D., Labour and nationalism in Ireland (New York, 1925).
 Cross, C., The liberals in power, 1905-14. (London, 1963).
 Dangerfield, G., The strange death of liberal England (London, 1935).
 Davis, R.P., 'The rise of sinn fein, 1891-1910' (T.C.D., M.Litt. thesis, 1958).
 Fanning, R., 'The unionist part and Ireland', in I.H.S. vol. xv. no. 58 (Sept. 1966).
 Gollin, A.M., Balfour's Burden (London, 1965).
 Gollin, A.M., The Observer and J.L. Garvin, 1908-14 (London, 1960).
 Halvy, E., The rule of democracy (London, 1934).
 Handley, J.E., The Irish in modern Scotland (Cork, 1947).

- Henry, R.M., The evolution of sinn fein (Dublin, 1920).
- Jenkins, R., Mr. Balfour's poodle (London, 1954).
- Jesuit fathers (ed.), A page of Irish history: University College, Dublin, 1884-1909 (Dublin, 1930).
- Jones, G.A., 'National and local issues in politics: a study of East Sussex and the Lancashire spinning towns, 1906-10 (Sussex Univ., Ph.D. thesis, 1965).
- Lyons, F.S.L., 'The Irish unionist party and devolution, 1904-5', in I.H.S. vol. vi. no. 21 (March, 1948)
- Lyons, F.S.L., 'Irish parliamentary representation, 1891-1910' (T.C.D. Ph.D. thesis, 1947).
- Lyons, F.S.L., The Irish parliamentary party, 1890-1910. (London, 1951).
- McGready, H.W., 'The liberals and home rule, 1899-1906', in I.H.S. vol. xiii, no. 52 (Sept. 1963).
- MacDowell, R.B., The Irish administration, 1801-1914 (London, 1964).
- Mansergh, P.N.S., The Irish Question (London, 1965).
- O'Connor, Sir James, History of Ireland, 1798-1924 (London, 1925).
- O'Hegarty, P.S., Ireland under the union, 1801-1922 (London, 1949).
- Pelling, H.M., A short history of the labour party (London, 1961).
- Pollard, H.B.C., The secret societies of Ireland (London, 1922).
- Pomfret, J.E., The struggle for land in Ireland (Princeton, 1930).
- Russell, A.K., 'The general election of 1906' (Oxford Univ., D.Phil. thesis, 1962).
- Schilling, E.R., 'William O'Brien and the All-for-Ireland League' (T.C.D., B.Litt. thesis, 1956).
- Stansky, P., Ambitions and strategies: the liberal leadership in the 1890s (London, 1963).
- Strauss, E., Irish nationalism and British democracy (London, 1951).
- Whyte, J.H., 'The influence of the catholic clergy on elections in nineteenth century Ireland', in English Historical Review, Apr. 1960.
- Wollaston, E.P.M., 'The Irish nationalist movement in Great Britain, 1886-1908' (London Univ., M.A. thesis, 1958).

